

Franck Peillot

Profile

The Bugey is small viticultural area whose fame doesn't extend much farther than the city of Lyons, where its sparkling Cerdon and Montagnieu have long been staples in bistros.

Located in the eastern part of the Ain department, which is better known for its *poulet de Bresse* (the only French poultry with its own AOC) and its freshwater fish, the Bugey is a series of low altitude hills forming the most southern tip of the Jura range. In distance, it is closer to Savoie than to viticultural Jura, so, if mentioned at all, it is often considered a part of Savoie.

Winemakers in the Bugey beg to differ. They feel that their region has a soil and a climate all its own, which produce wines found nowhere else in France (Cerdon being the less obscure example of Bugey's originality).

Montagnieu is a village south of Cerdon, with *premières côtes* overlooking the Rhône valley, and most of its production is a white sparkling wine made from Chardonnay, Roussette de Savoie, Gamay and Jacquère. The grape Roussette is called Altesse locally, and it survives in the Bugey in a few patches of old vines, for it is not as hardy, reliable and productive as others. Only two young winemakers in Montagnieu, Franck Peillot and Benoît Dumont, produce still wines exclusively from this grape. By law, the wine, Roussette du Bugey, can contain any white varietal, in any proportion. That's why Peillot's is labelled 100% Altesse.

Peillot, who took over his family estate five years ago, carries on the work of 4 generations before him. Although he makes a sparkling Montagnieu from Chardonnay, Altesse, and Mondeuse, he vinifies all of his Altesse old vines as a still wine. With low yields and high ripeness, he is set to revive the wine that Jules Chauvet (a Beaujolais négociant, eminent taster and writer who has inspired a whole school of "natural winemaking", notably in Morgon) put on a par with Château Chalon, Château Grillet and Yquem. Exaggeration aside, the varietal is thought to be a cousin of the Hungarian Furmint of Tokay fame, and, even when vinified dry, it retains a fair amount of residual sugar. Peillot is also a believer in the quality of his Mondeuse grapes, and is the lone vigneron in the village who obtained the appellation Montagnieu Mondeuse with his red wine in the 1997 vintage.