With less than 54 ha and about sixty labels, the Dézaley is a grand cru that rejoined the canton of Vaud AOC in the spring of 2013 after three years spent in the 809-ha Lavaux AOC. While a single varietal predominates (Chasselas accounts for 90% of vineyard acreage), the nature of the sub-soil, direction of slope exposure and density of planting are just some of the parameters that each wine-grower handles in his own way, just as he selects his own wine-making methods in the secret confines of his cellar. To illustrate this heart of the Lavaux region for the Lettres du Brassus, Pierre Thomas has chosen to paint a portrait of four of the Dézaley’s iconic estates.
The Massy family
has succeeded in establishing
THEIR BRAND, THE DÉZALEY
CHEMIN DE FER.

In Switzerland and Germany, as in Japan, Dézaley Chemin de Fer is one of the few well-known Swiss whites—and has been for a long time. For while the Massys did not settle in Épesses until 1903, which is nothing compared to the lineage of other wine-growers, they were the first to bottle their wine, beginning in the 1920s, rather than selling it in bulk from casks at local cafés and restaurants...

The first of the “Massy wine-growers,” after having traveled in Africa and contracted malaria, worked in the Vallée de Joux, in a shop founded by one of his ancestors who produced jewel bearings for watchmaking—a fact that will not be devoid of interest to readers of the Lettres du Brassus. Then, seeking a better future, he came to try his luck on the shores of Lake Geneva. Having married a girl from Épesses, Luc Massy explains, “my grandfather immediately thought of the brand: his inspiration was to call it ‘Chemin de Fer’ [Railroad],” after a parcel acquired in a locale of that name, so christened because the Paris–Simplon railway line had just been finished.

Today, the roughly 35,000 bottles of Chemin de Fer still come from this same 3.5-ha combe not far from Vinorama, the showcase and wine bar for the Lavaux vineyards, along the lake road from Lausanne to Vevey, set back from the railway line. When the president of the Barony of Dézaley is asked what has changed in his cellar since his grandfather’s time 110 years ago, he replies quick as a flash: “Nothing! Between the alcoholic and malolactic fermentations, we leave our wine on the same lees. We don’t move the wine, it stays with its ‘foster mother’ from October until March.” In March the wine is pre-filtered, then bottled three times a year, at the end of May, in July, and in September.

Another characteristic is that only a third of the wine is aged in a large cask. Luc Massy is proud to show off “his” cask in a naturally cool cave hollowed out of the rock at the entrance to the village of Épesses. “I treated myself to it in 2002, for my 50th birthday. A gift that cost 45,000 Swiss francs!” With barely disguised irony, the master of Chemin de Fer declares: “Dézaley is the locomotive of Vaud wines! Consumers don’t always understand that it has more flavor and costs more than other chasselas. For me, Dézaley has always been an extraordinary wine because of the way the terroir and the climate come together. In fact, the Barony of Dézaley was created in 1994 to drive home the point!”

Sold for 24 francs on the estate, this great white wine—which as we are now discovering not only ages well but develops along the lines of old champagnes—seems to be quite a “deal” for a grand cru. “We are not daring enough, because Dézaley does not have the image,” confesses Luc Massy, who has every vintage since 2001 available in his cellar. The fourth generation is now in place. After vitivinicultural studies and internships abroad (at Colomé in Argentina), Benjamin, 29, returned home a few months ago.

www.massy-vins.ch
In 2010, Louis-Philippe Bovard celebrated his 75th birthday by opening a small cellar in the old village of Cully on the shores of Lake Geneva. It is equipped for making a large number of wines in small amounts. For, champion of chasselas though he may be, Louis-Philippe Bovard—a man whose effervescent spirit bubbles out from behind his severe glasses and sailor hat—is first and foremost a tireless trailblazer.

As a gentleman farmer of this estate that dates back to 1684, he has surrounded himself with professionals in both the vineyard and the cellar. In early 2013, promising Alsatian wine-maker Philippe Meyer (of the Josmeyer family, see Lettres du Brassus No. 12) became a “cantalonian oenologist” tasked with advising wine-growers throughout the Vaud region. He was replaced by Caspar Eugster, who has international experience (Hess estates).

Of all the wines signed Bovard, Dézaley Médinette (35,000 bottles per year) remains the standard-bearer. This brand intrigues even French-speakers. Its name is taken from a temple of Luxor, in Egypt, and also matches the androgynous silhouette of a Bacchus, looking almost like a young girl (midinette) from the 1905 Vevey wine-growers’ festival. This label, which Louis-Philippe’s grandfather accentuated with the phrase “the finest of Swiss wines” done in gold letters, has never changed since. At the very most, the 1990s saw the appearance of Warhol-esque colored labels—blue, red, green, or yellow—to differentiate the vintages, because while the notion of terroir is dear to Louis-Philippe Bovard’s heart, the special characteristics of each year are dearer still. Ask him how the vines were doing in, say, 2001, and he will pull out his notebook: “It was a late year, a hot summer with rain before the harvest, and October was sunny and hot.” While the Louis Bovard Estate makes a chasselas without malolactic fermentation, and even a chasselas aged in oak barrels, Médinette is produced using a traditional fermentation, aged on fine lees in large casks.

Louis-Philippe Bovard is behind a hierarchical classification of Vaud’s wines, created after studying the terroirs, that is modeled on the grands crus of Alsace. He has opened a “World Chasselas Preserve” above Rivaz, where 19 types of this varietal are planted, including five clones and 400 vines. He is also one of the founders of the Barony of Dézaley, which aims to further develop this grand cru over time. A committee made up of well-known tasters assesses the vintages after some time has passed (the latest vintage rated is 2004) and awards them stars. The ratings are updated every two years, depending on how the wines change. “As Dézaley wines age, they behave like Tain-l’Hermitage Marsanne; they become something totally unlike a younger chasselas. The taste components change and blend into a new balance,” the patriarch opines. The estate has offered 13 vintages for sale since 1999, and still has between 200 and 2,000 bottles left from each year.

Louis Bovard Estate:
TRADITION AND IMAGINATION

Of all the wines signed Bovard, Dézaley “LA MÉDINETTE” remains the standard-bearer.
Les Frères Dubois: A FAMILY DYNASTY

Les Frères Dubois [the Dubois brothers] are really branches of a much larger family tree. First came grandfather Marcel, then Christian, and finally his two sons Frédéric and Grégoire. The sons are also “coopers,” which is what consulting enologists who do cellar work for estates other than their own are called in Vaud. In this case, the Dubois brothers also craft wines for the Lavaux estates belonging to the City of Lausanne, including the two well-known Dézaley vineyards, Clos des Moines [The Monks’ Vineyard] and Clos des Abbayes [The Abbeys’ Vineyard]. These two names recall the historical connection with Cistercian monks.

Modern enology has also wreaked havoc in Lavaux. In the 1980s, a number of cellars stopped using large oak casks, replacing them with more easily cleaned stainless-steel vats, to avoid introducing any “off” tastes into the chasselas, that most delicate of all varietals. For their Dézaley-Marsens De la Tour, the Dubois brothers have brought aging on fine lees in tuns (large casks) back into favor. In the cellars beneath the manor house called Le Petit Versailles—today enlivened by a lovely wine bar!—at the entrance to the village of Cully, this would be Vase No. 4, with vase here being a French synonym for “cask.” Until 2008, the cask held 3,700 l, or the equivalent of 5,285 “Vaud” bottles of 70 cl each, continued use of which is allowed under Swiss law despite the standardization of European measures (at 75 cl). Having disintegrated into its component staves, the first-generation Vase No. 4 was replaced by a new cask that holds 6,300 l, the equivalent of 9,000 bottles. This wine is not sold before it reaches two years of age.

Concerning the second fermentation (malolactic fermentation, or “malo” for short), which is desirable for chasselas, Christian Dubois notes “without malo, only the varietal is expressed; with malo, you get the terroir.” The estate eagerly—and successfully!—seeks recognition at competitions. The 2009 vintage—named the second best Vaud chasselas, favorite of the 2013 Guide Hachette, gold medal at the Expovina competition in Zurich and at the International Chasselas Competition (Mondial du Chasselas, Aigle) held for the first time in 2012—is doing its part to showcase wines made from this varietal, of which canton of Vaud is the world’s leading producer with 2,320 ha (61% of its vineyards). And at the second event, the 1984 Dézaley-Marsens de la Tour was awarded the “best ranking in all categories of the Chasselas World Championships (with 93,8 points out of 100)”.

www.lesfreresdubois.ch
www.mondial-du-chasselas.com

The 1984 Dézaley-Marsens de la Tour is the wine that achieved the best results at the 2013 CHASSELAS WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS.
At age 48, Blaise Duboux is proud to state that he represents the seventeenth generation of wine-growers from his family in Épesses. The ancestor who gave the family its name was a notable of Lausanne cathedral, Leopardo de Bosco, who emigrated from Turin in 1242 to care for Saint-Saphorin’s vines.

While the three other estates mentioned here are larger, this one comprises only 5 ha. “That’s the most you can do alone. I have only one full-time employee and some temporaries during the pruning and harvest seasons.” An enology engineer (ingénieur-œnologue) who graduated from Switzerland’s only school of enology, Changins, located between Lausanne and Geneva, he owns property in two grands crus: Calamin (0.5 ha) and Dézaley (1.5 ha).

This only child, the father of three teenage daughters, brought fermentation back to the family estate in 1988 and revived the entire operation in 2011. A former employee of Prométerre, a viticultural advisory institution, he has all the answers when it comes to Dézaley’s inherent good qualities. “The word terroir is still the one that describes it the best... the interaction of the soil, the parent rock, the water regimen, slope, and climate. Not to mention that what we call the ‘three suns’—the sun itself, in the sky, and the double reflection from the lake and the terrace walls—create a real atomic reactor!”

Blaise Duboux produces two Dézaley wines. His Haut de Pierre represents a selection from a half-hectare parcel of old vines. “The oldest vine stock is 47 years old, the youngest 26.” In good years and bad, the parcel yields 3,000 bottles. The other, of which 12,000 bottles are made, is called Corniche, from the name of the panoramic drive that overlooks the Dézaley from the village of Épesses to Chexbres. “The Dézaley owes its reputation to the Cistercian monks. They were the ones who chose to clear the steepest slopes!” And it is exactly there, where the land is steepest, where the moraine has slid and the soil is “rubified,” that the vines from which he makes his Haut de Pierre grow.

A purist, Duboux says is is working “toward organic, sustainable viticulture.” Over time, he has refined his fermentation. He tries to get along without industrial yeasts or, at worst, to use a generic yeast that guarantees dry wines. His Dézaley wines, aged in vats on fine lees, never touch oak casks or barrels.

Though not a member of the Barony of Dézaley, Blaise Duboux is the president of Arte Vitis, an association that for ten years has been bringing together thirteen of the best-known estates from canton Vaud and, since spring 2013, from the Lavaux wine-growing community. He was deeply touched by the fact that Robert Parkers’ magazine Wine Advocate recognized his Dézaley Haut de Pierre. “In every generation since the 19th century, a woman from our family has gone to the United States—New York, Los Angeles, or Florida.”

www.blaiseduboux.ch
www.arte-vitis.ch
TASTING Notes

Over several sessions, Pierre Thomas (PT) and Jeffrey S. Kingston (JK) tasted the four producers’ most recent Dézaley wines, and two older vintages.

MÉDINETTE 2011, LOUIS BOVARD ESTATE, CULLY
Robust yellow; nose hints of anise with white flowers, warm stone; open; rather lively attack, unctuous in the middle range; good length, supple; finish yellow fruits and almond (PT). Nose evokes lemon peel tending toward apple and pineapple, vanilla notes in mid-palate; impressive structure; long spicy finish (JK).

MÉDINETTE 2008, LOUIS BOVARD ESTATE, CULLY
Robust yellow; spicy nose (reminiscent of the 2011), notes of candied ginger; penetrating attack with aromas of candied lemon; good full-flavored finish; still young and fresh (PT). Pineapple nose; highly structured and very acidic; really dances in the mouth (JK).

MÉDINETTE 2001, LOUIS BOVARD ESTATE, CULLY
Deep gold; nose redolent of preserves with a touch of mint and dried herbs, discreet hints of mushroom and forest undergrowth; orange peel and lime aromas in the mid-palate phase; powerful; tertiary aromas already in evidence; complex, comes back to the acid side, a spirited wine with a final note of mandarin (PT). Mineral and lemon-peel notes in the nose; a somewhat heavy, distinguished wine with average structure, tasting of a mixture of lime and herbaceous notes; its brilliance and freshness are impressive considering that it is 12 years old (JK).

DÉZALEY-MARSENS DE LA TOUR 2009, VASE NO. 4, LES FRÈRES DUBOIS, CULLY
Yellow with golden highlights; open nose has good intensity with notes of very ripe yellow fruits, peach; full, mellow attack; unctuous with a buttery note; a rich, mature wine, distinguished and complex; persistent finish with honey and mineral notes (PT).

DÉZALEY-MARSENS DE LA TOUR 2004, VASE NO. 4, LES FRÈRES DUBOIS, CULLY
Golden yellow; aromas of passion fruit and ripe mango in the nose are confirmed in the attack; very lively, magnificent volume with a rich mouth feel and persistence; cherry plum note in the finish; a very fine wine made from a late harvest (October 20) (PT).
DR. GEORGE DERBALIAN
Dr. George Derbalian is the Lettres du Brassus wine expert. Dr. Derbalian is the founder of Atherton Wine Imports, located in northern California. Not only has he become one of the United States’ premier importers of fine wines, but he has acquired a well-deserved reputation as one of the leading and most respected wine connoisseurs and expert tasters in the world. Each year, Dr. Derbalian travels the wine circuits of Europe and the United States, meeting with wine producers, owners of the finest domains, chef de chai, and other key figures in the world of wine. Throughout the course of each year, he tastes literally many thousands of current production and vintage wines.

SITUATION

DÉZALEY-MARSENS DE LA TOUR
2000, VASE NO. 4, LES FRÈRES DUBOIS, CULLY
Golden highlights; nose of lemon verbena and candied lemon; nuances of toast and spices in the attack; good volume on the palate; well-balanced, with notes of licorice and a slightly bitter aftertaste; very persistent (PT).

CHEMIN DE FER 2011,
LUC MASSY, ÉPESSES
Robust yellow; buttery, lactic nose with subsequent aromas of ripe mango; begins with caramel attack; powerful and original; full-bodied, generous; finish with yellow fruits and almond (PT). Nose a little closed; perfect balance of sweet apple and honeysuckle; an elegant, subtle wine with a sweet finish (JK).

CHEMIN DE FER 2009,
LUC MASSY, ÉPESSES
Very golden color; ripe sunny nose with hints of a match that has been struck; supple attack, candied fruits; rich, full, unctuous; low acidity; changing notes of acacia honey; candy-like finish similar to calissons from Aix-en-Provence (almond paste and lemon) (PT). An abundance of mineral and honeysuckle notes that burst forth in the nose; rich and round with a touch of overripeness; dried apricot; impressive finish; a focused, solid wine (JK).

CHEMIN DE FER 2000,
LUC MASSY, ÉPESSES
Robust golden color; nose of dried banana, roasted hazelnuts, and dried fruits; full-bodied, unctuous attack; nice freshness; empyreumatic notes with almond milk and candy; a magnificent wine, unctuous, highly consistent and remarkably honest (PT). Spicy and vanilla notes in the nose with melon aromas; marvelously balanced (JK).

HAUT DE PIERRE 2011,
BLAISE DUBOUX, ÉPESSES
Golden yellow; mineral nose with earthy impressions; crisp attack; rich mouth feel, sap (not tree sap!), mineral qualities; white flowers in mid-palate; powerful, almost tannic, holds up well in mid-palate and slightly salty with a little carbon dioxide (CO2) in the finish (PT). Mineral nose with lime flower notes; vanilla attack; round in the middle range with a marvelous dried apricot aroma; interesting contrast between the rather discreet, heavy nose and the open, luxuriant palate; extraordinarily rich and mature; sweet lemony finish (JK).

HAUT DE PIERRE 2010,
BLAISE DUBOUX, ÉPESSES
Golden color; fine full nose with aromas of quince jelly, yellow fruits, sweet spices; full-bodied attack; fresh pear, mango, sweet spices; good complexity; a little CO2; generous long finish (PT). Spicy mineral nose, rich and round in mid-palate, with notes of sweet peach and vanilla; long finish (JK).

HAUT DE PIERRE 2003,
BLAISE DUBOUX, ÉPESSES
Golden color, full creamy nose of panettone with lemon notes; attack reminiscent of gingerbread; long and fresh with candied fruits, a slight note of honey, and aromas of pear tart (PT). This vintage was made during the heat wave in Europe and the wine reflects that: nose of exotic fruits (passion fruit) mixed with bush peach and sweetened apricot; rich, ripe, and concentrated (JK).