Wine Spectator

Winery Intel

A Côte-Rôtie Dream Come True

With a vision for modern elegance, newcomers Graeme and Julie Bott are making some of the Northern Rhône's most exciting Syrah and Viognier



Graeme and Julie Bott are making elegant, modern wines and pushing the Northern Rhône forward stylistically. (Courtesy of Graeme & Julie Bott)

By Kristen Bieler

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Standing in the Lancement *lieu-dit*, a coveted vineyard site at the top of a steep slope in Côte-Rôtie, Graeme Bott is apologizing for the wind. "This may be the windiest day I've ever seen up here," he admits. Fully braced against the relentless gale force, we are barely able to stand, and conversation is nearly impossible, but we can't leave until Bott shows me his vines.

"In many ways, this plot will mark the story of our estate forever—it was the first bit of our dream, the first parcel we were able to own in Côte-Rôtie, and it was like buying a *grand cru* site. But it had no vines."

The Botts were outsiders when they started—Graeme's from New Zealand, and Julie's a local, but from a non-winegrowing family. Acquiring existing vineyards was prohibitively expensive. "Our only choice was to find parcels of land that were unplanted and overgrown with bush," Graeme says. They bought this 0.24 hectare plot in 2017, planted Syrah vines by hand in 2019 and were able to make their first Lancement *lieu-dit* cuvée in 2022. (The just-released 2023 Lancement scored 95 points.)

“We were finally able to taste what this vineyard could deliver. For us, Lancement is one of the purest and most elegant *terroirs* in Côte-Rôtie,” Graeme explains. “It produces wines of finesse rather than sheer force.”



The Botts have quickly amassed prime parcels in Côte-Rôtie, Condrieu and beyond. (Courtesy of Graeme & Julie Bott)

Located on the Côte Blonde—which is in the southern part of the appellation, with granite soils, and known for refined, aromatic expressions of Syrah—Lancement is Bott’s favorite of his single *lieu-dit* cuvées, he confesses. “I love the smoked bacon, the elegance and flow of it.”

It’s also a wine that epitomizes the Bott style. Graeme and his wife, Julie, have quickly made a name for themselves with their outstanding-out-of-the-gate wines, which are modern, pristine and distinctively high-energy. “We are not chasing massive color or extraction. We seek balance and finesse. In many ways, I think this is harder to achieve, as it requires restraint and knowing when to accompany the wine rather than force it.”

Newcomers are rare in Côte-Rôtie, one of the most elite appellations in the Rhône, but Bott arrived with a New World sense of possibility—and impatience. While most domaines quietly acquire parcels over decades, Bott is constantly scouring the region for plots he can acquire now—with or without vines.

The Botts’ first vintage, in 2016, was made with purchased fruit. Since then, they have amassed 12 hectares. Today their range—which includes wines from Côte-Rôtie, Condrieu, St.-Joseph and Seyssuel—is produced from a majority of estate fruit. They have also moved on from their garage, where they first made their wine, into a proper winemaking facility of their own.



The Botts have expanded their holdings of prime *terroir* in the heart of Condrieu, with vineyards overlooking the Rhône river. (Courtesy of Graeme & Julie Bott)

The couple met while working at Stéphane Ogier, a top producer with parcels in many of the top *lieux-dits* across the diverse swath of Côte-Rôtie. After working eight vintages in his native New Zealand, Bott came to the Northern Rhône in 2010 in order to make wine in the birthplace of Syrah. He didn't speak a word of French.

His eight years working with Stéphane Ogier (during which he hopped hemispheres in the offseason to work at Australia's famed Clonakilla estate) were foundational. "I knew what I wanted for my own estate—knew when to pick, how to age." When he went back to New Zealand, he realized he knew the *terroir* of Côte-Rôtie better than his native land.

In 2015, the Botts discovered that the small hillside garden surrounding their just-purchased home in Vérin was situated in the heart of the Condrieu appellation, next to the famous Château-Grillet.

"With empty pockets and no equipment, we started clearing the land and rebuilding the stone walls so we could plant our first vines—we brought this vineyard back to life in the birthplace of Viognier," Graeme recalls.

The wine from that garden vineyard is bottled separately, as a single-site L'Aleau cuvée, with just 934 bottles made per year. It's a study in focused precision—the wine you pour for Viognier haters to show them how finessed, mineral-rich and complex the variety can be when not pushed in an opulent direction.

"When Viognier is picked too ripe, it doesn't express *terroir*," he explains. "We want the brightness, the acid-driven crisp profile." Bott is the first to pick in Condrieu—and interestingly, the last to pick in Côte-Rôtie.



Graeme champions a fresh, mineral-driven style of Viognier that he believes lets Condrieu *terroir* shine. (Courtesy of Graeme & Julie Bott)

Embraced by the “old guard,” as he describes it, Bott feels a debt of gratitude to the generation that helped build the modern reputation of Côte-Rôtie. He feels more of a kinship with them than with many of his winemaking peers. Land prices are quite different in Côte-Rôtie than they were 30 years ago, he points out. Now, bank loans and debt are a requirement. “Since we didn’t inherit our land, we relate to the older producers who built their businesses from scratch—and we’ve become good friends with the Duclaux family, Yves Gangloff, Christophe Bonnefond. They have been a part of our story.”

In 2019, Bonnefond helped the Botts acquire a small parcel in the Semons *lieu-dit*, an extremely steep, terraced vineyard with granite and gneiss soils in the Côte Blonde. (The silky, smoky Semons 2023 received 94 points.)

While some Côte-Rôties can be rustic, with grippy tannins that require years in the bottle to unwind, Bott achieves a silky, finessed style with low, gentle tannin extraction. If you are looking for the (sometimes charming) old-fashioned Côte-Rôtie style featuring some barnyard character and chewy tannins, Bott’s wines are not for you. He’s a purist, meticulous about cleanliness in his cellar. He wants the fruit to shine, so all his barrels are older to impart just the subtlest touch of oak.

Even his wines from the Côte Brune—the appellation’s other famous slope, which features iron-rich soils that yield wines of power and weight—show a unique delicacy. In 2022, Bott debuted two new Côte Brune cuvees: Côte-Bodin and Fongent. Côte-Bodin lies just south of the famous La Landonne plot, where legends including E. Guigal, R. Rostaing and Jean-Michel Gerin craft some of the region’s most famous, long-lived reds. It offers gorgeous fruit and purity from vines that are at least 50 years old. For now, the grapes are entirely destemmed, and the wine delivers a lot of complex, spicy depth. (The 2023 scored 94 points.)

The Fongent cuvée is the most powerful wine Graeme makes; it comes from iron- and schist-rich soils, which give muscular, brooding wines. It’s also the only wine for which he uses 100% whole-cluster fermentation.

“I like to match power with power,” he explains. “The depth we get from the stems—the chewy, salty, earthy character—really works with this site and drives longevity.” (It’s also my favorite cuvée; the 2023 scored 96 points.)



Older barrels and a clean cellar help the Botts achieve their pure, energetic style. (Courtesy of Graeme & Julie Bott)

Of course, it's always most honest to judge a producer by his flagship, blended wine, and Bott's entry-level Côte-Rôtie seems to shine brighter every year—the 2023 Côte-Rôtie received 94 points. "Everyone praised the 2022s, but I'm a bigger fan of 2023—we haven't seen that combination of balance and density in a long time." And the wines are ready to drink now.

As for the much cooler 2024s, we tasted them in barrel together in Bott's cellar. A less ripe vintage, the wines are perfumed and racy with taut acidity and ripe red fruit character. He is pleased with them. "Cooler years like 2024 prove that we don't need a heat wave to make good wine in Côte-Rôtie."

Bott will vinify his domaine's 10th vintage next fall, yet he retains the air of someone still pinching himself at where he's ended up. Back at his home vineyard—the "garden" surrounding his house on a slope in Condrieu overlooking the majestic Rhône river—he points out a new block in the front that he was able to acquire in 2025. The parcel gives him a full 1.7 hectares in one contiguous block. The place is under full renovation and will soon be open for tastings and dinners. "It will allow us to really highlight Condrieu as well as the grassroots beginnings of our domaine."

He will likely always feel like a newcomer here, surrounded by families whose history stretches back generations, but the quality of his wines speaks to the expertise he has honed by hand-working his soils and paying very close attention—and endlessly fine-tuning. "I've been making wine in Côte-Rôtie for 16 years and have a very defined idea about what I can do with each spot."