

DOMAINE DE COYEUX (France, Rhone, Beaumes-de-Venise)

BACKGROUND: The origin of the Beaumes de Venise's wine district is very old and the history of its wines can be traced back to 600 years before Christ, when a Greek community moved into the foothills of the Dentelles de Montmirail. Nowadays Beaumes de Venise is an appellation from the eastern central region of the Southern half of the Rhône Valley.



Located on the Southern side of the Dentelles de Montmirail, the Domaine de Coyeux is comprised of one continuous area of 110 total hectares (65 under vines and the rest as forest and woods) with its first vines planted in the 1950.

The estate was taken over in 2013 by Hugues de Feraudy, whose family was already established in Vaucluse in the tenth century. He's involved in the agricultural part of the management with a deep focus on the vineyards and the whole vinification process rather than the commercial side of the business.

The landscape of Domaine de Coyeux are exceptional with the rocky blades of the Dentelles de Montmirail within sight just a few hundred meters away. Mont Ventoux, snowy during the winter, gives the impression of being at your fingertips beaming the sensation of reigning calm all around the mountains of Coyeux.

BEAUMES DE VENISE WINE TRADITION: To cut a long story short the appellation of Beaumes de Venise is famous for its sweet fortified wine of the type "Vin doux naturel" (VDN) under the designation Muscat de Beaumes de Venise. The wines must contain at least 100 gr/lt of residual sugar and feature at least 15% alcohol content. The VDN wines are golden in colour, with a nose of flowers and tropical fruits, and have a long finish. Though typically drunk young, the wines often acquire wonderful toffee aromas and flavours with age which match well with appropriate deserts.

Beside the sweet wines, red Côtes du Rhône wines from the classification of named villages, gained in the last two decades an increasing number of followers looking for quality price ratio. Varieties that are blended to produce the red AOC are Grenache noir (min. 50%), Syrah (at least 25%), with the balance made up of other varieties, usually Mourvèdre but with the other usual suspects, whites (5% max. allowed) as well as reds, also permitted, as at Vinsobres.

In 2005 the greatest honour of all was bestowed on the region when Beaumes de Venise rouge and the sweet fortified wine Muscat became a "cru" - the highest order of the wines in the Rhone Valley. Today over 100 producers including 15 domaines and a cooperative winery combine their effort to keep up the highest standards and the centuries-old reputation of the town and its wines.

TERROIR: Coyeux's hills, located at 300 mt above the sea level, provide air breezes which bring freshness in the summer, contributing to healthy grapes and allowing an intriguing aromatic profile to the Domaine's wines. At the same time the microclimate is deeply influenced by the famous Mistral winds. Coming from the north, this wind occurs only a few hours after rainfalls, leaving enough time for the vines to absorb its benefits while minimizing the risks of the proliferation of parasites by rapidly drying the foliage.



Furthermore the estate is marked by its special soil composition which include the well known "Triassic" soil with its pores filled with clay which capture the winter water from the soil that will be released in the summer in order to nourish the root system of the vines. The soil creates an automatic vines' competition and a desirable hydric stress level.

VINEYARD'S MANAGEMENT: We all know that a good wine is made in the vineyard and a good vineyard is trained by respecting nature: Coyeux's soil is healthy and modified only by respectful contributions to the environment.

All the grape varieties cultivated fit the soil, respect the local tradition and can thrive with the Mediterranean climate. The domaine cultivates the Muscat a petit grains, while Grenache, Syrah, Cinsault and Mourvedre are the main red varieties.

Excess buds and leaves in the vines are removed in the spring in order to aerate the strains and increase the leaf's surface area exposed to the sun. Disbudding reduces grape production and improves the concentration of aromas.

The soil must be considered a living entity where microbial life creates organic soil enrichment through its regular twisted paths. Overall the healthy natural conditions (altitude, exposure and climate) need only gentle agricultural methods necessary to maintain the vineyard's perfect health. There are no special recipes or magic touches except listening to the soil, reading between the lines each vintage and preserving the natural heritage.

HARVEST & KEY NUMBERS: The harvest takes place in approximately 20 days and the whole process is agreed by both the resident winemaker Alain Sigaud and the consultant Xavier Vignon, a renowned oenologist.

Each plot is harvested by hand, according to its maturity, several times if necessary, by the harvesters who select the right mature and perfectly healthy grapes. The Domaine de Coyeux produces annually round 250.000 bottles with the following break-down:

140,000 bottles of Muscat de Beaumes de Venise
72,000 bottles of Beaumes de Venise Cru red wine
3,300 bottles of Cru Gigondas
16,500 bottles of white wine Muscadin and Praemium Florae
15,000 bottles of rosé Côtes-du-Rhône and IGP Méditerranée

MUSCAT, the WINE OF THE BEES: The real jewel of Domaine de Coyeux, the Muscat de Beaumes de Venise is produced on various contiguous plots, grouped together on 42 hectares. The production is in the range of 25 hl/hectare and some of the oldest vines have reached the 65 year old mark. Each year the Domaine of Coyeux produces approximately 1400.000 bottles of sweet Muscat wine.

The biotype involved is the famed Muscat a petit grains which was called “ the wine of the bees” by the ancient Romans. This grape variety possesses the characteristic of dividing itself into two sub-types, one with black berries and the other with golden berries. Regardless of their color, they both produce sweet Muscat wine.

The same grape variety is used to produce two unfortified different wines (the Muscadin and the off dry Praemium Florae), by farming 5 dedicated property hectares and, as with the fortified Muscat, the production is low to 25 hl/hectare. The vineyards assigned to the production of this wine have been around for almost 30 years. The Muscadin is fermented and briefly aged in tank, skipping any oak contact.

THE BEAUMES DE VENISE RED: 17 property hectares are dedicated to the production of the Beaumes de Venise Cru red with an average yield of 32 hectolitres/hectare and vines ageing between 35 and 65 years. Current production is about 72.000 bottles per year, according to the main characteristics of the vintage. The Domaine usually blends three or four grapes (depending on the vintage), each bringing its own personality:

The Grenache is the king of the Southern Rhone Valley with its enduring resistant to drought and winds. It is marked by its richness in phenolic compounds (red fruits, licorice and spices) and its powerful notes, sometimes a bit off-dry.

On the other hand Syrah, with its intense purple color, its aromatic potential (small red and black fruits, peppermint, earthy coffee) and its durability over time compliments very well the Grenache.

Mourvèdre requires a lot of heat and sun light to fully express its potential. The dark color, combined with the antioxidant power and the aromatic characteristics (black fruits, leather and earthiness) are valued for the good development of the wines.

Last but not least, Cinsault is a medium dark skinned grape that ripens early and often delivers prolific yields. When growers properly work with the variety and reduce yields, Cinsault delivers floral and ripe strawberry notes as well as hints of dried fruit. Usually it reaches complete ripeness at 13% to 13.5% AbV, and can go to 14% without losing balance—not like sometimes Grenache. This grape has been forgotten almost for 20 years but right now it’s picking up once again, made due to the climate change.

THE WINES IMPORTED BY STEEP HILL: While the estate produces a relevant number of different wines each year (including sparkling, monovarietal reds and two roses), Steep Hill has mainly focused on 3 wines:

Muscat de Beaumes de Venise VDN 2007 (bottle size 375 ml): Sweet fortified wine made with the Muscat a petit grains clone of this huge grape’s family. Grapes are hand-picked when just ripe and sent to the cellar in 20 kg boxes. Stalks are removed and

grapes are gently crushed producing a must that undergoes pre-fermentation maceration for 6 hours at low temperature. Fermented with indigenous yeast for 4 weeks partially in steel vats and enamelled concrete vats.

The addition of the spirit serves to augment the alcoholic strength of the wine, prevent any further fermentation, and ensure stability of the wine. Vins Doux Naturels (VDN) wines such as Muscat de Beaumes de Venise, Muscat de Rivesaltes etc are all fortified early on during the fermentation of the grape juice. The addition of spirit in making VDN wines is known as *mutage* rather than fortification, but is essentially the same thing.

The Coyeux's wine is generally bottled two or three years after the harvest, skipping therefore any clarification and fining process which is unnecessary. 110 grams of residual sugar (100 grams is the minimum required by the appellation's regulations).



Muscadin 2012: Presenting the elegant flute shaped bottle, this wine is a true killer with Asian cuisine and compliments pretty well the typical spiciness with its' mellow tropical notes, without being cloying. On the other side it can be served a classic aperitif wine between 10 and 12° Celsius. The fruit sourced for this wine comes from 5 selected property hectares with younger vines. After the hand harvest, the low temperature pre-fermentation maceration here is a key asset because it helps to preserve the aromas and the global freshness' must. Fermented and aged in stainless steel tank on the lees and bottled the June following the harvest. Overall the Muscadin displays a good mouthfeel persistence with its 13,5% AbV. and the 30 gr. of residual sugar. On top of this, the bottle ageing process allows definitely more complexity.



Beaumes de Venise Cru red blend 2007: 70% Grenache, 20% Syrah and 10% Cinsault all processed separately from different plots lying at 300 mt above the sea level. We were lucky enough to find the last bottles available of this old vintage. Domaine de Coyeux usually conducts a long, pre-fermentation must's maceration and this method offers various advantages:

- ✓ It releases the desired colour's intensity in an alcohol free environment.
- ✓ It avoids the extraction of unwanted tannins and preserves the fruity dimension of the wines.
- ✓ It allows the musts to reveal their aromas in all their intensity.

Fermentation is always carried out in a spontaneous way by using only the active yeasts naturally present on the grapes. No selected yeast by any means! The wine matured in stainless steel vats until 2014 and then has been racked and transferred to used barrels for 9 months and then bottled.

This cuvee is known and sold in France as Les Cavares whose historical name refers to the Gallic tribes living in the Southern Rhone area. For the export market the brand name has been removed.