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— CELLAR —

CLOS DE TART GRAND CRU

Sylvain Pitiot, one of the most talented winemakers in Burgundy crafts the legendary Mommessin Clos de Tart Grand Cru Morey St. Denis

By Simone Zarmati Diament



When Boisset -- a family-owned company created in 1961 by Jean Claude Boisset which is today the third largest wine company in France with important properties in the Côte D'Or of Burgundy, in Beaujolais, and from the northern region of Chablis down to the southern region of Languedoc-acquires new properties, it is acting as a "viniculteur" (a cross between a winegrower and a winemaker) with a non-interference policy to let century-long rooted families of winemakers do what they do best, and help them to do it even better, developing their lands and their wines to the top of their capacity.

To that end, they hire the best.

Sylvain Pitiot, an eminence in Cote d'Or and Beaujolais wines, writer and winemaker is the main consultant for the recently acquired Mommessin portfolio of vineyards, with legendary names such as Mommessin Pouilly Fuissé Reserve de Château Pully, Puligny Montrachet Le Trézin; Chasagne Montrachet Grand Cru Morgeot; Gevrey Chambertin; Mommessin Moulin a Vent Reserve Domaine de Champ de Cour among many others.



But what Sylvain Pitiot is proudest of is Clos de Tart -- home of the prestigious Grand Cru in Morey St. Denis, côte de Nuits and exclusive property of the Mommessin Family in 1932 -- where he has been manager and winemaker

since 1995.

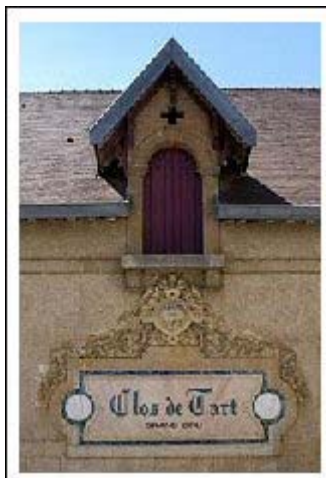
As a young topography engineer, he went grape picking one good day in 1972 and fell in love with Valerie, his wife, the daughter of Pierre Poupon, a well-known wine writer. He left his job and dedicated himself to wine and vines, learning from books and from his years of working on the land of Burgundy as regisseur or manager of the Hospices de Beaune.

Together with father-in-law and friend Pierre Poupon he produced the *Atlas of Great Vineyards of Burgundy*, co-authored *The Wines of Burgundy* (in its 12th edition in French) and a cartography of the Cotes de Beaune and Burgundy.

Clos de Tart - Grand Cru Morey St. Denis

A single parcel all under one owner ("monopole"), this 19-acre (7.5 hectares) Grand Cru that has had only three owners in its 850 years. It was run by the nuns of the Abbey de Tart from the 12th century until the French Revolution, then came under family ownership, and was purchased by Henri Mommessin during the Depression in 1932.

This estate is beautiful and quite unique. The vineyard of Clos de Tart covers 18 acres of the very best slopes in the village of Morey Saint Denis says Sylvain Pitiot, the current proprietor. The vineyard which is entirely organically farmed (no chemical fertilizers, only compost) although not "biodynamique," is surrounded by a dry stone wall, within which the 12th century farm house, the cellars and the vats are also enclosed. The brown, chalky soils contain a high proportion of clay particles, chalk for finesse and balance, small stones to help drainage and large flat rocks which heat up during the day and maintain a stable temperature at night.



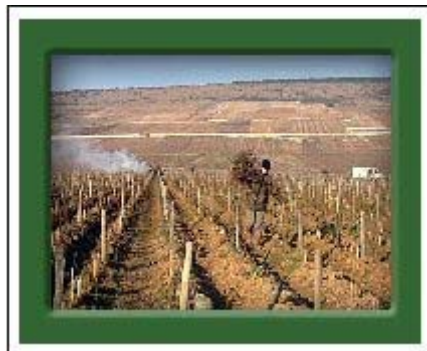
Since he took over in 1995, there's been a dramatic turn around in Clos de Tart. Pitiot is deeply committed to produce great wine. "There are no secrets or magic trick," he said at a lunch at North 110, in North Miami. Low yields, late harvesting for greater ripeness, more intensity, maximum quality control and a philosophy of winemaking according to the strictest laws of purity are key to greatness in wines that don't have to wait to be consumed. "Most people don't have cellars nowadays," he said. "They don't want to wait 10 or 15 years to enjoy the wine."

At Clos de Tart, grapes are hand picked from a small yield of 1.7 tons per acre and 10-15% of yield discarded at sorting. Only perfectly ripe grapes are used from vines pruned according to the Codon Royat system for vines under 40 years old with a very strict de-budding and 'green harvesting' method, meaning that only five grape bunches per vine are allowed to reach maturity.

For the vinification process, Grapes are 90% destemmed, no crushing before the uncrushed grapes are macerated for 18 days for maximum extraction.

Clos de Tart is aged 18 months in new French oak cased in partnership with three coopers in Burgundy and with a late malolactic fermentation state (9 months average.)

Pitiot noted that Clos de Tart makes two wines every year, the grand vin and a second wine labeled "La Forge", selecting the best grapes each year for the Clos de Tart. The percentage of the vineyard's production that goes into the grand vin varies with each vintage. In an excellent vintage such as 1991, all the grapes are used for the top wine.



Clos de Tart - Grand Cru Morey St. Denis 2003 (\$150)

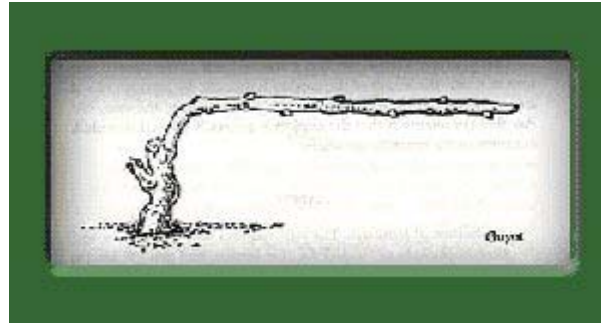
Brilliant garnet in color. A nose of great finesse with attractive scents of cherries, violets and cinnamon. Ripe, luscious and tart on the palate with aromas of red fruits: strawberry, raspberry and blackcurrant. Ready to drink but can be kept 5 years to 15 years. "An assemblage of all but the first lot: Dee p ruby-red.

Blackberry, minerals, flint, tar, bitter chocolate and smoke. Dense, superrich and velvety, but with tangy dark berries and good mineral lift giving life to the mid-palate. Finishes with explosive length and big, slightly aggressive tannins. This should last a long time but will also be accessible young owing to its extraordinary richness of texture." (Tanzer, 91-94) Pitiot said the grapes were picked late in September, with a controlled yield of only 1.3 to 1.4 tons per acre. The grapes were so ripe, he said, that they showed potential alcohol of 15-plus percent.

From The Wines of Burgundy by Sylvain Pitiot and Jean-Charles Servant:

"Pruning is an important and delicate operation which demands a good eye and good judgement. The general principles involved are continued by the style of training in use locally which in turn depends on grape-variety, soil

and climate. But circumstances alter cases and the vigneron has to go about his task on a case-by-case basis. Each plant poses its own particular problems, calling not only for good sense, but also demanding that just allowance be made for such secondary considerations as the number of canes, the age of the vine, planting density, etc. Left to itself, the vine would put out a mass of useless branches which would exhaust its strength and interfere with regular fruit-bearing. It has therefore to be domesticated just as an animal is domesticated... Pruning, then, requires long practice, real love for the work, and the experience that comes only to the man who carefully studies each plant in his vineyard several times a year, over a period of many years. Only such a man can train a vine to something approaching perfection. Pruning is one of those craft skills against which mechanisation is impotent: for this task, the machine is never going to replace the brain, the hand, and the eye of man... The Côte d'Or system is the "taille Guyot", named after Dr. Guyot who popularized it in the mid-nineteenth century. The root-stock is kept quite low. Each year two branches are kept: one, called the "baguette", is bent at 90° about 40 cm above the ground, tied in horizontally to the lowest of the training wires and cut back to a handful of buds which will produce next year's fruiting canes; the second is a spur (courson) cut back to two buds from which will grow next year's replacement branches. The vines are supported by three strands of wire one above the other, the middle wire being doubled..."



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