

The consummate Ashes wine
24 Aug 2009 by Jancis Robinson

In rather convoluted celebration of England's regaining the Ashes, I offer up the following tasting notes on wines made at Bonny Doon winery, most famous for its wines called Cigare, something to celebrate with and also something associated with ashes (told you it was convoluted - but see tasting note at * below!). As you doubtless know, there were some pretty savage bushfires very recently in and around the little town of Bonny Doon on the Pacific coast south of San Francisco. But Randall Graham has moved his winery a little bit south to the university town of Santa Cruz, which, I understand, was unscathed by the recent fires. See The virtues of wine aged in glass for news of his latest fad, and for some explanation of the various 2007 Cigares Volants below.

We caught up with Randall in the old vegetable store by a railroad track used for shipping veg north from Monterey. Within smelling distance of his winery are a brewery, four more wineries and a bakery. He also has a very good, casual café in the winery that's open Wed- Sun, for lunch and dinner.

Randall was a pioneer of the screwcap in the US, having switched his entire production to this stopper, still exceptional in the US, back in 2001. See Randall on screwcaps in America, and also the Randall rants video.

Note his move to ingredient labelling (see note on Bien Nacido Syrah 2007).

WHITE

Bonny Doon, Ca' del Solo Albariño 2008 Monterey County
15.5 Drink 2009-10. Third vintage of this varietal that's increasingly popular in California. I remember Mike Havens pioneering it. Now I see Tangent make one. Very aromatic and snazzy on the nose but pretty astringent on the finish. Apparently there's a bit of Loureiro and Treixadura from Rias Baixas also blended in. 'We're trying to make wines as light as possible. And moving to BD', said Randall. 12.8%

Bonny Doon, Ca' del Solo Muscat 2008 Monterey County
16 Drink 2009-10. Moscato Giallo. Thick skin and bigger berries. But it's not Muscat of Alexandria. Heady nose - even more intense than the Albariño. Nice and dry and appetising and tasted more like Alsace Muscat to me. 6 g/l residual sugar. Gets lower and lower each year. Great Slanted Door wine ie for Asian cuisine. I like this but I think I'd like it even more if it were just a tad drier. 12.5%

***Bonny Doon, Le Cigare Blanc 2007 Arroyo Seco** 16 Drink 2008-09. Beeswax Vineyard with two thirds Roussanne and one third Grenache Blanc. Hint of ash on the nose, interesting! Then pretty fat. Certainly ready to drink... 14.4%

Bonny Doon, Le Cigare Blanc 2006 Arroyo Seco 16.5 Drink 2008-10. Two thirds Grenache Blanc and one third Roussanne because it was so botrytised this year. Honeyed nose with herbal notes. Very juicy with a little more spine than the 2007. Lovely for current drinking. 14.4%

Bonny Doon, Le Cigare Blanc 2005 Arroyo Seco 16 Drink 2006-08. 54% Roussanne, 46% Grenache Blanc. Very interesting development on the nose but pretty heavy and sweet on the palate. The Grenache didn't manage to ferment out to dryness. Lovely nose but a bit hot and heavy on the palate. 14.2%

Bonny Doon, Le Cigare Blanc 2004 Arroyo Seco 17 Drink 2006-10. 73% Roussanne, 27% Grenache Blanc. Very difficult to sell originally but it has aged beautifully. Lovely rich white burgundy

nose with some reduction. Explosive on the palate. Like a really, really good white Châteauneuf. Great creamy texture. 14.3%

PINK

Bonny Doon, Vin Gris de Cigare 2008 California 16 Drink 2009. Very old Cinsault from Lodi, Grenache from Arroyo Seco, mixed Syrah, Mourvèdre from Oakley. Light and easy. Now farming in the vineyard for rosé rather than bleeding red tanks. Together and a successfully balanced wine. 13.6%

RED

Bonny Doon, Le Pousseur Syrah 2005 Central Coast 17 Drink 2008-11. Dry and polished. Savoury - not sweet. Real Syrah character (as opposed to so many California Syrahs which seem so thick and sweet)! From mixed vineyards in Central Coast and Bonny Doon's own vineyard in Soledad. Great value. 13% \$18 retail in the US

Bonny Doon, Le Pousseur Syrah 2006 Central Coast 17 Drink 2008-11. Drier than the 2005 but very worthy. Lovely texture. 13.5%

Bonny Doon, Le Cigare Volant 2006 California 16+ Drink 2011-16. Hint of brett. Still quite chewy. 13.5%

Bonny Doon, Le Cigare Volant 2005 California 17 Drink 2009-14. Not yet released. Sweet and well balanced and rich and round. Delicate and lightly floral. From 2005 they have deliberately increased the Grenache component. Great clones of Grenache Noir imported into their own Soledad vineyard from 'Europe-ish', maybe 'a very famous vineyard in Châteauneuf'. Will be in UK in late 2009. 13.5%

Bonny Doon, Le Cigare Volant 2004 California 16 Drink 2009-14. Lightly chewy and awkward. Quite rustic tannins. 13.5%

Bonny Doon, Le Cigare Volant 2003 California 16.5 Drink 2007-11. Deep crimson. Polished and sweet and spicy. Well balanced. A bit hot on the finish. 13.5%

Bonny Doon, Le Cigare Volant 2007 Central Coast 16.5 Drink 2011-16. Rich and quite tannic. Pretty alcoholic and pretty Châteauneuf-like. Spicy with a chewy end. 14.4%

Bonny Doon, Le Cigare Volant Foudre 2007 Central Coast 16.5+ Drink 2010-16. More lifted nose. Round and polished and dry on the end. Quite Syrah-like in a way - more transparent than the average Châteauneuf, though fleshy. Still pretty chewy on the finish. 14.4%

Bonny Doon, Le Cigare Volant Demi-Muid 2007 Central Coast 16.5 Drink 2011-17. Very smooth. Sweet and thick and lots of chew on the end. 14.4%

Bonny Doon, Bien Nacido Syrah 2007 Santa Maria Valley 16.5 Drink 2012-18. Ingredient labelling was introduced by Bonny Doon recently. Good for them. This one bravely lists 'grapes, tartaric acid, sulphur dioxide, yeast nutrients, untoasted oak chips, French oak barrels'. Scented, quite firm. Sweet and lush on the front palate. Oak chips used for colour stabilisation, they say. 'An extremely benign, low-impact intervention that doesn't deform the wine in any substantive way.' Just a little dry on the end at the moment but proper stuff. Quite firmly black olive. The coolest Syrah vineyard in California?? 13.5%

Bonny Doon, Bien Nacido Syrah 2005 Santa Maria Valley 17 Drink 2010-17. Very meaty/leathery nose. Dry end. Correct. Straight backed. No new oak at all, but needs lots of time still.

SWEET WHITE

Bonny Doon, Le Vol des Anges 2007 Arroyo Seco 17 Drink 2010-14. Botrytised Roussanne from the Beeswax Vineyard. Great texture - a little bit medicinal. 12.3%

Bonny Doon wines are sold by Berry Bros in the UK.

