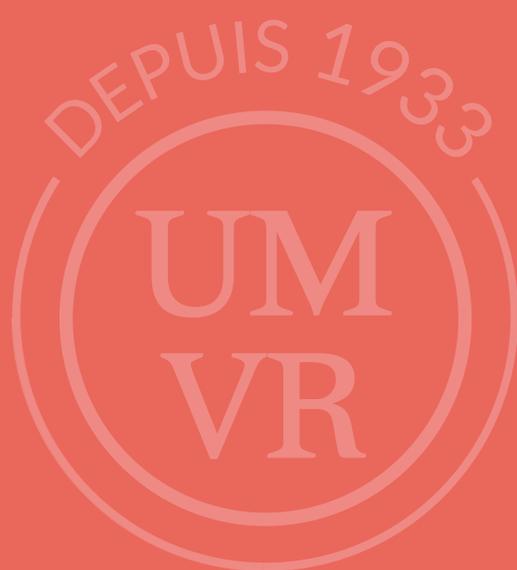


Les Wineries du Rhône

Grandes Serres



PORTRAIT —

GRANDES SERRES, MASTER BLENDER

Samuel Montgermont describes himself as a craftsman; a blender of wines, terroirs and varietals. He is also a disrupter, breaking boundaries and challenging resistance to change.

On the ground

He broadened his base so he could stand stronger; he's a Cairannais in Cairanne, a Gigondassien in Gigondas and a Chateuneuvois in Châteauneuf-du-Pape. He's created a separate winery in each of these terroirs, in each case at the heart of the vineyards. Because transporting bottles impacts quality far less than transporting grapes, and because it brings him closer to the vines, putting him where he can feel them, understand them, be comfortable with them. "If I didn't have a place in Gigondas, I wouldn't know what it means to be a Gigondas négociant," he says. The biggest difference between a Rhône Winery and a winery in the traditional sense, both in practice and philosophy, is the role of terroir.

Growing and developing

One of Samuel's pet projects is Clos Saint Patrice, an 18th-century grand cru and the first monopole in Châteauneuf du Pape. A monopole in the Burgundian sense is a single holding of land, defined and protected by law, controlled by a single owner. With permission from the authorities and land registry,

Samuel set about rebuilding the Clos walls, and announced his intention to take the whole vineyard to a new level both in status and visibility. He knows exactly what kind of wine he wants to make (and can make) here: delicate, elegant wine with limited extraction and whole-bunch fermentation to give backbone - wine which reflects the quality of his top-class raw materials. "Châteauneuf du Pape is a superb appellation, but it's lost a bit of its supremacy. Between the wars, restaurants would list Châteauneuf du Pape Grand Cru or Tête de Cru, followed by Hermitage or Côte Rôtie. Châteauneuf du Pape always came first. Now it's the other way around. What happened? Did something go missing? When it comes to terroirs, these are all major-league players."

Breaking boundaries

Samuel also has a soft spot for Cairanne, a recently-promoted cru clearly destined for great things. Here, the model he's put forward is ruffling a few feathers. He suggested an unprecedented alliance of négociants and cooperative members, intended to pool resources: the cooperative members keep their autonomy and give Les Grandes Serres permission to use their collectively-owned winemaking equipment; in return, Les Grandes Serres share their technical know-how and understanding of the market. "When we launched the project in 2014," Samuel explains, "winegrowers were being paid €90 per hectolitre, while Cairanne was selling at 225. I'm not sure it'll work, it's still a bit early to say. But what I can tell you is that at the end of harvest I could see some very broad smiles!"

Aiming high

15 years ago, you could count the Rhône Valley winemakers – i.e. those who make wine from grapes they buy in – on the fingers of one hand. Now there are more than 60 of them.

Samuel Montgermont, MD of Maison Les Grandes Serres and Vice President of UMVR.



Established in 1813
Employees: 23
Sales: 42,890 hl
Turnover 2016: €23 million including €12 million to export.
Brands include:
Blason du Rhone, Grandes Serres and Rémy Ferbras



"In our line of work, as in many others, it's the human element that counts. Once that human element is energised, there's no stopping it."

"It's a whole new skillset," says Samuel. Neither producers nor cooperative members have anything to fear. Let's work together!"

In the Rhône Valley, négociant producers are excluded from the cru classification structure. The only description they can put on their labels is "Côtes du Rhône Cru."

But Samuel maintains his American importers won't go for that. "Their customers don't understand the difference between an 'ordinary' Côtes du Rhône and a Côtes du Rhône Cru. Or why a Burgundy Pinot Noir sells for more than a Côtes du Rhône when the Côtes du Rhône is just as good. It's because of the Gevrey Chambertins and the Richebourgs of this world – the whole regional appellation basks in their reflected glory. If we really focus on highlighting the idea of the Rhône Valley cru, we could all be winners."



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