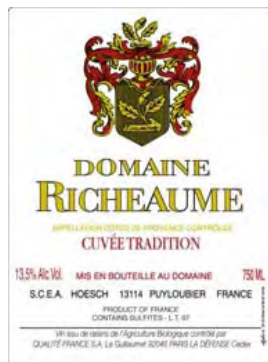


## Domaine Richeaume, Côtes de Provence



Fifteen miles east of Aix is Domaine Richeaume, snug up against the jagged limestone flank of Mont Sainte-Victoire. The domaine was founded in 1972 by Henning Hoesch, an historian and classical cellist with an environmental bent, and from the beginning he farmed along strict organic principals. He was one of the first in modern Provence to do so, just as he was one of the first in the region to plant Cabernet Sauvignon. Some 35 years later, organic farming is now the rage. As for Cabernet, that world favorite, it's now a staple in Provence. In this arid land, Cabernet the wine takes on a rugged, *garrigue*-infused profile that can't help but kick stones at the soft international model.

The domaine has 200 acres of land, with 60 planted to vines. Grape yield is kept to a very low 15 to 25 hectoliters per hectare. In addition, the Hoesch family farms 12 acres of olive orchards, 50 acres of grain, and maintains 75 acres of pasture for sheep (around 100 head). It's a polyculture farm, as it had been down through the ages, and Henning Hoesch intentionally maintained this culture as a way of preserving natural balance. Manure from the sheep is composted with other organic material grown on the farm, and then spread in the vineyards and orchards.

Henning's son Sylvain became involved in the domaine's operations in 1992. In 1996 Sylvain did a stint at California's Ridge Winery, and he returned to work at Ridge again in 2000. He was a keen student there, and became close to Paul Draper, who taught him valuable lessons about grape maturity and tannin management. The result, as Andrew Jefford writes in *The New France*, is that "the wines are far denser and more succulent than in the past...The Cabernet is beautifully crafted, with mingled currant and cinder flavours, while the Syrah achieves a perfumed lyricism closer to the northern Rhône style than the south. The Cuvée Columelle is one of Provence's great wines: a complex, finely detailed selection of the estate's best Cabernet, Syrah, and Merlot over which the perfume of sweet thyme seems to blow."

A range of wines is made from the domaine's diverse plantings, roughly five percent of which is white. The most important are listed here.

- Blanc de Blancs: Clairette (50%), Rolle (40%), and Sauvignon Blanc (15%). Clairette comes from very old vines, planted in the 1930s, and gives a long mineral note to the wine. The Clairette and Sauvignon Blanc are aged in older barrels, making for a rich, savory white wine.
- Cuvée Tradition: Roughly equal parts Cabernet and Grenache, sometimes with around 3% Syrah, depending on the year. Made in older barrels, this is the domaine's largest production and its best value. The idea behind this now classic blend is to combine the masculine austerity of Cabernet with the feminine opulence of Grenache. The resulting wine is dark, rich with lovely aromatics (the Cabernet notes soar), and full with sumptuous flavors.
- Syrah: there are 18.5 acres of Syrah at Richeaume, the most of any variety. This wine comes from 46-year-old vines and is made in 40% new oak and 60% older oak. The nose is highly perfumed, the body rich, dark, serious, and long. Some consider this, along with Columelle, to be one of the most compelling wines of Provence. The Syrah benefits from bottle age.
- Cuvée Columelle: The blend recently changed to roughly Cabernet (50%), Syrah (40%), and Grenache (10%). Sylvain replaced the Merlot with old vine Grenache (a century-old parcel), which consistently produces excellent fruit at naturally low yields. The wine is intensely rich and ripe, with chocolate overtones, a warming note of *garrigue*, and very long flavors. Its breadth is checked by fine structure, and its age-worthiness is evident. The cuvee is named in homage to Columella, a Roman viticulturalist who set down principals of viticulture in an age that did without chemical fertilizers and sprays.