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12

NOTES ON TASTING WITH JAMES MOLESWORTH

Old-School Youth at Phélan Ségur

The young but promising 2022 vintage continues to impress in St.-Estèphe, while a vertical back to 2017 reveals an alluring drink-now candidate



Phélan Ségur has recently shifted to using indigenous yeasts in an effort to amplify complexity. (Courtesy of Phélan Ségur)



By James Molesworth

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The beautiful **Château Phélan Ségur**

[[https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&scope=ratings&winery=ph%C3%A9lan+s%C3%A9gur)

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produces one of St.-Estèphe's most charming wines. There's also been

an injection of investment and energy here since [Belgian businessman Philippe Van de Vyvere](http://www.winespectator.com/articles/belgian-businessman-purchases-phelan-segur) [http://www.winespectator.com/articles/belgian-businessman-purchases-phelan-segur] purchased the property in 2018.

“We have an owner who is passionate about wine and who lets the team do what they need to keep moving in the direction we want,” says longtime [general director Véronique Dausse](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/preserving-a-style-in-a-modern-wine-world-46160) [https://www.winespectator.com/articles/preserving-a-style-in-a-modern-wine-world-46160] . “He just wants good wine.”

Fabrice Bacquey has been in the cellar at Phélan since 1998, and he's been in charge of the wines since 2012. He's recently been joined by new vineyard manager Stéphane Rougé.

A textbook St.-Estèphe estate, Phélan Ségur features 173 acres of vines spread around the appellation, which works as a hedge against hail in years such as 2022.

“We got hit on the northern side of our vineyards,” notes Rougé. “But not in the south. In the end, combined with the drought, the crop is down 30 percent in 2022.”

As at neighboring [Montrose](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/montrose-masters-an-extreme-vintage-in-st-estephe) [https://www.winespectator.com/articles/montrose-masters-an-extreme-vintage-in-st-estephe] , the vineyards run along terraces 4 and 3 and the area's gravel-over-clay soils performed well in the warm, dry 2022.

“We were happy with the maturity of the grapes all happening at once,” says Bacquey. “That made picking decisions easy. Harvest was quick, 13 days, instead of a typical four weeks. It was the vinification that was more difficult. We had to be careful with the [extraction](https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/show/id/extraction) [https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/show/id/extraction] . We cut back on [pump-overs](https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/index/word/Pump-over) [https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/index/word/Pump-over] and *délestage* [https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/show/id/d%C3%A9lestage] . **Maceration** [https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/show/id/maceration] was

normal, four weeks, but the work during the alcoholic fermentation was very gentle.”

One of this shifts here since 2020 has been to work on isolating the **native yeasts**

[\[https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/index/word/Native\]](https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/index/word/Native) in each of the four major vineyard areas of Phélan, and propagating them while shifting away from designer yeasts that can be purchased and used for specific traits in the wine, such as texture and aroma.

“We found with the commercial yeasts, quality was good, but all of the lots were more uniform. Using the individual yeasts from each area of the vineyards, we think we’re getting a better expression of the vineyard, and more complexity,” says Bacquey.

The **2022 Château Phélan Ségur St.-Estèphe** *grand vin* represents 75 percent of the crop, a bit more than the usual 60 percent, because of the smaller crop having such high quality. The wine represents a pure and understated style, with a steadily persistent core of red currant and damson plum notes laced with singed sandalwood and savory details. It has a lightly dusty edge on the finish that lends charm, while an echoing minerality gives it sneaky length. That dusty edge gives Phélan a bit of an old-school feel when young, but the fruit will steadily assert itself as it ages.

The **2021 Phélan Ségur** is under **fining** [\[https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/index/word/Fining\]](https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/index/word/Fining) in preparation for its bottling in May, so it’s a little muted today. But it has good tension and polish, with damson plum and Bing cherry fruit, a red tea note and a good, mineral spine, staying fresh through the finish. It will be earlier maturing, but it’s balanced and pure.

The **2020 Phélan Ségur** is textbook house style, with a touch of dustiness still clinging along the edges that adds character to the mix of focused red currant and damson notes. Sandalwood, red tea and mineral accents help lengthen the finish, and there’s a nice kick of energy on the end.

It's currently with the **2019 Phélan Ségur** where you begin to see how these wines age, as the dustiness disappears into the core and the fruit takes center stage, offering good tension as the mineral edge pierces the finish nicely.

The **2018 Phélan Ségur** is even fresher and more polished, with the fruit turning a shade darker in profile, more toward black cherry and plum. There's a long, gentle, lingering finish, with the minerality hanging in the background.

While those vintages are all on the young side, the **2017 Phélan Ségur** is hitting its peak. Though not as strong a vintage, the wine shows the gentle profile of this year, with charming red cherry and damson fruit and alluring red tea and incense notes curling around the finish. This is the one to drink while you wait for the others to mature.

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