

## Domaine Henry Natter, Montigny



Henry and enologist Cécile Natter started their domaine in 1974 from scratch, beginning with a family hectare in Montigny. They married, planted half of that hectare on a hillside running up behind the village, and started a family. This was in Sancerre's southwestern heights, an area widely planted to vines before phylloxera. Afterward, apart from a few scattered vineyards, the viticultural reconstruction generally passed these hillsides by and the area became a breadbasket for the local grain farmers. The Natter family domaine was the first on this side of the modern appellation of Sancerre and remains the

only winemaking domaine in Montigny.

Today, Henry and Cécile farm 23 hectares (57 acres) of vines. The breakdown is 19 hectares of Sauvignon and 4 hectares of Pinot Noir for red and rosé. From the beginning in 1974, farming and winemaking practices here have been noteworthy. Organic composts and homeopathic applications have always been used in place of chemical fertilizers, and likewise herbicides have never been used (the right is reserved to use synthetic fungicides in particularly difficult years—above all, for example, during a wet year after hail damage when rot could ravage an entire crop). Fermentations are routinely made in huge old wood casks (*foudres*) with indigenous yeasts, which stands in contrast to the far more typical production of Sancerre in steel or fiberglass tanks with commercial yeasts. Sancerre, *chez* Natter, is made the way it used to be made.

Henry manages the vineyards while Cécile manages the fermentations and the upbringing of the wines. These days they're helped by daughter Mathilde and son Auguste (who did internships in South Africa, New Zealand, and with the Newton winery in Napa). A Hmong is also full-time in their employ. He is the nephew of a married couple who had been relocated from Laos to a Hmong refugee camp near Bourges in the 1980s. This couple originally came to the domaine as vineyard workers, and they stayed on for nearly a decade before their nephew assumed their responsibilities. Many more Hmong come to help during the harvest.

### The Wines

- *Sancerre blanc*: This is the domaine's horse, a wine that never fails to make the cut for Bettane & Desseauve's annual Great Guide to French Wines, France's most serious guide. The Guide notes the "perfect maturity" the Natters obtain from their grapes, and this, coupled with native yeast fermentation in *foudre*, accounts for the intense aromas and rich texture of the wine.
- *Sancerre Cuvée François de la Grange*: This is both a vineyard selection and a cellar selection. The base for this wine always comes from an old vine parcel of 50+ years, and a culling of *foudres* takes place in the cellar. The wine that is bottled under this label undergoes a nine to twelve-month *élevage* entirely in the big casks.
- *Sancerre rosé*: 100% Pinot Noir made in steel. Cécile did part of her winemaking training at Domaine Ott in Provence, and she knows how to make rosé—this is one of the best of the appellation.
- *Sancerre rouge*: This is 100% Pinot Noir whose alcoholic fermentation is made in tank, then the wine is racked primarily into older barrels for malo and ageing.

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