

Domaine Marcel Richaud

Profile

Marcel Richaud is largely responsible for putting Cairanne, one of the best terroirs in the vast Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages designation, on the map.

Richaud comes from a vine growing family who'd historically sold grapes to the local cave cooperative, a time when being a cooperateur was very prosperous. So it came as a shock when 17 year old Marcel told his father he wanted to become a vigneron indépendant. This was incomprehensible and felt very risky; in his father's eyes there was nothing to gain other than more work and less pay. Undeterred, Marcel started with 14 hectares of his aunt's vines, producing his first vintage at 19 years old in a dilapidated cellar with no roof. He quickly made a name for himself in the nascent Parisian natural wine scene of the early 90's and eventually began incorporating his father's cooperative vines into his eponymous production.

Today, Marcel is retired and the estate is run by his children Thomas, Claire and Edith. The estate has grown to a sizeable 80 hectares over the years, a combination of Marcel progressively recouping family vineyards from the cooperative and purchasing land; about 40 hectares come from the family and the other 40 have been purchased or planted since the 1980's.

There are less Grenache vines than most estates in the area, just 25% of the varieties grown and the same amount of Syrah and Mourvèdre. The remainder of the estate is 10% Cinsault and 15% various local varieties. This mix is one of the reasons why Richaud's wines, despite being high in alcohol, have such great balance and finesse. Mourvèdre especially plays an important role in toning down the alcohol degree that Grenache easily reaches in a warm year: it requires more sun and later picking, and in Cairanne it is at the northern edge of its growing region. As is often the case, a variety gives its best and most nuanced in such "border" territory: witness red Burgundies and red Touraines from Cabernet Franc.

The focus is on harvesting a healthy and ripe crop, with the wines made in large cement vats, each variety vinified apart until a blend is done about eight months later. In 2000, a cellar was built of yellow sandstone blocks (from the Pont du Gard quarry), permitting for casks and barriques to be incorporated into the winemaking. Vinifications occur with native yeasts and without any additions of SO₂. The wines are never fined or filtered, and only a small amount of sulfur is added at bottling. For some cuvées, the Richaud offer a un-sulfured bottling to be shipped once a year in the winter. As of the 2016 vintage, we have opted to work with this bottling on the Cairanne.

The first cuvée is a simple Vin de France produced from the estate's youngest vines.

Next is Terre d'Aigles, from younger Grenache and Carignan vines growing on alluvial soil along the river Aigues. The terroir here makes for the fruitiest of the bunch.

Terre de Galets comes from a mix of plots and vines of Syrah and Grenache 10 to 40 years of age growing on red clay and round stones. It is spicy, ripe and peppery, with more structure.

The village of Cairanne is situated atop a range of low hills with perfect exposure, looking east over the plain between the Aigues and Ouvèze rivers, the elevation ensures slightly cooler temperatures

than on the Plan de Dieu where the summer heat is usually extreme. The Cairanne cuvée aims to express the village's terroir, and is made from Grenache, Syrah and Mourvèdre from poor, stony clay-limestone mid-slope plots. It is rich, very peppery, with complex fruit and spices, licorice and cherries.

Finally, L'Ebrescade is the estate's top wine, a powerful expression of the area's oldest vines on clay and white galets roulées very similar to Châteauneuf-du-Pape. This wine is vinified entirely in old casks.