



Sulphite exploration

Commonly used in wine production for their antiseptic and antioxidant properties, sulphites can alter wine's structure and taste. The wish to intervene less, to transparently show a sense of place, lies behind winemakers' decisions to work without them, or to use them at lower doses.

Jean-Philippe Bret (pictured above) has had success with microdoses in the Zen cuvées at Bret Brothers and La Soufrandière, adding sometimes as little as 5 parts per million (ppm) – in the EU, regulations permit up to 200ppm (or mg/L) in dry white wine.

Yet for him, even a tiny amount can give microorganisms a 'shock', preventing a potentially problematic microbial party.

Instead of using sulphites produced as a by-product of the petrochemical industry (the norm), Mark and Martial Angeli of Anjou's La Ferme de La Sansonnière work with mined Polish sulphur; they find that this gives significantly different results, barely affecting the wines.

Also in the Loire, Virginie Joly of La Coulée de Serrant adds that sometimes it enables her to reduce doses.

During Rajat Parr's sommelier career, he found himself drawn to wines made entirely without added sulphites, notably Thierry Allemand's cuvée from the northern Rhône. Wines at Phelan Farm in California have been made without sulphites thus far.

'Wine made without sulphites,' says Parr, 'is like listening to a vinyl record or taking a photo with an analogue camera – you have the raw version. It's not necessarily better, but the vibration feels higher. If I'm going to spend so much time taking care of a vineyard, why would I dilute the fruit's rawness?'

The future of wines like these relies on their people. Only fairly treated, thriving human beings can cultivate thriving vineyard ecosystems. In turn, only thriving vineyard ecosystems can create grapes that can be transformed into wines that truly tug at our heartstrings.