

Clos Roche Blanche

Profile

2014 was the last vintage of Clos Roche Blanche. Catherine is retired. Didier has a bunch of projects you may get to try one day. We've decided to leave their profile up because of what they mean to us. Also, the interview is pretty fucking good.

Touraine, a Loire Valley appellation, designates a large viticultural area around the city of Tours. The vineyards of Clos Roche Blanche were planted on the Touraine hills bordering the Cher river by the Roussel family at the end of the 19th century and have remained in the family since. Catherine Roussel took over this 28-hectare estate (which has progressively and intentionally been downsized to 9 hectares) in 1975 from her father, and was later joined by Didier Barrouillet, who tends the vineyards and makes the wine. Both are enthusiastic proponents of non-interventionist winemaking.

Their soil is poor, mainly clay with flint over a limestone subsoil. The varietals grown are Cabernet (Sauvignon and Franc), Gamay, Côt (or Auxerrois, the grape of Cahors) and Sauvignon Blanc. Roussel and Barrouillet keep yields low by maintaining old vines, using organic fertilizers in moderation and growing grass between and plowing under the rows.

They converted the vineyards to organic farming and, with the 1995 vintage, received the official "organic agriculture" accreditation. The vines are treated with copper and sulfur solutions, and plant *decoctions* (a mixture of nettles and other herbs) used in biodynamic viticulture.

The grapes are hand-harvested and the Sauvignon Blanc is macerated for 48 hours. The must is handled by gravity at all stages. The wine then ages on its lees, is bottled by gravity by hand without filtration to avoid mechanical manipulation that would unsettle it. Instead of using sulfur at bottling, the bottles are blanketed with CO₂. Their Sauvignon Blanc, of incredible purity and fruit, is available at amazingly low prices. All the red wines have true varietal character, and the depth associated with low yields and optimum ripeness.

Neither Catherine or Didier has studied oenology or viticulture. They both learned their trade in the vineyards and the cellar, searching for methods and techniques to make wines of exceptional character in an appellation of modest reputation.