



E. Guigal

Château d'Ampuis – the jewel in a crown of vines

The remarkable story begins with Etienne Guigal, who came to Ampuis to pick apricots. In the early 1930s his brother helped Etienne, still only 14 years of age, secure a job in the vineyards at the largest winery in the Rhône. Etienne started pruning in the vineyards and rose to cellar master over the course of 15 years, before eventually leaving just after the war in 1946 to start his own firm, E. Guigal. Etienne's son Marcel became involved very early in the business when in 1961 he was forced to rush back from school because his father was suddenly struck with total blindness. In the process Marcel brought attention to Côte-Rôtie and other appellations throughout the Rhône that were in danger of being lost in the annals of wine history. Today, Marcel's son Philippe serves as Director and Oenologist at Guigal, and with his father is carrying on the tradition of leadership in the Rhône Valley using four paths to uncompromising excellence.

First, they will only purchase vineyards that are capable of producing truly great wines. Therefore, despite their important production they only own 150 acres, all in the Northern Rhône.

Second, important dimension is Guigal's approach to viticulture. The Guigal family is tireless in its work on the steeply sloped, terraced vineyards it owns, with views entirely to the long-term. They are methodically re-building vineyards today that will be planted in five to ten years. No pesticides, herbicides or chemicals are used in the vineyards, and the fact some of Guigal vines date back to the 1890s is a testimony to the nurturing, obsessive approach the Guigals have in their vineyards.

Third, Guigal is a unique negociant company. The family knows the Northern Rhône like no one else and supplements their holdings by buying grapes from long-time grower partners. In total, they vinify around 33% of Côte-Rôtie and 45% of Condrieu, and have access to top fruit in all the regions they work. In the Southern Rhône, they buy only wine, and with a distinctive approach. In a given year, they will purchase the top 1% of the wines they taste, and because of their longtime contacts, they have access to the best wines in the region; they select, in other words, 1% from the very finest wines in the Southern Rhône.

Fourth, Guigal's vinification is singular in the world of wine, and allows their great raw materials to flourish in the bottle. All wines undergo natural yeast fermentation, and intervention is at a bare minimum, with no fining or filtration. The top Guigal wines undergo famously long maturation period in barrel, up to three and a half years, but even parcels of old-vine Syrah for their Côtes du Rhône are aged in foudres for six months, completely atypical for the Côtes du Rhône category. Additionally, every day five barrels are produced by hand by their single cooper at the Chateau d'Ampuis; they are the only winery in the Rhône Valley with their own cooperage, and one of the only in France.

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