



Of all the figures lauded for their influence on the arts, there is no one quite like Brian Eno. *Noble Rot* met up with him at his London studio to drink and discuss some of the world's most exciting wines, and try not to ask “got any ambient mate?”

Words by Dan Keeling
Photographs by Tom Cockram

Ode to Perfume

The finale of Patrick Susskind's novel *Perfume* is a fantastically far-fetched affair. Set in 18th century France, aroma-obsessed Grenouille is sentenced to death for murdering twenty-five virgins in order to blend their scents into the ultimate perfume. Hours after arrest, he manages to unleash his intoxicating concoction on the town's population, arousing widespread carnal passion and setting off a huge public orgy in the local square. The lustful townsfolk decide to pardon Grenouille and execute an innocent man instead, leaving him to make good his escape. Preposterous though the prospect might be, having experienced Brian Eno's unreleased perfume first-hand (thankfully no virgin murders necessary), *Noble Rot* can attest to the possibility of a fragrance wielding unexpected and extraordinary powers.

"My interest in smells comes from when I was young and fascinated by one smell in particular: motorcycle oil," Eno tells *Noble Rot* as he searches through a collection of bottles of fragrance, much like an advanced version of the wine aroma box set *Le Nez Du Vin*. "My dad owned motorbikes, and we used to go to Snetterton in Norfolk to see the racing. The smell of the high-octane fuel just haunted me as I grew older, so I got a little bottle of it, and after that I started collecting other smells. I now have about a thousand or so. When I was forty, I smelled something that really intrigued me called methyl octane carbonate, which is used in an aftershave called *Fahrenheit*. Methyl octane carbonate

was synthesized to try and create the smell of violets, because you can't distil their smell like you can from other flowers. But actually it smells halfway between violets and... racing motorbikes."

"Ah, here's the bottle," Eno exclaims, pleased to have finally found the fragrance he made with his friend Maurice Roucel at Quest Laboratories. "I wanted to make a perfume only for use during sex, and this is what I came up with." He offers the vial around the table to lots of "oohs" and "aahs". "I gave some to a friend, and ever since that day she has been completely addicted to it. She thinks this is how she got her husband to marry her." Did she keep dabbing it behind her ears? "You don't put it there, you put it on your..." Eno laughs. "It's not something you would ever wear during the daytime in the street; it has an effect on the person who is wearing it. Somehow, it's like an envelope of sensuality." Does he feel he may have missed out on a lucrative career as a perfumier? "I don't think I would be very good at it," he grins, "I've only ever had two ideas: sex and petrol."

Tucked away in the corner of a mews just behind one of Notting Hill's busiest tourist streets, the white walls of Brian Eno's studio are covered in a multitude of boxes, books, tools, CDs and musical instruments that lend it the air of a well-loved art school. *Noble Rot* has arranged to meet Eno here for a tasting of wines from some of the most exciting domaines in France (and one in Germany), and their counterparts in California, who make wine from the same grape varieties.

"My interest in smells comes from when I was young and fascinated by one smell in particular: motorcycle oil"
Brian Eno

Over the past few years *Noble Rot* has been fascinated to witness the growth of estates in California that produce a more elegant style of wine than the 'blockbusters' that became critics' favourites in the 1990s, whilst conversely some of the more austere, 'old world' estates have begun to make their wines more forward and accessible. Although not set up as an 'old world' vs 'new world' competition, nor tasted blind, we are looking forward to garnering the opinions of one of the world's most open-minded creative thinkers on a stellar selection of producers close to *Noble Rot's* heart.

First gaining notoriety in the early 1970s as the synthesizer player in the glam rock band Roxy Music, Brian Eno is probably best known as one of the world's most successful music producers, helping to shape albums as diverse as David Bowie's *Heroes*, U2's *The Joshua Tree*, Talking Heads' *Remain In Light* and Coldplay's *Viva La Vida* among many more. As an artist in his own right he was among the first to use sampling (and in turn inspire hip hop and house/techno production) on the classic *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts* (with Talking Heads' David Byrne), and released a series of landmark albums starting with 1975's *Discreet Music*, which introduced a musical genre called 'ambient'. Elsewhere, he was responsible for the music that played every time Microsoft's Windows 95 was launched on a PC, and is a pioneer of what he describes as 'generative' or 'chance' music, most recently embodied in his *Bloom* and *Scape* apps. With a Wikipedia page entry that makes



A Brief History Of Time seem like a light read, Eno's highly diverse CV is a reflection of a charming and super bright intellectual who has the talent and curiosity to skip from project to project, seemingly unencumbered by conventional rules, mediums or formats. Joining us for the tasting were *The Wine Advocate's* Neal Martin and Coldplay's Will Champion (both present for appreciation purposes only).

Brian Eno, Notting Hill, December 2014

"I was convinced there was a different type of drunkenness from each kind of wine. That was the reason I got into Burgundy, because I noticed Aloxe-Corton in particular made people laugh. Bordeaux is a bad drunk for me" Brian Eno



The tasting with Brian Eno.

Noble Rot: Hi Brian. Before we start, what kind of wines do you normally like?
 Brian Eno: My best wine experiences have been with French wines, so I think the best French wines are the best wines. But there are also so many bad French wines – there’s such a range. A long time ago I wrote an essay called *Wines classified according to their effects*, because I was convinced there was a different type of drunkenness from each kind of wine. That was the reason I got into Burgundy, because I noticed Aloxe-Corton in particular made people laugh. Bordeaux is a bad drunk for me. I think Bordeaux wines are largely responsible for the decline in French philosophy in the last 50 years. I think the problem is that Bordeaux makes you think that everything you are saying is really quite important.

Scores

Eno: The way I like to give scores is by starting in the middle of the range; whatever the first thing is I rate I give it 50% of the possible full score, and then rate everything else in relation to it.

Flight 1 2011 Sandhi / Rita’s Crown Chardonnay (Santa Barbara, USA) 2007 JF Coche-Dury / Meursault (Burgundy, France)

Sandhi Wines, a project in Santa Barbara that specialises in Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, was set up by genius winemaker Sashi Moorman, sommelier Rajat Parr and ex-Screaming Eagle owner Charles Banks.

They are one of the leading estates involved in the ‘In Pursuit Of Balance’ movement towards a more restrained style of Californian winemaking.

Coche-Dury is revered as one of France’s most legendary vigneron, his famous style of white Burgundy – redolent with aromas of minerals and gun smoke – inspiring legions of loyal fans. However, perfection doesn’t come cheap, and even his village-level Meursault (featured here) now retails for upwards of £200.

Eno: (Sniffs Coche-Dury Meursault) Now, I have to ask you a question. To me this smells like it’s a bit off – in a restaurant I would send it back. It’s a bit foxy and smells of old fireworks.

Coche wines are well known for that type of old firework/gun smoke aroma profile, which isn’t to everybody’s taste. Caused by an effect called ‘reduction’, which, when present to a great extent can be considered a winemaking fault, a few producers in Burgundy have harnessed the process in order to add complexity and character to their wines. How does it compare to the Sandhi?

The Sandhi I find a bit thin and sour. Sorry, these aren’t very complimentary comments... (laughs) The Sandhi seems a bit insubstantial to me, and the Coche-Dury I can tell is a very good wine which has gone slightly off. That would be my opinion of them. If you tell me that character is a feature then I have to think differently, but it’s not a feature that I appreciate.

Which one would you prefer to drink?
 I’d go for the Sandhi, as the other one does strike me as a mistake. It’s like it has got a greenish-grey cloud hanging over the flavours.

In musical terms, is it like an off-note?
 Or a resonance when something gets recorded. Bad microphone placement!

Flight 2 2011 Tatomer / Kick-On Ranch Riesling (Santa Barbara, USA) 2010 Keller / Hubacker Riesling Grosses Gewächs (Rheinhessen, Germany)

Graham Tatomer worked at the renowned Emmerich Knoll estate in Austria’s Wachau region before returning to California to make his own wines. Kick-On Ranch Riesling, from a coastal vineyard near Santa Barbara, uses many of the same winemaking methods and techniques as are typical in Austria and Germany.

Klaus Peter Keller’s dry Grosses Gewächs Rieslings have been described as “the German Montrachets” by critic Jancis Robinson, and on the basis of past mind-blowing bottles from the Kirchspiel and Absterde vineyards, we wholeheartedly agree. Complex, pure and refined, the searing acidity and energy of Keller’s top wines can have an almost narcotic, uplifting effect.

Eno: (Smells Tatomer) That’s unusual. It’s lovely. Let me show you something... (leaves tasting table and returns a minute later with a small vial of fragrance, which he opens and passes around). What this wine

immediately reminds me of is cinnamon bark. When cinnamon bark is distilled it’s different from the taste of cinnamon in food – it smells a little bit like the Plasticine clay that children play with. There’s such a strong resemblance to some of the aromas in this Riesling.

(Everyone agrees. Damn. Not only is this guy one of the smartest thinkers in art and music, he’s also got the nose of a bloodhound.)

Do you prefer one of the wines?
 For me, the Tatomer is the most interesting one. It’s intense, but saying that, the fact that it resembles Plasticine might overwhelm me after a while. (laughs) I grew fonder of the Keller as time went on, although I thought it was a little bit characterless, to be honest.

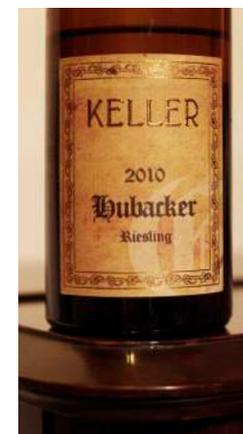
Could that have been because it was drunk alongside the more rambunctious Tatomer?
 Yes, probably.

What whites do you like to drink at home?
 I like Sauvignon Blancs from New Zealand and South Africa. I hardly ever buy the same wine twice as I like to try different things. As you can tell from my reaction to the Tatomer, I like a surprise. I like it when I’ve never heard of something before, or tasted something before. I am a thrill-seeker really. But it does mean that I end up with quite a few disappointing bottles.

Flight 3 Scholium Project / Sylphs Chardonnay 2011 (Napa, California)



Eno: Sandhi / Rita’s Crown ★★★ JF Coche Dury / Meursault ★★★	Rotter’s: Sandhi / Rita’s Crown ★★★★ JF Coche Dury / Meursault ★★★★
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Eno: 2011 Tatomer / Kick On Ranch ★★★★ 2010 Keller / Hubacker ★★★★	Rotter’s: 2011 Tatomer / Kick On Ranch ★★★★ 2010 Keller / Hubacker ★★★★
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JP Robinot / L'opéra des vins/ Lumière de Silex 2004 (Loire, France)

A former professor of ancient Greek philosophy at St John's College in Maryland, USA, Abe Schoener caught the wine bug and went to work for John Kongsgaard in the Napa Valley before setting up on his own. Scholium Project now produces some of the most unique wines in America, including one of our favourites of last year, 'The Prince In His Caves'.

Jean-Pierre Robinot used to run a wine bar in Paris before selling up in 2001 to return to his native Loire Valley to make wine. To say some of his methods are un-orthodox would be an understatement, but there is no doubting the deliciousness and intellectual engagement of his best wines. Lumière de Silex 2004 is 100% Chenin Blanc, and quite possibly the most leftfield wine we have ever experienced.

Eno: (Sniffs Scholium Project) Hmm, I am trying to place that smell. There's a woman's perfume that smells like that.

Abe Schoener uses no sulphur or artificial yeasts, but rails against being called a 'natural' or 'low-interventionist' producer. He doesn't want to artificially 'make' a wine but thinks that every time a winemaker decides not to do something, that in itself is also an intervention. He claims that low-intervention wine making is just as high-intervention as any other type of winemaking. That makes a lot of sense to me.



(Tastes Robinot) I think this one tastes a bit like Port – and I like it. It's completely mad, and confirms my feeling that I am a thrill-seeker. It's like Christmas wine with its aromas of fruitcake.

Maybe there are some parallels between how Robinot makes his wine (farming and vinification with little intervention) and some of your methods of setting a musical system in motion and seeing how it develops?

I am completely in sympathy with this wine. I like the idea of somebody producing a wine like this.

Robinot is a real rebel to modern industrial winemaking and has been one of the major figures behind the natural wine movement in France since the 1980s.

It's like explorers – people who go to the North Pole. Nobody actually wants to live at the North Pole, but it makes a difference to how you feel about where you do live.

Now that you know the North Pole exists it gives you a much bigger range. I think I wouldn't want to drink this all night, but if you are a thrill-seeker, a very nice idea for an evening would be to have three or four different wines like this that make you go, 'wow, that's really something!'

**Flight 4 Hirsch Vineyards / West Ridge Pinot Noir 2011 (Sonoma Coast, USA).
Domaine Dujac / Echezeaux 2007 (Burgundy, France)**

David Hirsch bought land on the 'extreme' Sonoma Coast at a time when people thought

Eno:
Scholium Project/ Sylphs 2011
★★★★
JP Robinot / L'opéra des vins 2004
★★★★

Rotter's:
Scholium Project/ Sylphs 2011
★★★★
JP Robinot / L'opéra des vins 2004
★★★★



One of Brian's aroma box sets

he was crazy to try to grow grapes in such an inhospitable place. Hirsch's brave vision for his part of Sonoma has inspired other highly regarded estates (like Kistler and Littorai) to make Pinot Noir there. West Ridge is one of their most sought after cuvées.

Jacques Seysses's father Louis was a successful biscuit manufacturer and keen gourmand, but Jacques dreamt of making great wine rather than join the family business. In 1967, he bought Domaine Marcel Graillet in Morey-St-Denis and turned it into Domaine Dujac. Now run by

the next generation of Seysses – Jeremy, Diana and Alec – Dujac wines are among Burgundy's very best.

Eno: It's funny you should mention a son staying away from the family business, because whilst I was swimming this morning I was writing a song called *Your Destiny is Dentistry* in my head. It was a song sung by a dentist to his son in an attempt to persuade him that dentistry was a good profession, and that teeth were the gateway to the soul. I wrote down the



Eno:
Hirsch Vineyards/ West Ridge 2011
★★★★
Domaine Dujac/ Echezeaux 2007
★★★★

Rotter's:
Hirsch Vineyards/ West Ridge 2011
★★★★
Domaine Dujac/ Echezeaux 2007
★★★★

first lines in my notebook: ‘Son, your destiny is dentistry, that’s what I think you ought to do. I know you feel it lacks intensity...’

Sounds like a hit. What do you think of the wines? West Ridge is one of Hirsch’s top two vineyards, and Echezeaux is a Grand Cru – one of many riches in the Domaine Dujac portfolio.

I really like both of these wines. First of all I preferred the Hirsch, but now I like the Dujac much more. I really like them aromatically. I’d give them an equally high score – my two highest scores of the day.

Flight 5 Corison / Kronos Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 2006 (Napa Valley, USA) Pontet-Canet / Pauliac 2006 (Bordeaux, France)

Cathy Corison was an oenology student in California at the time of the famous ‘Judgement Of Paris’ tasting in 1976, and counted winner Warren Winiarski from Stag’s Leap Winery as a mentor and friend. She set up Corison Winery in the late 1980s, but her restrained wines weren’t to the taste of the powerful American critic Robert Parker, and she gradually fell off the radar. Now many drinkers have rediscovered her classy, elegant style.

Pontet-Canet is a Bordeaux fifth growth whose estate adjoins the first growth, Mouton Rothschild. Under the leadership of Alfred Tesseron, for the last 20 years Pontet-Canet has steadily improved its wines (average blend is 65%

Cabernet Sauvignon, 28% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc, 2% Petit Verdot), and is now rightly regarded as being amongst the very top estates in the region.

Eno: To be honest, I think I am losing the ability to discriminate. I like both of these, but if you switched them I probably wouldn’t notice.

Which would you prefer to drink?

I like them both. I would say that the Pontet-Canet is a bit more tarry, and has a darker profile than the Corison. It has an element that is like the smell of road tar – it’s a lovely smell actually. But these wines don’t seem very different.

What do you think of giving numerical scores to wines, art or music for purposes of review?

It’s so contextual. Even as we are sitting here today I am thinking that we are a little drunker now than we were an hour ago – that makes a difference to how benevolent your feelings are about the wines. So certainly it would be impossible for me to have any real objectivity about it. However, I still think I can say I don’t like this one as much as that one, but I couldn’t make any absolute judgements.

Has anything you have created received a terrible score that particularly hurt, or does that not bother you?

Yes, the score was 1 out of 10. I have had quite a few of those (laughs). It’s only the bad reviews that matter. They hurt and you



remember them more because in a way they are true – they hurt precisely because they locate your insecurities. When David Byrne and I released *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts*, which is now regarded as a sort of classic, it was poorly reviewed by some of the critics because they saw it as a kind of musical colonialism. They thought that we were stealing ideas; what is now called sampling was then called theft. There was a horrible review of it in the *Village Voice* in New York about how we were musical imperialists. Years later, in 2006, the album was re-

released and we were interviewed by a journalist from the *Village Voice*. He said “So you two have worked together for a long time, and this record is quite a landmark,” and I said “Yes, it’s a landmark now, but you should have seen what this cunt wrote in the *Village Voice* when it first came out,” and I started laying into the original review. David was grinning a bit and the journalist was looking quite uncomfortable. After the interview was finished David turned to me and said ‘That was the same guy that wrote it’.



Eno:
Corison / Kronos Vineyard 2006
★★★★★
Pontet-Canet/ Pauliac 2006
★★★★★

Rotter’s:
Corison / Kronos Vineyard 2006
★★★★★
Pontet-Canet/ Pauliac 2006
★★★★★

Marks & Spencer’s spring collection was a roaring success. Left to right Neal Martin, Mark Andrew, Dan Keeling, Brian Eno and Will Champion