



Guillaume Gerard (left), Dagan Ministero and Luc Ertoran

Crusaders in Natural Wine

“So why did you name this place after a dog, anyway?”

The question came from a fellow perched at the other end of the bar. He claimed to own a wine bar himself, somewhere over near Polk Street. Guillaume Gerard, who along with partners Luc Ertoran and Dagan Ministero had opened *Terroir* about three weeks before, shrugged off the question.

“I think people will remember the name, and they’ll ask questions about it,” he replied to the man, and then smiled as if to suggest that he had his work cut out for himself.

At that time, back in December 2007, the three partners had managed to stock about 80 different wines from producers who practiced natural winemaking, a sort of catchall for biodynamic, organic and minimal intervention. Today, according to Ministero, that number is somewhere around 440. “When we were first talking about opening, a lot of people in the restaurant business were like, ‘Can you even find that many wines?’ he recalled. “Well, we keep finding them.”

Ministero had met Gerard at San Francisco’s *Chez Spencer* where the two worked as servers. They quickly bonded over wines that they liked, but neither of them at the time identified natural winemaking as something to look for in a wine. Gerard soon returned to Paris to visit family and friends, and while there he began hanging around bars like *La Muse Vin*, which specialized in natural wine. They were pour-

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ing Jean Foillard’s 2004 Morgon one night, Gerard recalls, “and it basically changed my life.” He spent the next six months hopping around the natural wine bar scene in Paris before returning to the States, excited, as he puts it, “to seek out wines that aren’t lying.”

Back in San Francisco, Gerard and Ministero brought in their friend Ertoran, and the three began to lay plans for *Terroir*, which was to be strictly dogmatic in its approach. “If I taste a wine brought in by a supplier, and it’s good, I’m going to check out the producer first to make sure it’s something we can work with,” says Gerard.

Their approach has irked some members of the trade, even in progressive San Francisco. Ministero says that while there’s a slight backlash from sales people, “Overall, the trade is supportive. Especially chefs and restaurant people.”

They seem to respect the trio’s honesty. What you see at *Terroir*—an open space, bottles, a simple, minimal bar, as well as record player in the corner—is what you get. Gerard & Co. clearly believe in each of the wines on their shelves, even perhaps more so than in the words behind their philosophy. “The proof is in the glass,” says Ministero. “Even if a customer can’t wrap their head around the concept, the wine itself is incredible.”

“We’re not *terroirists*,” adds Ertoran. “We’re crusaders sent by God.” —WOLFGANG M. WEBER