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Roches Neuves 2013 Saumur-Champigny Franc de Pied

Saumur Champigny, Loire Valley

Red wine from France

Drinking window:

Saturated ruby. Enticing aromas of wild raspberry, bitter chocolate, violet and mint. Subtle and delicate, with an edge of acidity giving shape to the blackcurrant and spice flavors. Finishing with slightly herbal tannins and lovely complexity, this light and tender cabernet franc has only 11.8% alcohol. The vines were planted in 2004 on their own roots in a sandy garden that was previously owned by the mayor. The first vintage was 2008. Only 1,500 bottles made.

Joel B. Payne, December 2014

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From Loire Valley Cabernet Franc (Dec 2014)

Roches Neuves

When Thierry Germain left Bordeaux in 1982 at the age of 23, few would ever have imagined that this estate in Saumur would become one of the great success stories of the Loire. His family owned Château Yon-Figeac in Saint Emilion, but given the "Catholic hierarchy" already in place, he saw little opportunity to prove his true mettle there. As he says, "the cards had already been dealt." While his style has gone through several stages of metamorphosis over the years, Germain now claims that he only enjoys drinking those wines that he has made over the past four vintages. Rich and voluptuous cabernet francs have given way to examples that are more pure, linear and crystalline. With some vitriol, he speaks today of his antipathy for "body-builder wines," those produced by recipe in an overripe, overoaked and overblown fashion. He began moving down the biodynamic road some 15 years ago after an encounter with Lalou Bize-Leroy. By

2002 the estate was certified organic by Biodyvin. Since purchasing Domaine des Roches Neuves in 2012, he has changed the boundaries again, establishing a nursery to permit massale plantings, reintroducing the horse into his vineyards, and rolling the shoots back into the canopy rather than hedging them in order to create a better internal balance in the vines. Beyond his vinous talents, Germain is also a gifted storyteller. After his standard biodynamic line about the sun being king and the earth queen, I particular enjoyed the one about how his mentor François Bouchet asked him to take a chair into the vineyard at sunrise and sit there for four hours. Why? To understand the movement of the leaves as they track the course of the sun, protecting the grapes from overexposure.

With 28 hectares this is no small estate. About 85% of the 120,000 bottles that Germain produces each year are red, mostly from vines planted on warmer soils. However, frost in 2013 and hail in 2012 had a serious impact on volume. He has essentially made only two crops over the past three years. Interestingly, while some of his neighbors made no single-site bottlings in 2013, Germain is a great advocate of the vintage. "It was one of the warmest years on record for us," he told me. "I think these are some of the greatest wines I've ever made."

When I visited in early October, he was bringing in his last grapes from 2014. It was a cool and humid vintage, he explained, "but saved by September." Actually he wanted to begin harvesting even earlier, but was not allowed to do so by the local authorities who control the dates for the start of crush. "One plot that I wanted to harvest at 12.8%," he said bitterly, "ended up at 13.9%. Who do these guys think they are?" Almost all of his wines are matured in larger casks, often 2,500 liters in size, and he generally frowns upon the use of new oak. He particularly likes the three-year-old barrels that he buys each year from Méo-Camuzet in Vosne-Romanée. That is not altogether surprising, though, since his goal is have his cabernet franc exhibit the silky elegance of pinot noir. In fact, many of his Saumur-Champignys do taste more like Burgundy than a lot of pinot noirs on the market.

Grape Variety

Cabernet Franc

Release price

$62.00

Winery/Importer Contact Info

rochesneuves.com, Represented by Russell Herman, Berkeley