

Eco hero The biodynamic winemaker

email ecohero@telegraph.co.uk

Robert Eden, 46, a British biodynamic winemaker, has just built the world's first hemp cellar in the Languedoc region of the south of France, where he lives with his wife and four children. (Biodynamic viticulture, based on the beliefs of the philosopher Rudolf Steiner, treats vineyards as self-nourishing systems free from artificial interference.) The 1,000-square-yard cellar will house his award-winning Château Maris wine (mariswine.com). Eden, the nephew of the former prime minister Anthony Eden, is an executive director of the Jane Goodall Institute, an international conservation organisation.

Interview and photograph by Kate Eshelby

I left school at 17 and spent a year in Australia, pruning vines, where my interest in wine and vineyards began. I worked in vineyards in Italy and Spain before setting up my own label, Château Maris, in 1996.

When we bought our vineyards in Languedoc, the initial yields were low. The soil was dead, because of the previous farmer's overuse of chemicals, so we looked at ways of rejuvenating it with organic compost. We added biodynamic preparations to one pile of compost and left another alone. After a while the biodynamic one had far more living organisms in it. The vines are now healthier and grow longer – and the grapes are better.

The cellar was built using hemp straw, lime and wood – with zero carbon emission. Growing hemp has many benefits: it fights soil erosion, needs no pesticides or fertilisers and little water, and it consumes CO₂, offsetting the CO₂ produced during the transportation of materials and the baking of the limestone. The wood is from certified managed forests, and also stores carbon. It is a 'vegetable' building and fully recyclable.

No heaters or air conditioners are needed so the building functions without consuming energy. Hemp bricks are 'alive' and able to breathe. They maintain temperature and humidity on their own. Solar panels (for electricity) will ensure that the cellar

I am very excited to see how the wine will evolve once it has lived in a living, breathing cellar

produces more energy than it expends. The cellar is sited on a strong energy line (I asked dowsers to investigate it). The lay of the land also means that with its grass roof it can hardly be seen.

This cellar may have a phenomenal effect on the taste of the wine. I am very excited to see how it evolves once it has lived in a living, breathing cellar.

The main reason for constructing an environmentally-friendly building is that, to a farmer, climate change is a big enemy. Three of my wine labels donate one euro from each bottle sold to the Jane Goodall Institute, Rainforest Foundation or International Polar Foundation respectively, all of which work towards stabilising climate change.

Next week: the electric-scooter pioneer



As a consumer you have a choice of what food and drink to buy. Choose wisely. Food always tastes better from your local market or responsible companies such as Abel & Cole (abelandcole.co.uk). **Learn more about biodynamic wine** by reading Monty Waldin's book *Biodynamic Wines* (Mitchell Beazley) – he is a leading authority on the subject. Vintage Roots (vintageroots.co.uk) is an excellent organic wine specialist, and has a good selection of biodynamic and vegan wines. **Build with sense**, and insulate your house efficiently. **Investigate green building methods** – hemp is a great building material. **Take an interest in the world** around you; start by visiting the website treehugger.com.

MY TIPS

ILLUSTRATION BY LUY VIERAS