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## Soil and wine

*French researcher seeks to study the soil of the New World and role in making fine wine*

Distinctive wine begins with distinctive dirt, according to Pierre-Marie Camper. And in Prince Edward County he believes he has found soil with promise—soil worth protecting.

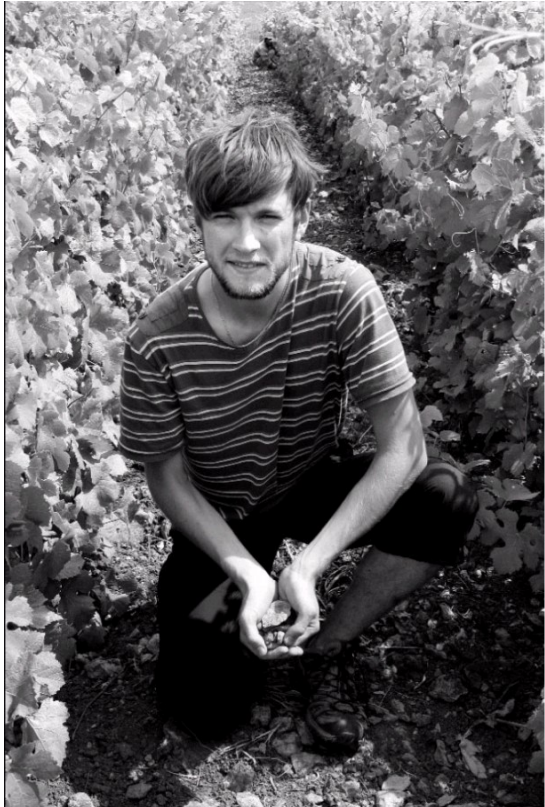


PHOTO: RICK CONROY

Pierre-Marie Camper amid the vines at the Old Third Vineyard owned and operated by Bruno Francois and Jens Korberg.

The soft-spoken young man cycling around Lake Ontario becomes quite animated when talking about dirt. The Masters student from the Institut Universitaire de la Vigne et du Vin at the University of Burgundy in France is spending the summer and fall in Quebec, Ontario and New York state making connections and looking to land a research placement in the New World. He is interested in how soil interacts with vines, climate and other factors to create wine. But while some see winegrowing as an art; Pierre-Marie Camper is more interested in science.

Last summer he spent several months cycling between Toulouse, where he received his undergraduate degree in geology, and Montpellier speaking with winegrowers about world terroir. It's a concept he uses with some hesitancy. For too often in his opinion terroir has been used as a way for European winemakers to put down New World upstarts. "Sometimes terroir is like bullshit," said Camper. "If we want to speak about terroir and wine we need to take the vaporeuse [air] out of the talk and replace it with science. "We can't say a region has terroir because of tradition or history—it doesn't make sense. Of course terroir will always be a mix of art and tradition, but we need some basis in science.

"It's important not to be so Cartesian [to rely solely on scientific certainty]," says Camper, "but the Old World has to give a chance to the New World. The new world will discover its own terroir."

It is the New World that intrigues him, despite the rich traditions of wine making in his home country. His interest more specifically is the soil.

He has learned in his short time in the County that many growers here strive to emulate the style of wines produced in the Burgundy region of France. Speaking with growers such as Geoff Heinrichs, Norman Hardie, James Lahti, Bruno Francois and Frederic Picard, he has heard first hand the

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challenges and aspirations of County wine makers.

“Geoff [Heinricks] was very helpful in helping me to understand how you are able to make a Burgundian style wine here. Here the soil is thin like Burgundy, but it’s also different.

“Here climate is a big factor. There is also a big difference in the bedrock—Jurassic era geology in Europe and much older Ordovician here—melding with the rocks deposited hereby the glaciers during the ice age.

“That is why we can grow wines like Pinot Noir or Chardonnay.”

Camper believes the distinctive soils and climate in the County will, in time, result in a unique County style of wine.

“Over time, the wines of this region will stop being in the style of Burgundy and will become wines of their own character and place. We can hope for this.”

But why did this young and ambitious student of soil decide upon Canada and New York State?

New Zealand and California are already overdone, according to Camper. Besides he, like many French residents, was attracted by advertising from Quebec.

He landed in Montreal in mid-June, then ventured by bicycle and trailer around the wine country in the Eastern Townships. From there he cycled back to Montreal then to Ottawa and eventually to Prince Edward County.

In preparation for his journey, he contacted winemakers whose websites interested him seeking advice and accommodation. He received welcoming emails from Norman Hardie and Bruno Francois.

He is now headed back to Montreal and will tour the Gaspé region of Quebec, as well as Île d’Orléans near Quebec City. Later this summer he plans to spend some time in the Niagara region and then the Finger Lakes wine region in upstate New York.

He has another motive in focusing a tour around Lake Ontario.

“Ontario and New York state have many research programs in viticulture — this is what attracted me. The climate also attracted me.”

He keenly wants growers here to learn some hard lessons about the soil learned in Europe in the last 60 years.

“After WWII agriculture became very intensive in Europe, these practices changed the morphology and chemical composition of the soil.

“Now we are coming back to our traditions and using our knowledge about soil and making better decisions — thinking about balance between the soil and what we want to produce.

Vines in nature don’t give us the same grapes we need to make wine.

“We need to be less intrusive-less impact.”

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