

Oratoire St-Martin

Profile

Brothers Frédéric and François Alary are the tenth generation of winemakers to tend this estate in the Côtes-du-Rhône over the last 300 years (the family history goes back to 1692). They succeeded their father in 1984, and cultivate 27HA of some of the best plots in Cairanne.

Cairanne is a village north of Gigondas blessed with exceptional terroir and a group of tremendously talented and hard-working winemakers. The Alarys' vineyards are located on steep hills of two main lieux-dits, les Douyes and St-Martin.

The estate takes its name from the small chapel (oratoire) that stands of the aforementioned plot. The soil is very rocky, with a high proportion of limestone and two types of clay, yellow on the surface and blue deeper down. Les Douyes' exposure is east, north-east and well-suited to growing white grapes and Syrah, all early maturing varieties. St-Martin is warmer, facing south, south-west and that's where Grenache and Mourvèdre grow. Most of the vines are over 40 years old and some are reaching their 100s.

The estate produces mainly red wines, from the varieties 60% Grenache, 30% Mourvèdre, and 10% Syrah. The proportion of Mourvèdre is unusually high for the region, but this very late ripening grape is key to balancing the high alcohol often reached by Grenache, and brings aromatics and structure to the wines. 18% of the wines made are white, and the varieties are 50% Marsanne, 30% Roussanne, 15% Clairette and 5% Viognier. A little bit of Rosé is made every year from saignées of the red grapes.

Vineyard work for many years was organic, although the Alary brothers might have preferred the term traditional, since they continued to plow as their father did and use no pesticides, herbicides or chemical fertilizers. Over the last decade they have converted the estate to biodynamic practices, and are now certified. They plow every other row to deepen the root system, and the second row is sown with grass that competes with the vines and reduces their vegetation.

They prune short and, with old vines and green harvests if necessary, get low yields. The harvest is picked by hand with strict sorting in the vines and on a sorting table at the winery. The grapes are destemmed, crushed and macerated with pigeages for the Cairannes and pumping over for the Côtes-du-Rhône.