

## Domaine Richou, Anjou



The thing about the Richou wines is their purity and depth of fruit. If length in wine bespeaks elegance, then Richou's upper tier comes dressed in silk. They're also beautifully transparent vis-à-vis their terroir: these are wines of Anjou; even more specifically, wines of Anjou's schist soil.

The domaine is managed by Didier and Damien Richou. The elder brother Didier took over the winemaking in 1979 after doing an internship in America with David Bailly (Bailly was a pioneering cold-climate winemaker in, of all places, Minnesota). Since then the good-natured, intelligent and hard-working Didier has gained the respect of every critic who has been by to see him. "Didier Richou," writes Jacqueline Frie-drich, "doesn't know how to make bad wine." In 1993 Damien came on board, and today he is responsible for the domaine's 74 acres of vines while Didier handles vinification. The domaine eschews chemical fertilizers, works its soils, and harvests most of its vineyards by hand.

Founded in 1920, the domaine is a modest place off a country road deep in the Anjou Noire, so called because of the preponderance of schists in the geological makeup of this section. Anjou is a big region, encompassing limestone chalk vineyards to the east in Saumur, volcanic schists in its center, and granite-based soils to the west near Muscadet. Saumur marks the border of the Paris Basin and its limestone; Anjou Noire, with its schists, is home to a much older geology. You cross an invisible line traveling through the region from white limestone houses to villages made of dark stone sheathed in slate.

It is this slate-like rock that gives AC Anjou wines their distinctive character, particularly in the meandering Aubance Valley and, on the opposite side of the Loire, in Savennières. Vineyards grow all over Anjou, but it's only in this valley and in Savennières that schists own the ground. This volcanic rock gives Chenin Blanc layered intensity and finesse (Côteaux du Layon, Bonnezeaux, and Quarts de Chaume, by contrast, have a hodgepodge of soils and more clay, and their wines are weightier than their brother Côteaux de l'Aubance). In the same vein, the local Anjou Gamay, Anjou Rouge, and Anjou-Villages Brissac can thank this rock for their darkly colored substance and meaty intensity, qualities which can make their chalk-grown cousins in Saumur, Chinon, and even Bourgueil seem skittish.

The domaine acquired a three acre parcel in Savennières in late 2010, on the plateau just behind the Roche aux Moines vineyard. Re-planted in 2008, this parcel will begin producing experimental cuvées with the 2012 vintage.

### The Wines

- *Anjou Blanc "Chauvigné"*: Chenin Blanc. The emphasis here is on freshness and minerality, with bright aromatics, lemon high tones, and richly long, elegant fruit. It's a wine with real style. At around 1,700 cases, *Chauvi-gné* is the domaine's largest production. Two-thirds comes from a 7.4 acre vineyard named Violettes growing in volcanic schist soils, planted in 1980 (2.5 acres), then in 1986 (1.2 acres.) and 1998 (3.7 acres); and one third comes from their Rogeries vineyard, growing in a streak of glassy volcanic soil known as rhyolites. Harvest is by hand with two passes through the vines, and the wine is made mostly in tank, with some 20% done in older barrels.

- *Anjou Blanc “Les Rogeries”*: Chenin Blanc. This is a dense, richly plump and honeyed Chenin (from ripe fruit, not sugar) underpinned by intense minerality. It comes from a 10.4 acre vineyard growing in meager rhyo-lites soil, which imparts minerality. This parcel had supported vines in the 16th century and was more recently planted in 1989-90-91. Harvest is by hand with two passes and the yield is quite low (normally 32 hectoliters per hectare); *élevage* lasts as long as 16 months in new and older barrels on the lees.
- *L’R osé*: This is Richou’s top rosé made from Cabernet Sauvignon. Typically made from low yields of 45 hectoliters per hectare, it is weighty, with a terrific balance between sweetness and austerity, spice, and stone. The lot number on the back label is in fact the vintage year.
- *Anjou Rouge “4 Chemins”*: Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon. This is full of fresh rich fruit and makes a terrific bistro wine. It is made in tank primarily from younger vine Cabernet Franc with a dollop of Cabernet Sauvignon. Both grow in Aubance schists and the yield is kept in the 40 hl/ha range.
- *Côteaux de l’Aubance “Les 3 Demoiselles”*: Chenin Blanc. Les 3 Demoiselles is only made in years of great botrytis. It is, as Andrew Jefford writes in *The New France*, “almost always one of the appellation’s best wines.” This wine comes from a 2 acre parcel of Chenin planted in 1924 in the Violettes vineyard, and a smaller parcel (Grand Vau) planted in 1988 that grows on the domaine’s best slopes.