

### **Domaine Samuel Billaud - Chablis**



Samuel Billaud is one of those winemakers who epitomizes great, traditional Chablis. If a neophyte demanded to know exactly what a Chablis ought to be, then I might well choose one of Samuel's wines, possibly also one of Didier Picq at Domaine Gilbert Picq. Visiting both on the same day, I noticed a common approach between those winemakers: terroir-driven wines, what you might call a "minimalist" style that is paradoxically packed to the rafters with intensity. Of course, the internecine family fallout, whereby his uncle, Bernard Billaud, sold Domaine Billaud-Simon from under his feet to Faiveley, has grabbed the headlines and shrouded Samuel's winemaking future in doubt. (On this note, I do hope that Faiveley phase out the name of the winery – I cannot be the only one who finds it very confusing.) A couple of winemakers expressed sadness that they could not have sat down and come to some agreement, however, what's done is done. And rather than stalling Samuel's winemaking career, in hindsight, this considerable setback may well be seen as the impetus for a new direction. "I have around 4 hectares of vine of my own now," Samuel told me at his temporary winery down in the village of La Chapelle-Vaupelteigne, "plus grapes that I purchase. We are constructing a new chai at the moment where we were able to vinify the 2014. We've bought all the equipment. We are hoping it will all be finished by September 1. It's a bit 'cozy' in this facility." I asked him about the two vintages that I tasted: the bottled 2013s and the 2014 from vat. "The 2013s are concentrated. It was a sunny vintage, a small harvest cropped at around 25 hectoliters per hectare from

September 17, picking over the following ten days. It is about richness and fruit with less mineral and less typicity than 2014.” Like others, it is the range of nascent 2014s that excites Samuel and they already come across as energetic, mineral-rich, precise Chablis that are going to give immense pleasure to Chablis-lovers who appreciate that steely, tensile style. There is a purity in Samuel Billaud’s 2014s that I think was denied in the 2013s because of their richness. Once Samuel has moved into his new winery in Chablis, sorted out his own vineyard holdings, I think we should see him right at the top of Chablis producers alongside the likes of Raveneau and Vincent Dauvissat. After all he’s suffered, you might say he deserves it, but that would be ignoring the sheer quality of his wines.

*-Neal Martin*