

Emmanuel Houillon/Maison Pierre Overnoy

Profile

Viticultural Jura is one of the smallest of all wine regions in France. Over 80 kilometers stretching North to South, on a ridge never more than 5 kilometers wide, the Jura has 1850 hectares under vines. This is down from 20,000HA pre-phylloxera, when about 40 varieties were widely used. This has been reduced to 5 since the creation of the AOCs, with the local grapes Trousseau and Poulsard for red wines and Savagnin for white, and the Burgundian grapes Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Chardonnay dominates the plantations, although there are many types of plants and clones. The most interesting is called Melon à Queue Rouge, a type developed locally which has reddish stems.

Pierre Overnoy's father ran a 15HA farm of mixed agriculture in Pupillin, a village near Arbois. 2.65HA of the land was vineyards, which Overnoy took over in 1968; he left the rest of the farming to his brother. From his beginnings, he tended his vines in organic fashion, known at the time as traditional, i.e. without herbicides, pesticides, fungicides, nothing but copper and sulfur.

In his winemaking, he was a pioneer of what has come to be called natural wines, especially in his avoidance of the use of sulfur. The Jura, with its tradition of Vin Jaune, made in a slowly oxidative fashion, was probably ideally suited for these explorations. Jules Chauvet, the Beaujolais négociant and wine researcher, was a mentor and a friend to Pierre Overnoy since those early years. Overnoy's goal was to make wines of terroir, which would reveal the minerality of their soils and the ripeness of their vintage.

Emmanuel Houillon, a kid from the nearby, vineless area in Franche-Comté (the region that comprises Jura), came to Pierre as an apprentice in the fall of 1990. He went to school for two weeks in a row, then worked at the estate for two weeks. That lasted seven years, until he left school with a professional baccalauréat in viticulture and oenology. Overnoy then hired him as an employee.

In 1995, when still a student, Houillon found 1/3HA of Chardonnay vines which he tended himself. He also planted 1/2HA of Chardonnay in 1998. That same year, the Overnoy estate grew by 2.5HA of Poulsard and Savagnin, when Pierre took over vines owned by his sister.

In 2001, at the age of 63, Pierre Overnoy retired. Houillon worked with his wife Anne until his brother Aurélien joined them as a partner in 2007. Pierre Overnoy devotes much of his time to baking bread and is an everyday presence for the family and the estate.

The estate now consists of 2.43 HA of Ploussard (or Poulsard), 2.20 HA of Chardonnay and 2HA of Savagnin.