

Domaine de Souch

Profile

In the early 70's, Yvonne Hegoburu and her husband René found a pile of rocks, the ruins of an old house, at the top of the hill in the village of Laroin, about 6 km towards the Pyrénées from their home in Pau, southwest France. They both fell in love with the spot. He was a former, dashing Jai Alai champion, currently editor of the local sports newspaper, *L'Equipe*. After years of rebuilding this manse and enjoying life in this beautiful hillside retreat with his wife and child, he died. They had always both dreamed of planting a vineyard on their 40 acres inside the demarcated zone for the unique Jurançon wines, but they never got around to it.

By this time in 1987, Yvonne was 60 years old. Determined to complete their dream and to honor her husband, she went ahead and planted those vines - eventually, 6.5 hectares of them. Her first wine in 1990 won a gold medal in Paris which only encouraged her "folly" more. Through her friendship with Pascal Delbeck, then vineyard manager of Château Belair in St. Emilion, she came to an understanding of *biodynamie*. She saw that fruits and vegetables farmed using these methods and the vineyards tended with biodynamic practices produced fruit that was healthy and even more delicious than those grown conventionally. In 1994, she embraced the philosophy for her own estate and has continued it to this day.

The estate really resembles a large garden of vines that cascade or are trellised down a hillside at 300 meters, the Pyrénées Mountains in the near distance. The vines are carefully tended without the use of pesticides or herbicides and traditional plowing. The trellising system is unusual for the region - double guyot - instead of the usual stake training and the pruning is very short aiming for 25-30hl/ha yields. The soil is what is called "*poudingues*" de Jurançon, a heavy, gravelly clay that has calcareous components. Her vineyard is separated by woods and large expanses from any other vineyards so there is little risk of contamination from other grower's treatments. She planted in 70% Petit Manseng, 20% Gros Manseng and 10% Courbu -- grapes famous for their acidity and ability to produce sweet wines that age.

Jurançon is an old appellation and one of the first to be classified. It has an important, legendary place in the history of France, since, as it is generally related, the lips of Henry IV of Navarre, one of the boldest Kings of France, were rubbed with Jurançon wine at his baptism, the result of which was, of course, his courage and charisma. The 20th century writer Colette added to the wine's cachet by touting its excellence.

But Yvonne, while appreciating the history, is very much a person of the here and now. She has completely charmed the rest of the French wine world, and can consider among her many friends, some of the finest winemakers and personalities in wine. Didier Dagueneau was especially fond of her and assisted her with some of her work. His sudden death in 2008 is still a grave loss of a good friend. Not so long ago, she also had a moment of celebrity as one of the sage and more memorable winemakers in Jonathan Nossiter's film, *Mondovino*. She even attended the premiere at the Cannes Film Festival on the director's arm where she walked the red carpet. "I planted vines when my husband died," she said in the film, "Ever since then, all this love inside me, I give to the vines. I talk to them. I have an exchange with them. I ask them to drive their roots deep down into the soil to get the best from the land."

All the harvesting is done by hand in successive passes through the vineyards. The pressing is done in a pneumatic press.

Yvonne is now in her 80's and in terrific form. We look forward to a lot more great vintages from her. She just got a beautiful new 3 month old Great Pyrenees puppy. She also has a cat that's 22 years old! Perhaps there is something in these Jurançon wines.