

## Dom Paul Meunier-Centernach

Tamlyn Currin, September 2022



Meunier-Centernach vineyards in the Agly Valley (photo credit Antonin Bonnet [@antoninbonnetphotography](#))

US wine importer Roy Cloud of [Vintage '59 \(@V59Wines\)](#), based in Washington DC, introduced me to the wonderful wines of Dom Paul Meunier-Centernach. Paul Meunier's parents managed the Burgundy estate Dom Jean-Jacques Confuron, which is where he grew up. But after getting a degree in oenology and viticulture, he headed to Roussillon to do an internship with Domaine de la Préceptorie, then



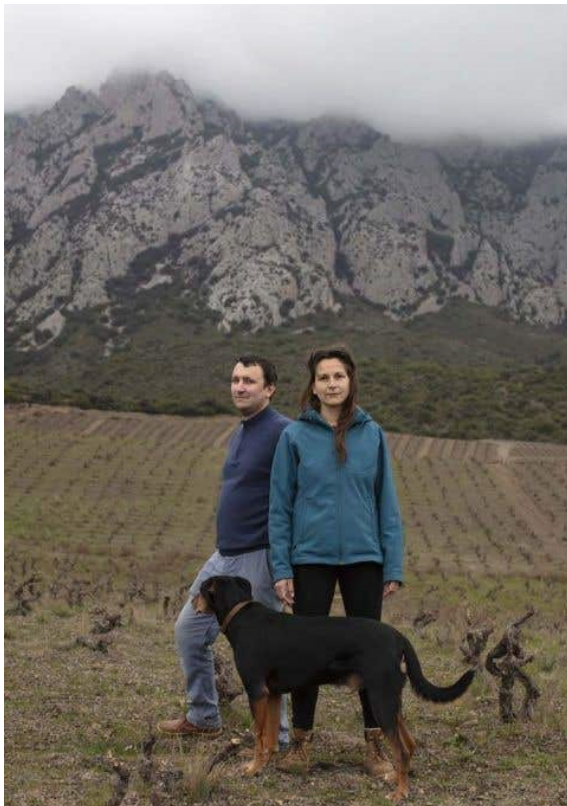
travelled the world for five years, working as a sommelier in Japan, and making wine in South America, Australia, New Zealand, Portugal and Lebanon.



*Paul working in the winter mist*

Finally heading back to France, he ended up in Centernach (the old name for St-Arnac), in the Upper Agly Valley of Roussillon, where he found some old growers on the verge of retirement who were willing to sell their vineyards. He eventually managed to patchwork together a domaine of 10 ha (25 acres) of old-vine parcels, a mosaic of Agly Valley terroirs including vineyards in the villages of Maury, St-Paul de Fenouillet, Lesquerde and Centernach. The average age of the vines is 60 years, although many are older than this. Symbolic, one might argue, of the essence and the heart of

Roussillon.



Paul and Lucile Meunier in one of their rugged old vineyards (photo credit Romain Guittet [@romainguittet](https://twitter.com/romainguittet))

His actor wife Lucile gave up her job to join him, putting herself through intensive courses and training in order to learn everything she could about winegrowing. They bought the old, battered Centernach co-operative winery, fixed it up, and from 2014, began to make wine.

From the start, their approach has been light touch: picking earlier than most, infusing rather than extracting, adding nothing more than minimal sulphites before bottling. They make microfermentations, parcel by parcel, variety by variety, in a mix of amphora, stainless and concrete.





Paul and Lucile in the old ex-co-op cellar, tasting barrel samples



Paul and Lucile in one of their old vineyards in spring (photo credit Antonin Bonnet [@antoninbonnetphotography](https://www.instagram.com/antoninbonnetphotography))

Much like the Danjou brothers, they're investing in agroforestry, planting trees and hedges throughout their vineyard parcels, restoring arid land to its richly diverse, natural ecosystem. Paul's sister brings her horse for a couple of months every year to very lightly plough the vineyards. They farm without chemicals, with committed respect, with a sense of guardianship.



*Paul's sister, ploughing the vineyards*

This is a deeply thoughtful couple who treasure the unique terroir of Roussillon with a passion that borders on reverence, and yet they farm this land and make their wines with a joy that can be tasted in every drop. Their wines are hauntingly beautiful...





Tasting in the cellar (photo credit Antonin Bonnet [@antoninbonnetphotography](https://www.instagram.com/antoninbonnetphotography))

### Dom Paul Meunier-Centernach, Chorèmes Blancs 2018 Côtes du Roussillon

*Full bottle 1,374 g. 80% Macabeu, 20% Grenache Gris on black schist from the commune of St-Paul-de-Fenouillet. A single, high, north-facing, complanted vineyard. Planted in 1950. All their vineyards are worked completely organically and they use a horse rather than a tractor for vineyard work. The grapes were harvested together. Fermented in amphora and steel, élevage on fine lees in steel. Minimal sulphite additions. 2,200 bottles produced.*

Smells of wild honey and mountain herbs, chypre and cistus. The texture, which is the first thing that fills the senses, feels like hand-made cotton paper in its crisp yet tensile, fibrous strength, and the way it makes the colours of the wine appear richer and deeper, the way it carries the watermark of the vineyard. I can taste honeysuckle and candied orange peel, lanolin and the melting wax of a soy candle. It's a wine that seems to carry the last-gold-glow-on-rocks of early sunset, the dust of time, and incipient, tentative shadows teasing at the lustrous burnish of the fruit. It's full, rounding out like a Buddha belly of calm stillness in the mid palate; but narrows to a long, long, silvery silk ribbon on the finish. It is a wine worth complete attention. (TC)

Drink: 2022 – 2028

**17.5 pts**



### **Dom Paul Meunier-Centernach, Chorèmes Rouges 2018 Côtes du Roussillon-Villages**

*Full bottle 1,360 g. Certified Ecocert organic. 60% Carignan, 20% Grenache, 15% Syrah, 5% Lledoner Pelut. From four parcels of very old vines in Lesquerde, Maury and St-Paul-de-Fenouillet. The word Chorèmes comes from the Greek root for space and chorus and is a spatial-cognition term referring to routes between spaces – in this case, pathways (physical and metaphysical) between plots of vines and between vines themselves. Élevage in older barrels. Bottle 1,151 of 2,100 bottles made.*

Interesting that the first sniff of this wine reminded me a little of the Meunier Maury VDN. Fresh-leather breath, simmering damsons, that incense of mixed spices that you get when you open the door to your spice cabinet (the cinnamon always a little ahead of the others), a fingertip of plum syrup slightly burned on the stove top. Tannins grooved with xeric charm: the old-vine Carignan cavalcade. Following, Syrah, with its underbrush pathways of dry Med herbs and the sweet caress of well-worn leather. And then Grenache, tucking in on the finish: a sine curve of generous fruit, sweet-meat charcuterie tang, wild plum turning toffee apple under the edges of your tongue. A finish of ruffled velvet. (TC)

Drink: 2022 – 2035

**17.5 pts**

### **Dom Paul Meunier-Centernach, Ch. Vieille Syrah 2018 IGP Côtes Catalanes**

*Full bottle 1,359 g. 100% old-vine Syrah from Lesquerde, grown on granitic sands. All their vineyards are worked completely organically and they use a horse rather than a tractor for vineyard work. Minimal sulphur additions. Bottle 217 of 620 bottles made.*

Deeply meaty; violet top notes. There is a cellist, alone, playing in a huge, empty, unlit auditorium, in a pool of light; the haunting cursive of minor-key adagio melting into the soft glow of old-wood curves. Then a double bass, appearing out of the shadows, thrumming so deep your breast bone starts to vibrate in response. The fine-taut flow of bows drawing long z-shaped lines forward, back; drawing a lento, deep-night berceuse from the old-moss and mushrooms shadows pressed into the bruise-dark velvet of the fruit. (TC)

Drink: 2022 – 2034

**18 pts**

