

Domaine Alain Normand, Mâconnais



Alain Normand is a grower in the Mâconnais who began his career by taking over an abandoned vineyard with a *métayage* contract, a common agricultural practice in France whereby the landlord is paid in wine. Today, Alain works the vineyards, makes the wine, and sells off the landlord's portion to *négociants*. He keeps the finest for himself. His wife Sylvaine handles the office work when she's not handling the two children. Theirs is a typical family domaine operation.

He works eleven hectares (27 acres) in La Roche-Vineuse, an old village nestled on the steep flank of the huge limestone outcropping that gives name to Vineuse. This village sits astride the small pass that cuts through the Mâcon ridges and leads to Cluny, the seat of power for the Benedictine order of monks in their Medieval heyday. On his hillsides in Vineuse, Alain farms Chardonnay and a little Pinot Noir. He used to have some Gamay for his *Mâcon Rouge*, but the wine never measured up so he ripped out those vines.

In 2003 he inherited a tiny parcel of Pouilly-Fuissé in Solutré from his father-in-law and made about a pallet of wine every year from it. After the harvest of 2009, he inherited the rest of his father-in-law's vines—seven hectares total. Three are in AOC Pouilly-Fuissé divided between mostly old-vine parcels in Chaintré (vines are 50-60 years old) to the south and Solutré (vines are 70+ years old) in the northern half of the appellation. The remaining four hectares are on the lower slopes of Chaintré and Solutré and are classed as Mâcon-Villages. He intends to divide his Pouilly-Fuissé production along the lines of the Mâcon production: an old-vine cuvée made in old and new oak, and a classic cuvée made in vat. Both cuvées will work extensively with lees.

He farms according to the pragmatic principles of *lutte raisonnée*, or reasoned fight. He plows his vineyards rather than using herbicides, and he doesn't use pesticides or chemical fertilizers. In every way, his methods are the antithesis of the cooperatives whose wines dominate the Mâcon trade.

The Wines

- *Mâcon La Roche-Vineuse*: This comes from roughly five and a half hectares of vines and is made in a distinctly artisan style with native yeast in vat and an extensive upbringing on its fine lees (that spicy zesty quality in the finish of the wine comes from this lees contact). The bottling is usually in the summer following the harvest, but can easily wait until the autumn. This depends on the fermentations; nothing *chez* Normand is rushed.
- *Mâcon La Roche-Vineuse Vieilles Vignes*: This comes from roughly four hectares of vines planted in the late 1940s after the war. The wine is made in a combination of old and new barrels with extensive lees contact, and normally is bottled without fining or filtration.
- *Pouilly-Fuissé*: Currently, this comes from a north-facing parcel of less than one hectare in Solutré that makes particularly elegant Pouilly-Fuissé. The 2010 vintage will be the first to incorporate the new parcels Alain inherited, and we'll revamp this description at that time.
- *Bourgogne Rouge*: This comes from 1.40 hectares (3.5 acres) of Pinot Noir planted in 1971, the year of Alain's birth. It took years to wrestle this parcel into shape to perform as he wanted it to. With the 2007 vintage, the progress became apparent in a wine with surprising fruit, structure, and length for its modest price tag.