

Renardat-Fâche

Profile

The Bugey, halfway between Lyons and Geneva, is one of the tiniest and most obscure wine areas in France. Although the altitude is modest, the terrain is very mountainous, the roads are steep and winding as in the Alps, and the villages are built for cold winters - the houses made of gray/white limestones all bunched together on narrow streets.

The vineyards are hard to detect, little patches here and there on steep slopes looking southeast or southwest, lost in the midst of fields with grazing cows, and dense forests. The total Bugey acreage in vineyards is 170 hectares. The varietals are many, borrowed from all the surrounding areas: Gamay, Poulsard (a grape from Northern Jura), Roussette, Mondeuse (both from Savoie) and Chardonnay. Many still wines are produced, but the region's star wine is the Cerdon Méthode Ancestrale, a semi-dry, pink bubbly made by spontaneous, but incomplete, fermentation.

Alain Renardat is a respected vigneron in Cerdon, and he has been a long-time supplier of Alain Chapel's restaurant, in the Dombes. The Dombes, which, like the Bugey, is in the Ain department, is an area of ponds and marshes, known for its fish and small birds. Alain Chapel, who died several years ago, was a chef beloved among chefs, and famous for his love of wine and winemakers. A winemaker and his wines selected by Chapel are guaranteed to have great personality. (The restaurant still exists, run by his widow, and the winemakers he brought together have become friends and still meet about once a year.)

Alain and his son Elie make their Cerdon from Gamay and Poulsard, and follow the technique called "ancestral method" (in wider use is Méthode Champenoise, or else plain carbonation, the preferred method used for supermarket wines). The grapes are picked by hand, pressed and fermented in cold vats until the alcohol reaches about 6 degrees. After a light filtration that leaves most of the active yeast in the unfinished wine, it is bottled and continues its fermentation in the bottle, reaching about 7.5 or 8 degrees of alcohol and retaining a fair quantity of its original sugar. It is more vinous (with grapey primary aromas) than most Champagne, since there is neither dosage nor addition of yeast before the second fermentation.

Cerdon is to be consumed throughout the year following the vintage. It is fragile and requires excellent cellaring and transporting conditions. Renardat's is delicate, berry-scented, refreshing, and makes a delicious aperitif or dessert wine (even chocolate goes well with it).