



Stak Aivaliotis is a London photographer of Greek-Cypriot parentage with a lifelong passion for, not just wine, but great wine. He made a lot of money shooting adverts through the 1970s and 1980s and spent most of it on the best that Bordeaux, Burgundy and the rest had to offer. Slowly, the conviction grew that he, too, had to make wine — not just good wine, as I say, but great wine, at the level of Château Le Pin, or higher. He considered various wine-producing areas, and in 1988 bought Monte Bernardi.

It took a few years to get going, but by 1992, with Giorgio Marone, as consultant oenologist, Stak from his 6 hectares of vineyard, mostly planted in the late 1960s, was making 'the best wine in Chianti' (whatever his other vices or virtues may be, Stak does not suffer from pangs of modesty). The range grew and developed until — to cut a fairly short story even shorter — he had worked out his wines and his methods.

Wines: there are three — Paris (this being Stak's middle name, given to the Chianti Classico), 100% Sangiovese; Sa'etta, again 100% Sangiovese, a selection from his best vineyard, Vigna Grande; and Tzingana, a Bordeaux-style blend consisting of Merlot, the two Cabernets and Petit Verdot — these having been grafted onto existing unwanted varieties like Canaiolo, Trebbiano and Malvasia.

Methods: Extreme selection in the vineyard, pressing by old-fashioned (but new) basket press, 4 days pre-fermentation maceration, fermentation in stainless steel, malo-lactic completed in barrique, then 10-12 months — no more, he feels this is the exact right period — in small French oak, some new, some used; finally, bottling without filtration. No buying in of grapes or wine, no additives (apart from SO₂), no cultured yeasts, in short, pure wine. This is one of his hobbyhorses: 'Maybe the world wants homogenised wines', he laughs, 'but I want the real thing. And my wines, today, are not just pure, not just real, they are among the best in the world. The Bordelaise aren't doing it anymore', he claims, 'too many tricks. Maybe there are still a few Burgundians who can give me a run for my money; that's it.'

The wine world has responded positively, both press-wise and sales-wise, and Stak today is able to sell all his very high-priced production without trouble to Brits, Americans, Japanese, and, increasingly, Italians.