

## Extreme wines from Les Caves

8 May 2009 by Jancis Robinson

As promised [here](#) on our members' forum to a purple pager based in Sydney, I recently immersed myself in a giant two-day tasting organised by idiosyncratic UK wine importers of 'artisan wines', Les Caves de Pyrène, whose modest retail outfit just south of Guildford, Surrey, is shown here. There were too many wines to taste everything, but below are tasting notes on more than 100 drinks (not all of them wine) in the order they were presented. Prices given are per bottle ex-VAT *trade* prices, so retail prices will be at *least* 10% more plus 15% VAT. Les Caves is not about bargains, but offers one of the most interesting and unusual collections of wines anywhere. This means that many of them belong in the like or loathe category. As you will see, I veer between the two emotions. For more details of Les Caves, and to download their extremely detailed wine notes, see [www.lescaves.co.uk](http://www.lescaves.co.uk), and see my article tomorrow in the *FT* and *Free* for all.

Les Caves sales and marketing guy Doug Wregg (ex Gilberts restaurant in South Ken many years ago) loves writing - in fact one wonders how he finds time to sell and market.

His reflections written after the tasting can be found [here](#). He also offers us the following observations:

*The average alcohol level of the wines was incredibly low (a great proportion were under 13%). I think it is because when the vineyard is so healthy the grapes reach physiological maturity that much more easily.*

*The yields from natural winemakers are so low. Riffault in the Loire (approx 1/3 of average Sancerre producers) and Pithon (10-12 hl/ha) to the Burgundians in the low 30s - it's a whole different ball game to the average estates.*

*Experimentation: There were growers present and absent whose entire production is predicated, so to speak, on a whim and prayer. The zero use of sulphur is a dangerous game to play.*

*The greatest wines transcend their appellations: Lapalu in Brouilly, Foillard in Morgon, De Bartoli whites from Marsala, Croganletti in the Marche, and make one re-evaluate the potential of the appellation itself.*

I get it now. His writing IS his sales and marketing.

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## ITALIAN WINES

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### **Bressan, Verduzzo Friulano 2004 IGT Friuli 16 Drink 2008-10**

They believe their wines need time to develop. Mid orange and very mature. Pretty heavy but certainly chock-full of flavour. I could imagine it with salami, ham and cheeses. They say it's a red wine with a white dress because it's so rich in tannin.

*Caves de Pyrène £13.98*

### **Bressan Schioppettino 2004 IGT Friuli 16.5 Drink 2007-12**

Full and dusty and a hint of that spice I found on the Pinot below - some wood factor? His aim is to make a peppery wine - as in black pepper, or even Szechuan pepper, I'd say. Gentle texture and mid body. Bite and acidity.

*Caves de Pyrène £15.88*

### **Bressan Pinot Nero 2003 IGT Friuli 17 Drink 2008-13**

*2,000 litre oak casks.*

Mature and light ruby. A very particular spice - something vaguely Indian? - and very well balanced. Though still quite chewy. 'Not light but elegant', Bressan says. 'Elegance is what you have in your soul. Pinot Nero needs to be cooked slowly for a long time like a soup.' Lots of acidity and good balance. Still very fresh. Lots of interest.

*Caves de Pyrène £15.88*

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