



Ao Yun



Ao Yun 2019

, China

The wine: At the foot of the Himalayas, the luxury goods conglomerate LVMH has embarked on an adventure at 2,600 metres above sea level: the production of the company's first Asian wine – Ao Yun. The name means “flying above the clouds” or “sacred cloud”. The wine is an assemblage of Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. The grapes were harvested in the vineyards of Shangri-La in south-western Yunnan province. The wine's launch was so successful that Ao Yun is already being traded on the electronic exchange for fine wine (Liv-ex).

The story: For almost a century, the fictional place of Shangri-La existed only in the imagination of the British writer James Hilton. His 1933 novel “Lost Horizon” tells of an earthly paradise deep in the Himalayan mountains that few people have ever seen. The creation of Ao Yun has revived this mythical place.

The taste: The higher the vineyard, the greater its exposure to ultraviolet radiation. This causes grapes to grow a thicker skin with more colour and an intense flavour. It also increases the wine's aging ability. Ao Yun is a powerful wine, loaded with black fruit, and richly structured with firm, silky tannins.

Alcohol :15,00 %

Composition: 67% Cabernet
Sauvignon, 17% Cabernet Franc,
10% Syrah, 6% Petit Verdot



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Robert Parker (RP) : 96 Points (2019)

This is the best vintage of Ao Yun to date and also the highest-scoring Chinese wine I have ever reviewed. It, therefore, requires a more detailed account to understand why. The 2019 Ao Yun is a blend of 67% Cabernet Sauvignon, 17% Cabernet Franc, 10% Syrah and 6% Petit Verdot (this latter emanating from the village of Sinong). Notably, Merlot did not make the grade in 2019, which was less to do with vintage but, according to winemaker Maxence Dulou, more a function of Merlot vines at an adolescent stage of development (at five to six years of age, Dulou feels Merlot doesn't produce the most interesting fruit compared with younger or older vines). The relatively cooler and wetter winter prior to 2019 gave the vines decent reserves, but the drier and warmer than expected spring meant some irrigation was required around budburst and flowering. Overall, across Ao Yun's different villages sites—Xidang, Sinong, Shuori and Adong—2019 witnessed a warm, healthy growing season and not too warm autumn with yields at their lowest to date (around 16 hectoliters per hectare rather than the average of 20-22 hectoliters per hectare). The long harvest commenced in Xidang on September 9th and finished in Adong on November 21st. Of the varieties above, the proportion of fruit was drawn from the villages in order of elevation as follows: 23% from Xidang, 21% from Sinong, 32% from Shuori and 24% from Adong. In the harvest as a whole, only 53% went into Ao Yun's top wine, with tiny percentages being used for the Village Cru reds (6% each) and 2% for the 2019 Chardonnay. Thus 33% of the harvest was not used for Ao Yun at all. But what of the wine? The 2019 Ao Yun has an intensely deep purple appearance. On the nose, there is already appealing, immensely powerful dark fruit showing abundant cassis, black cherry, bramble, blackberry and blueberry fruit with some subtle, leafy herbaceous character (sage, green bell pepper, mint) combining with very well-integrated new oak notes of vanilla, clove, toast and smoke (note that Ao Yun only sees around 35% new French barriques with the remainder being matured in stoneware vessels and old oak). On the palate, the wine is immensely full-bodied but far from heavy, with vibrant acidity and very coating, ripe, fine-grained and polished tannins. Dulou reports that this was the first vintage when the entire harvest was gravity-fed through their winemaking facility in Adong with much gentler crushing resulting in partially opened berries retaining seeds inside (even through to racking the wine off gross lees). He also now opts to ferment in narrow, higher-filled vessels, which results in easier cap management, a less-aerated cap with less thermal variation. All of which helps explain the refinement and integration of tannin in the 2019. There is a scintillating core of complex fruit, herbaceous character and subtle new oak notes that are harmoniously integrated. With its very long length, the 2019 Ao Yun is unsurprisingly very youthful and will show better from 2023 at the earliest, even if it can already be appreciated. It will also develop impressively in bottle over the next 15 years or so. In sum, 2019 is the completest statement to date of everything Ao Yun has aspired to be in terms of attaining the best blend achievable from this complex patchwork of vineyard sites stretched across different villages at markedly different elevations.



James Suckling (JS) : 98 Points (2018)

I love the depth and complexity of the nose, which brings you down deeply into the wine, showing blackberry, ink, tar, earth, incense, cloves, and black licorice. Thyme, too. The purity of the fruit, including cassis, is the real thing. This is full-bodied, but remains so fresh and vertical on the palate. The tannins are so fine and integrated, producing a millefeuille-like layering of tannin and cool, blue fruit. Incredible wine. The greatest wine made in China so far. 60% cabernet sauvignon, 19% cabernet franc, 10% merlot, 7% syrah and 4% petit verdot. 26,000 bottles made. Drinkable now, but will be so much better in four or five years.



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Decanter (DCT) : 96 Points (2018)

Gorgeously seductive nose, this is rich and abundant, aromas bursting out the glass, smells sweet and spicy, five spice fragrance with sweet blackcurrant and black cherry aromas. Mouthcoating and invigorating on the palate, totally harmonious and balanced with the salinity and wet stone nuances coming through backed by ripe, but so well defined, fruit flavors. Such purity on both the nose and palate. This is seriously refined, aromatics are preserved, balancing power with excellent acidity, so you get these bright and energetic flavours but still with structure. Seductive but this also has a sense of classicism. Lovely saline elements and cooling touch at the end with all the flavours lingering long in the mouth. Will be interesting to see how it ages. (GH) (3/2022)



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