

B22 TASTING THE GRAPE FROM WHERE IT CAME

PROJECT: EUROPE 2011

SUBJECT: B22 TASTING THE GRAPE FROM WHERE IT CAME SCRIPT

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Our time in the Bordeaux region was not totally spent at Beau-Sejour as compelling as that idea is. Since we were in the neighborhood we stopped at the Chateau Minvielle winery. The winery dogs quit nipping at our tires when a young man, wearing knee high-boots, appeared at the winery door. Pierre and his wife represent the current generation turning grapes into wine

from their own property. The winery was established by an Italian nobleman in the 1700's who lost it during the French revolution. Pierre's family picked up the property and have made wine there ever since.

He gave us a brief tour of the holding tanks that contain his future income. We were surprised to hear that they are cement instead of the wooden casks that are the typical image. He said, "That comes later but this is the first step."



Pierre explained how tightly the Bordeaux wine region controls and monitors the vintner who wants to keep the special distinction of "Grown and bottled in Bordeaux."

His vines are planted in the region called Entre Deux Mers, literally "between two seas." In his case the seas are actually two rivers and the area provides mostly Merlot and Cabernet grapes. Naturally we wanted to taste the product and Louise chose a 2009 Rose as a starter.



We traded terms like "Nose, fruit, bouquet" and discussed hints of raspberries that grow on the property and are carried by the local bees. Then we popped the cork and put taste to the words.

We went on to a 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon that he said was just ready for tasting but would improve over time. We could have gone on forever but he was having to open corked bottles to accommodate us and we felt badly about that. In the end we bought the 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon for later but took a bottle of Rose back to Beau-Sejour for our dinner that evening.





On leaving for our hotel reservations in Cognac we passed a partially fallen wall and recalled that we'll soon be visiting Jude and Chris Bratt in England's lake district. Chris is now retired from the television business and has taken up the hobby of Walling. We'll tell you more about it when we visit them in July.



We arrived at Hotel du Domaine du Breuil in Cognac at the end of the day. The hotel owner told us it formerly was headquarters for a cognac vintner but converted some 20 years ago to its present use. The best news was that it had an elevator to reach our second story room.



There are many problems in converting a building not intended for housing people. The present owner's daughter is an architect and, apparently, a master in space utilization. She had to put a queen-sized bed, bathroom and WC in a space best described as an air shaft with a view. It was easily as tall as it was wide. No pictures for obvious reasons. We slept well though.

The hotel had a lovely dining room with a good menu



but we chose to have our dinner on the terrace and selected duck with orange sauce which is a regional specialty. To stay regional, we ordered a bottle of local red wine and it did its job but the finishing touch was a snifter of cognac. Our waiter was the son-in-law of the owner and made sure we were never without.



We began our search for Mademoiselle WiFi shortly after arrival. They apologized that some of their signal transmitters were down but we finally located her in, where else, but hanging out in the bar. The bar is also where the difference between different qualities of Cognac was explained. The original grapes were grown within sight of where we were standing.



VS is lesser; VSOP is better; Napoleon is an upgrade and XO is best. I learned all this while

being guided to taste the XO at nine euros a pop. No free samples here. Nor did we buy a bottle.



The breakfast room housed a good-sized petite déjeuner (not included).



Breakfast meats, breads, hard boiled eggs, yogurt and condiments. Even had toast but had to make it ourselves. Jon Stratford would be aghast. We stoked up again, loaded the car and set off for St. Jean de Monts on the Atlantic Coast. The wind was almost vicious and stayed that way all day. It brought

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out my field expediency capabilities but it took a while.

Louise and Ray