



# Terra Burdigala and Ch. Manoir du Gravoux

by Charles M. Bear Dalton



I want to write about Ch. Manoir du Gravoux in the Cotes de Castillon but I can't without first writing about Terra Burdigala (literally "Land of Bordeaux"). As a chateau, Manoir du Gravoux pre-dates Terra Burdigala by a number of years, but my knowledge of the chateau's wines comes directly from Terra Burdigala.

Terra Burdigala is the brainchild of friends François Thienpont and Stéphane Derenoncourt. I have known François since the early 1980s when he worked in Houston selling wine and cheese while he perfected his English. Thienpont went back to France and founded a négociant house – Wings – where Spec's buys a number of the Thienpont Family wines for our shelves (Ch. Le Pin, Vieux Ch. Certan, Gravettes de Certan, Pavie Macquin, Puygueraud, Charmes Godard, etc.) as well as specialties (the soon to arrive Sirene de Giscours) and some Classified Growths.

I first met Derenoncourt at Ch. Canon la Gaffeliere in St. Emilion in 1997. Chateau owner Stephan von Neipperg introduced Derenoncourt to us (the core of the group I have been traveling and tasting with in Bordeaux for the last 15 years) as his up-and-coming young winemaker responsible not just for Canon la Gaffeliere but also Clos de la Oratoire, Ch. d'Aiguilhe, and La Mondotte. I liked ALL of those wines. Later I got to know Derenoncourt as a consulting winemaker and then as a super consultant who Jancis Robinson called "the new Michel Rolland". I did not like all of those wines but Derenoncourt's talent is evident. Derenoncourt also owns the sometimes controversial Domaine de l'A.

When, after the 2003 vintage, François Thienpont began talking to me about his new venture making chateau-bottled wines from leased chateaux located in good but not famous terroirs, he kept saying "we" and referring to his partner. I was surprised to learn that he was working with Derenoncourt because I didn't realize they even knew each other. (It turns out there is a connection through François' brother Nicholas Thienpont who manages Ch. Pavie Macquin where Derenoncourt did his first vinification.) I was surprised but pleased because I understood the strengths that each brought to the project. Derenoncourt understands the vineyards and the winemaking. François (who is no slouch in those areas) understands the wine business, the wine market, and what sort of wines the market wants. Together they lease five chateaux - including Ch. Manoir du Gravoux (you knew I'd get to it eventually, didn't you?) - and make ten wines. Their success has been in bringing quality and consistency to properties that are historically up-and-down or hit-or-miss by applying farming and vinification practices (real expertise) more suited to the elite chateaux of Bordeaux.

For me, Ch. Manoir de Gravoux from Castillon and its "whoopie-dupee cuvee" la Violette are the stars of the lineup. The Manoir is an old medieval chateau, located on the top of a small valley, facing Domaine de l'A. Put together, the various parcels of this small valley make up the whole of the Manoir du Gravoux vineyard. The vines (88% Merlot and 12% Cabernet Franc averaging over 25 years old) are classified according to their age and

their degree of exposure to the sun. The combination of advanced work in the vineyard and ideal natural conditions (clay-limestone soils, south-exposed slopes, natural draining), enables the grapes to reach full maturity. The berries are picked according to each parcel's stage of maturation, and a highly precise vinification is then undertaken. Yield runs to about 32 Hectoliters per Hectare which is less than most of the Classified Growths (big names) of Bordeaux. The team's job in the winery is to make a fine wine with a fruit character and elegant tannins that reflects the best of its place (terra or terroir) and vintage.

The vines for La Violette de Ch. Manoir du Gravoux were planted in 1958 on a clay-limestone plateau which has an ideal location offering excellent growing conditions and producing fleshier, fruitier but still terroir reflective wines. These bunches of grapes are kept separate during the harvest and get a careful vinification, followed by 12 months in barrels (varying from 25% to 50% new depending on the vintage).

I drink these wines on a regular basis but do not have current tasting notes. I do recommend them all. Here is what we have of the main wine and the more luxurious cuvee:

## Ch Manoir Du Gravoux Cotes De Castillon 2005

12x750ML \$17.99 ~~\$204.54~~

## Ch Manoir Du Gravoux Cotes De Castillon 2006

12x750ML \$11.39 ~~\$127.37~~

This main wine of the Chateau is typically 88% Merlot and 12% Cabernet Franc fermented and aged in tanks (no oak barrels) where it is given a micro oxidation treatment to round it out and add a supple richness. The fruit is clean and shows through in the finished wine. The 2005 is a bit bigger and more ready to drink. Although very nice now, the more focused 2006 is still improving and has several years of development. Both are what some Bordelaise call "chicken wines" in that they are perfect for that simple meal of a roast chicken with salad and potatoes.



## La Violette de Manoir Du Gravoux Castillon 2003

12x750ML \$22.99 ~~\$256.48~~

## La Violette de Manoir Du Gravoux Castillon 2004

12x750ML \$19.50 ~~\$218.40~~

## La Violette de Manoir Du Gravoux Castillon 2005

12x750ML \$18.98 ~~\$213.74~~

## La Violette de Manoir Du Gravoux Castillon 2006

12x750ML \$24.99 ~~\$281.09~~



The blend here runs about 92% Merlot and 5% Cabernet Franc because that is the mix on these oldest vines of the chateau. The wine is fermented in tanks using both pump-overs and rack-and-return but gets its malo done in oak barrels where it is aged 12 months before bottling. The fruit is dominant but there is more terroir and complexity in this vineyard selection cuvee. The oak barrels (percent new varying by what the vintage requests) add complexity and character. This is a bigger, more serious wine. It is more for roast or even grilled beef or lamb and can even handle some robust pasta dishes. The 2003 (a very hot vintage) is the ripest and richest (and most developed) of them. The 2004 is my favorite for right now. As with the main cuvee, 2005 was the "best vintage" and is drinking well now with more improvement with time. 2006, although already quite tasty, is the most focused and has the longest aging and developmental potential. ✨