

Domaine de Souch

Interview

This interview with Yvonne Hegoburu took place in her front yard in July, 2012.

Tell us about *Domaine de Souch*.

My husband and I purchased this house and the land surrounding it about 50 years ago. When we bought it, it was in shambles: there was no roof and the courtyard was overrun with wild thorns. We also had to do a lot of work to assure that water wouldn't damage the house by building underground drains.

The property is 20 hectares, 10 of which are woods. The other 10 are exposed full South and Southwest, and here we've planted 6,5 hectares of vines. In 2 or 3 years, I want to plant another .25 hectares, but I don't plan on expanding past that.

When were the vines planted?

When my husband René left us 27 years ago, everything changed drastically. His salary was gone, and I needed to do something to earn my keep. Back then, we let our neighbors' cows graze the land. But I took them back, and decided to plant vines. So the vines are 27.

You were 60 when you planted your vines. Can you tell us about your life before becoming a vigneronne?

My husband's first career was as a wood merchant for a big enterprise. We met at a wood factory where I worked as a secretary. He travelled a lot since he sold most of his merchandise to England. During that time, he developed a taste for living lavishly and his employer eventually decided he was costing them too much.

After getting fired, he proposed we start a business partnership together, since his loyal customers still wanted to buy from him instead the enterprise. So we did it, and it was a prosperous time for us: the Brits needed a lot of wood to rebuild from the war, (particularly London) and we made a lot of money. We were very young at the time we started; I was 20 and he was 25.

Profits eventually slowed down from the wood business, but it gave us the opportunity to partake in many different investments. One of those was the purchase of 9 buildings in Bordeaux. We had 49 tenants, but a friend of mine who lived in the area advised me that we weren't going to see proper long term benefits from this deal, and were better off selling the units in order to purchase a viticultural estate. I searched for a month and eventually purchased Chateau de Viaud. That's how we started with wine.

So at the time, this was more of an investment than a passion?

I planted my vineyard as a result of my time in Pomerol. I instantly fell in love with the work in the vines there, and wanted to plant my own. I took a 300 000 franc loan out, and went all-in on Souch. If it hadn't worked, I would have had to sell the house!

Domaine de Souch is one of the most high profile biodynamic estates in France. How did you discover this type of agriculture?

Since I had no background in viticulture, the first thing I did was go to the Chamber of Agriculture and ask for a protocol. They immediately gave me round-up and all that other junk. So for 8, 9 years, I used round-up.

At the time, I was living between *Souch* and *Chateau de Viaud*. One day I was taking the train and had nothing to read. So I went to the newsstand and the first thing I grabbed was a publication on wine. Inside, there was an article on the Barre family, which focused on their use of biodynamic practices. It instantly made me realize that working chemically was killing my soils, that I was doing something terrible to them!

So I rushed to the nearest phone both and immediately called Ms. Barre, who is about my age. I told her how wonderful their work was, etc... Since I lived quite close to their village, she invited me to their weekly meeting for biodynamic vigneron. It was very friendly and convivial: everyone would meet, read a little bit of Rudolph Steiner out loud, eat, drink each other's wines and support each other. From there on out, I started converting *Souch* to biodynamics.

How long did it take you to see a difference in the vineyards?

It takes 10 years.

What about the winemaking?

That took longer. Even though the vineyards were converted to biodynamics, we were using commercial yeasts for many years. But we've been certified biodynamic since 1994, and the grapes' yeasts have been able to find themselves into our cellar. It's in the walls, in the air... It's everywhere! The fermentation starts on its own now, and we've been using native yeasts for about 10 years.

What wines do you like to drink?

I like drinking my friend's wines! I don't have the talent to dissect a wine, and I prefer loving wines from people who love me!