

The Rhône Wineries

Rhonéa



STRONGER TOGETHER

Let's start with some figures. Rhonéa was established in 2015, bringing together the historic wine cooperatives of Beaufort de Venise and Vacqueyras. Rasteau and Visan joined them in 2019. As a union of cooperatives, they currently represent almost 3,000 hectares of vineyard and 400 winemaking families. "Gone are the days when a cooperative would tip every grape into the vat, come what may," says Pascal Duconget, Rhonéa's Managing Director. "We manage our 3,000-plus hectares of parcels as if they were one large estate."

Each parcel is worked individually according to grape variety, characteristics and history. Meticulous attention is paid to ensuring consistent ripening dates. Rhonéa primarily make Rhône Valley Crus, which account for 2,100 of their 3,000 hectares. Red wines and sweet wines from Vacqueyras and Beaufort de Venise, as well as those from Gigondas and Rasteau, are matured at the Cooperative's five vinification facilities. In addition, the cooperative produces a wide range of Côtes du Rhône Villages wines with village names – including Visan, Plan-de-Dieu, Séguret, Sablet, Vaison-la-Romaine and Roaix. In 2023, Rhonéa recorded a turnover of €45 million, 25% of which came from export. Half the Cooperative's wines are sold in supermarkets and hypermarkets in France. Direct sales account for another 13% of the domestic total, with wines sold in the Cooperative's six wine shops. These are all open to the public and offer fun, informative guided tasting sessions for groups.

Blazing a trail

Rhonéa was the brainchild of a small group of forward-thinking winegrowers who saw that there could be great strength in unity. The cooperatives in Beaufort de Venise and Vacqueyras were persuaded to put aside 50 years of petty bickering and join forces. They had, after all, both achieved so much in terms of growing their appellations and boosting their reputations. In the 1950s, both Vacqueyras and Beaufort de Venise were classed as Vins de Qualité Supérieure. Over time, they progressed through the ranks of Côtes du Rhône and Côtes du Rhône Villages, ultimately achieving the prestigious Rhône Valley Cru classification – Vacqueyras in 1990, Beaufort de Venise in 2005. "Both had strong identities and significant influence over their territories," says Pascal. "Grouping them together and choosing one name over the other would have been problematic. So we came up with Rhonéa. Then Visan and Rasteau saw that our values aligned with theirs, and came to join us."

One person, one vote

That trailblazing spirit has, of course, evolved and tempered over time. With today's plethora of négociants, cooperatives and estates, the world is more open, and the lines more blurred. What hasn't changed, though, is the way Rhonéa operate. All winemakers, when they join, are required to take a number of shares based on how much product they supply, but other than that, all members carry the same weight. At the AGM, it's one person, one vote. The AGM elects executives to the Board of Directors, the Cooperative's governing body; Pascal then maps out a strategy, which, on approval, he is tasked with implementing. A steering committee provides both support and accountability.

From tech to wine

Pascal stumbled into the wine world by chance. With a degree in engineering and a PhD in management, he'd started out working for IBM, in IT. Then in 2003, Cave de Vacqueyras offered

Pascal Duconget



Established: 2015
120 employees
2023 turnover: €45 million
incl. 25% to export.



“We’re working on wines with a lower alcohol content”

him a managerial position, which he accepted with alacrity. "I've found a lovely region, full of friendly people. And wine's such a great expression of culture," he says. "It's a living product for those who love living!" He'd be first to admit he's not a technician. His role is much more focused on markets, where he tries to bring a fresh perspective, which can be subtly different to someone who has always been an 'insider'. And, he claims, today's wine market is experiencing a structural crisis.

Balance of power

The crisis is reflected in falling wine prices. It's not as noticeable in the Crus market, where volumes are smaller, but wine consumption is declining fast. Consumers are more aware of the risks associated with drinking alcohol, and as their behaviours change, so do their tastes. Less time is spent on formal meals where wine is the focus; desserts are largely dispensed with, and the preference is for quick, snack type meals and the wines that pair with them. Rosés have driven demand for the past ten years or so, now whites are taking over. Studies predict that in ten years' time, all three colours will be on an equal footing. "What we know for sure, though," says Pascal, "is that not every wine produced will find a taker. The number of producers will fall, there's no way out of that. The wine industry is still very fragmented, and therefore carries little weight on the market. It's the buyer who calls the shots, not the seller. Buying and selling is basically about balance of power."



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