

Grape The Press

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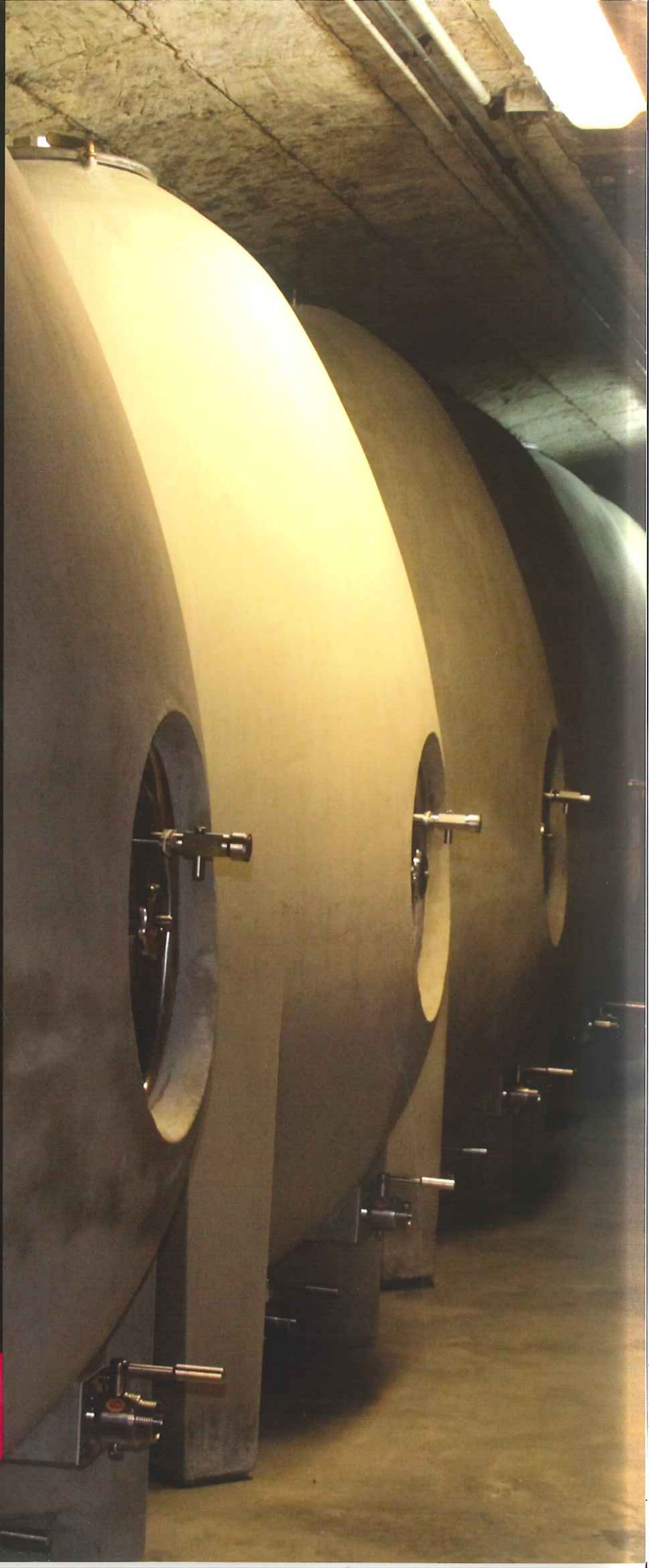
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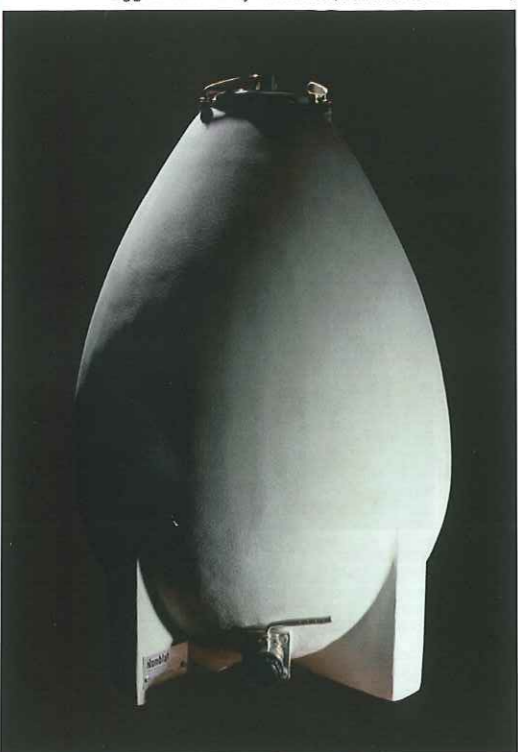
by Chris Carter

It's 7am on a Tuesday morning and I'm having a discussion about winery flooring while boarding the BA flight to Bordeaux. At a rough guess our plane was more or less half full of bleary-eyed, English winemakers off to Vinitech. Perhaps we should think about chartering a flight for Site-Vi in Montpellier next year?

From the airport it was straight to the Parc de Expositions for a coffee with our tank man to discuss next year's requirements. Then a quick scout round the kilometre long building before my 2am start began catching up with me and I had to head into town to find my hotel and take a quick siesta – later returning for charcuterie and biodynamic Jurancon with Ben from Adgestone Vineyard.

Back to the fair, bright and early on Wednesday and despite the fewer than normal exhibitors the place was mobbed. The sheer number of vigneronns meant it was quite difficult to get to speak properly with the sales people on the stands. We did manage an interesting chat with the people from Nomblot about their concrete "egg" fermenters which are all the rage amongst the organic/biodynamic community. I know people who use them in the Priorat region of Spain (Clos Mogador) but was shocked to find out there are some already in Hampshire! Though they do look very smart they've been out-done by barrel manufacturer Taransaud, who managed to build a 2000 litre egg from oak staves. Very impressive craftsmanship indeed.

Egg Fermenter by Nomblot (www.wine-tanks.com)



When visiting these events it pays to bring a few pinches of salt with you to take while listening to the sales pitches which range from the farfetched to the frankly ridiculous. The pocket sized crusher de-stemmer that does 12 tonnes of fruit per hour? The literature of the semi-automatic labelling machine that boasts it labels a bottle every 3 seconds? Possibly true if Superman works on your labelling line but for mere mortals I got the chap to admit 400 per hour was a more reasonable speed.

For those of you with deep pockets there were some fantastic bottling lines on display. Much debate over who was better between GAI and Kosme with pros and cons for each. Worth doing your homework before buying as these lines range from between €20,000 and more than €100,000! Out of the labelling machines CDA seemed to be leaders, especially for Sparkling Wine labelling, as the machines have to be able to line up the foil sleeve with the bottle labels. Again, not for those of us on a budget as even the 500 bottle per hour machine was €20,000.

While waiting to speak with Perpinieres Guillaume to see if our new vines are all going to be ready on time I got a phone call from England informing me that Gatwick was closed for the day and all flights were cancelled. No worries I thought as I wasn't due to return until Thursday evening. 5am Thursday morning and I get a text from BA saying the Thursday flights were cancelled. I'd actually got to the Airport by the time Friday's flights were cancelled. So I eventually didn't make it home until Saturday lunchtime. Still there are much worse places to be stuck than Bordeaux!

Due to the snow in France, a lot fewer people turned up to the show on Thursday. This meant it was actually possible to have conversations with the exhibitors without being constantly interrupted. Even the barrel manufacturers managed to spare a bit of time for me even though I was only after second hand



barriques. They don't make any money on the second hand ones so only arrange sales as a favour to their real clients. Of course they were all very keen to tell us how many Champagne producers are using new oak barrels and how they had developed a special "neutral" toast specifically for Sparkling Wine. Interesting, but I think I'll stick with 5yr old neutral barrels for €65 rather than new ones for ten times that price.

A lot of time was spent comparing the many and varied labour saving devices for the vineyard. While I don't think I'll be getting one of the whizzy little go-carts on which you sit sideways to do your pruning, I certainly am going to try and get a mechanical pre-pruner, trimmer, tipper, leaf stripper, etc. There's even a machine that does your tucking in for you! The Pellenc stuff looked good, as did the Collard, but my particular favourite was the Ero equipment. None of them are cheap but when you tot up the man hours required for various vineyard tasks they suddenly seem a lot more affordable.

Maxime from Oenococept had a constant stream of visitors keen to pick his brains about Sparkling Wine production (and sample the fine Champagne he was liberally pouring). Apart from him there were very few others from Epernay. It's a shame for us fizz makers that the Champagne trade show is in mid-October, right in the middle of our harvest.

Even if you're not buying kit these events are great for networking, swapping ideas and catching up on the gossip. Over the course of the three days I spoke to the guys from Hush Heath, Chapel Down, Stopham Vineyard, Allbourne Estate, Adgestone, Vivid Wines, David Cowderoy and Pete Morgan, and his flock of students. We even managed an impromptu Dorset Grape Growers meeting in the departure lounge of Bordeaux Airport when I bumped into the Riddles from Wodetone Vineyard.



Exhibition images courtesy of Vinitech

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