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## Weekly Interview: Pierre Seillan

Each week, as regular readers know, we pose a series of questions to a winemaker. This week, we're featuring Pierre Seillan, a revered veteran of the industry. Pierre is the current winemaker at six properties sprawled across multiple winemaking areas: Vérité and Anakota in Sonoma County, Château Lassègue and Château Vignot in Saint-Émilion, Arcanum Valadorna in Tuscany, and Bellevue Seillan in Gascony.



It was at the very last property on that list – Bellevue Seillan, a family estate – that Pierre began his wine career. Pierre then did some work in the Loire Valley and Bordeaux. But

Pierre's real breakout project came some time later – and on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. In the mid-1990s, Pierre came to America, to Sonoma, and created Vérité. Vérité's wines have garnered high praise from the critics, including seven 100 point scores from Robert Parker. Unsurprisingly, that achievement opened even more doors for Pierre. He quickly expanded his portfolio to the current list of six properties.

### **What is your general winemaking philosophy?**

It's simple: listen to the soil and always respect the terroir of a specific region. My goal is always to find the synergy between the vintage and the terroir using my micro-cru philosophy – a practice where I divide the vineyards into small crus based on the block's soil and terroir. Each cru is managed, harvested, and vinified separately in order to understand what the fruit wants to say that year. I do not believe in imposing a particular style to a wine – I believe in letting the soil, the terroir, and the vintage speak.

### **What's open in your kitchen right now?**

A bottle from our family's estate in Gascony: Bellevue Seillan 2011.

### **Who are your favorite winemakers in history, through personal account, or their wines?**

Three come to mind. Richard Geoffroy at Dom Perignon – I always admired his winemaking philosophy, which is similarly based on micro-crus. Christian Moueix at Château Pétrus – he perfectly managed a superb micro-cru vineyard and created a Merlot blend that has become the reference for all other Merlots. Comte Alexandre de Lur Saluces at Château d'Yquem – his blending was masterful at that wonderful estate, which actually possesses a great diversity of soils, and his work changed the entire appellation for the better.

**What new winemakers are you most excited about, and why?**

Perhaps I am biased – I don't think I am – but my daughter H  l  ne is producing very exciting wine right now and is without a doubt my favorite new winemaker. She works with me in Saint-  milion at Ch  teau Lass  gue, but she is also spending a lot of time in Sonoma County on a project called Cenyth, blending fruit from mountain and hillside vineyards and creating wine that excites me.

**How do you spend your days off?**

I do not take a lot of days off, but when I have free time, I spend it walking in the forest or perhaps working in my garden. My greatest passions are my family, wine, and the outdoors. Every couple of years, my wife Monique will convince me that we need to travel to a place, like Tahiti, where we can disconnect from everything and just be (there are no vineyards in Tahiti). When we go on these trips, we spend our time outside swimming, fishing, walking, and just enjoying nature.

**What's the best wine you've ever tasted? The most interesting?**

A very old Port. I don't remember the name or the vintage, but the taste has stayed with me through the years.

**What's the oldest bottle in your cellar? The most expensive?**

The oldest is a bottle of 1928 Ch  teau de Terrefort-Quancard and the most expensive is my bottle of Ch  teau Margaux 1947.

**If you had to pick one red and one white to drink for the next month with every dinner, what would you choose?**

I would go with a Sancerre for my white and a C  tes de Gascogne for my red.

**What's your biggest challenge as a winemaker?**

Without a doubt, weather conditions – like too much heat in California or hail in Bordeaux or Tuscany. Reacting to such challenges with little or no warning is always a concern for me.

**What's your favorite wine region in the world – other than your own?**

The Loire Valley. It is a fabulous region to grow Cabernet Franc, Sauvignon Blanc, and Chenin Blanc.

**Is beer ever better than wine?**

Everything has its place. I admit that I sometimes prefer a cold beer when I am exhausted, especially after cheering for my rugby team.

**What would people be surprised to know about you?**

My simplicity of life in permanent relationship with nature. I would prefer to spend my rare vacation time in a simple and rustic Tahitian farr  e rather than a 5-star hotel anywhere in the world.

**If you weren't making wine for a living, what would you be doing?**

I would be raising cattle, probably sheep. Something outside, with nature.

**How do you define success?**

Success is realizing your passions and appreciating the fruit of your efforts. I am very lucky in that regard.

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