



Winemaker: Etienne Blanc
Generation: 4th



Cotes du Rhone Rouge AOP

Tending vines that grow on an ancient riverbed, fourth generation producer Etienne Blanc takes pride in three things: protecting the environment, honoring his dad's memory, and making small batch wines that sing of the sub-alpine Rhône. With his rugged good looks, he probably could have been an actor, but growing up in the village of Tulette (20 kms north of Gigondas), farming and enology have long been his sole calling. Here, 25 year-old vines lend themselves well to a CDR that is soft, well-integrated, and fruity, with flavors of currant, plum, and earth spice. A perfect introduction to this true blue estate.

WINEMAKER BIOGRAPHY

With the support of his mom, Françoise, and trusted colleague, Patrick, young French winemaker Etienne Blanc is, as they say, "all in". From vine training to enology, he does everything himself on this 15-hectare, true blue estate in the sun-filled market town of Tulette, just a stone's throw from the hills of Rasteau.

ENOLOGIST

Etienne Blanc



TASTING NOTES

Color Ruby
Nose Black and red currant, plum, and earth spice
Palate Soft and fruity, with great weight, balance, and integration
Finish Ample and well rounded



VINEYARD & VINIFICATION

Vineyard Location Côtes-du-Rhône AOP, Rhône
Vineyard Size 15 ha
Varietals List 60% Grenache
30% Syrah
10% Carignan
Farming Practices Certified sustainable farming (HVE level 3); dry-farmed; grapes picked by hand; certified vegan
Elevation 250-300 m
Soils Alluvial clay and silt (ancient river bed) with stones
Maturation Summary In Steel for 12 months
In Steel 12 months
Alcohol 14.5 %
Annual Production 12,000 bottles





REGION

RHÔNE

Geologically, the Rhône was the result of a dramatic clash between France's Massif Central and the southern Alps, creating a vast valley that was flooded by the ancient Mediterranean - eventually supplying the region with its floorboards of limestone and calcareous clay. Three hundred million years ago, during the Paleozoic Era, the volcanic Massif Central also produced the granite rocks that help define the northern Rhône, while alluvial and marine sediments formed huge limestone monuments in the south such as the sawtoothed Dentelles de Montmirail and Mont Ventoux. As the earth cooled and seas receded, powerful fluvial currents pulled hillside rocks and sediment down with them, littering the valley floor... Today, the Rhône Valley spans nearly 250 km north to south and encompasses 250 communes from Lyon to the coast, extending over 6 French départements and forming a key agricultural corridor between northern Europe and the Mediterranean.

As far as wines go, discussion is often divided between the northern and southern Rhône, with the former more renowned for the tannic purity and spiciness of its (comparatively) cooler climate Syrah, along with its fuller-bodied, aromatic whites... while the latter is better known for its more voluptuous, warmer climate Grenache-driven red blends that are rounder, riper, and often higher in alcohol.

Coincidentally, the north and south subdivisions are also divided by a 40 km gap between the villages of Valance and Montélimar in which very few vines are grown. The northern Rhône is much smaller (representing only 5% of the valley's overall production) and quality-driven. The hugely prolific south tends to see a wider array of both grape varieties and quality levels... Important northern appellations include Côte-Rôtie, Crozes-Hermitage, Hermitage, Cornas, and Condrieu. Southern appellations of note include Châteauneuf du Pape, Côtes du Rhône, and Côtes du Rhône Villages (including the crus of Rasteau, Gigondas, Vacqueyras, Lirac and Tavel). As a related side note, the massive Côtes du Rhône AOC has territory in both the northern and southern Rhône, encompassing 200 of the valley's 240-kilometer span.

CÔTES-DU-RHÔNE AOP

One of France's first appellations to receive official status, the Côtes-du-Rhône AOC was officially established in 1937. In part, this was due to its long reputation for producing popular wines, with the first regulations to ensure authenticity dating all the way back to 1650. In 1737, a royal decree was further issued, requiring all barrels to be branded with the now iconic letters: "CDR". Encompassing a large swathe of the Rhône Valley, this AOC is a massive, geographically diverse area (the second largest in France), spanning 171 villages and covering roughly 30,000 hectares, all centered around the city of Avignon. (As a sidebar, the more restrictive, terroir-driven Côtes-du-Rhône Villages AOC includes 95 of these same villages on either side of the river around Orange.) Throughout the sub-region, the climate is decidedly Mediterranean: hot, dry summers follow mild winters, with the Mistral wind from the north providing constant ventilation - all ideal circumstances for sustainable and organic farming, which is trending ever upward in the CDR.

To make the traditional red blends that largely define this area (affordable, round, friendly, berry-driven wines), Grenache, Syrah, and Mourvèdre are still the most widely-used varieties. By law, this trio must account for at least 70-80% of the cépage. That established, Carignan and Cinsault often factor in (especially in the southern latitudes as both varieties are more heat resistant) and overall, 23 grape varieties are permitted under the AOC. Whites tend to be made of Grenache Blanc, Vioqnier, Clairette, and Rousanne - all

LES ASSEYRAS

Hands-on winemaker Etienne Blanc takes pride in three things: protecting the environment, honoring his dad's memory, and making small batch wines that sing of the sub-alpine Rhône. Located in the village of Tulette, roughly 250-300 m above sea level, his estate lies very close to a mountainous area called Les Dentelles de Montmirail - gorgeous sawtooth formations that also form the foothills to Provence's highest peak, Mont Ventoux. From his vines, grown on an ancient riverbed full of silty clay and calcareous river stones, one can see both Ventoux and also the hills of nearby Rasteau. In the case of Etienne's Côtes du Rhône, 25-year-old vines lend themselves well to a wine that is soft and fruity, yet sophisticated. Even though this region receives countless hours of sunshine - and only about 15 inches of rain per year - highland breezes and cooler evening temperatures translate as fantastic integration. A vein of blue clay running through his soil also adds to the acidic balance in the glass.

Located some 20 km northeast of Orange and 20 kms north of Gigondas, the town of Tulette technically lies near the northernmost edge of the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region. Culturally, however, this commune is part of La Drôme Provençale, an unofficial zone spiritually linked to Provence. Known as the bridge between north and south, La Drôme is also where the climate shifts from rainy and northern to hot and Mediterranean, and where the lavender fields of southern France first start to appear en masse. Etienne has spent his whole life here, surrounded by pastoral beauty and raised on the farm started in 1937 by his great-grandfather, Xavier, and subsequently managed by his grandmother during WWII. One of his favorite childhood memories was accompanying his father, Daniel, to their local "Fêtes des Primeurs", or harvest festival, when everyone in town donned traditional clothing, feasted, and went from house to house, tasting all the new wines. For Etienne, it was the beginning of something deeply personal and magical, and something you can still sense in this talented young winemaker's words - and bottles - today.