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Food & Drink

Quick bites: Labelled with love

The Beaujolais cru of Saint-Amour sees one-third of its annual production sold cheaply on Valentine's Day. But a few newcomers are starting to make vintages built to last



Saint-Amour vines © Alamy

YESTERDAY by: **Aaron Ayscough**

In Saint-Amour, at the northernmost edge of France's Beaujolais region, the local wine economy depends, for better or worse, on Valentine's Day.

"Let's say Saint-Amour is not where there are the greatest winemakers," admits Crôzes-Hermitage winemaker Alain Graillet, who with his sons in 2013 purchased a small plot of the *cru* for Domaine de Fa, its Beaujolais estate. "[Saint-

Amour winegrowers] sell a lot in bulk to négociants, and they sell it for Valentine's, and that's it.”

Wines from the other nine *crus* of Beaujolais can't be released until at least March 15 following the vintage. Saint-Amour alone is permitted to be rushed to market for Valentine's Day. The wine's abbreviated maturation period pitches it somewhere between a Beaujolais Nouveau and a true *cru* wine.

Graillet waited until August 2016 to bottle his rich, structured 2015 Saint-Amour, after extended ageing in oak. He's among a select few Saint-Amour producers who recognise that the Valentine's Day marketing undersells the local terroir. At a time when other Beaujolais *crus*, such as Fleurie or Morgon, have become recognised for organic farming and additive-free vinification, Saint-Amour is unapologetically unreformed, propped up by its romantic sales boost.

Beside Graillet's vines sit those of Château des Rontets' Claire Gazeau and Fabio Montrasi, who were among the first in the Saint-Amour *cru* to seek organic certification. A decade ago Montrasi took over the vines from a sharecropper who had not shied away from using herbicide. “The two first vintages were complicated. There wasn't enough life in the vines — not enough variety of

yeasts.” Like Graillet, Gazeau and Montrasi pay no heed to potential Valentine’s Day sales, instead releasing their carbonic-macerated Saint-Amour when they feel it’s ready.

Christophe Pacalet, another newcomer to Saint-Amour production, two years ago found a grower willing to sell him good grapes he could vinify his own way: whole-cluster, using natural yeasts. “It’s nice,” he says now, “to make a true Saint-Amour.”

The true Saint-Amour, after all, had nothing to do with love. The eponymous village is named for Roman legionnaire Amor, who in the third century converted to Christianity after narrowly avoiding death in battle.

Domaine de Fa Saint-Amour 2015

£21 ([Yapp.co.uk \(https://www.yapp.co.uk/\)](https://www.yapp.co.uk/))

Château des Rontets Saint-Amour 2015

€23 ([Beaujoloire.fr \(https://www.beaujoloire.fr/\)](https://www.beaujoloire.fr/))

Christophe Pacalet Saint-Amour 2015

£14.90 ([Vinatis.co.uk \(https://www.vinatis.co.uk/\)](https://www.vinatis.co.uk/))

Aaron Ayscough writes the French wine blog Not Drinking Poison In Paris

([notdrinkingpoison.blogspot.co.uk \(http://notdrinkingpoison.blogspot.co.uk/\)](http://notdrinkingpoison.blogspot.co.uk))

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