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HERVÉ SOUHAUT

At the loci of the world's great terroirs, what Terry Thiese calls 'the erogenous zones' of the earth, most winemaking tends to follow a fairly predictable track, one designed over the centuries to offer a particular, generationally approved model of terroir. One can find a ton of whimsical cellar work on the margins but get to the classic appellations and even the "zero zero" (no added sulfite) crowd tend to stick to a pretty traditional model.

Hervé Souhaut is different.

There are very few winegrowers on the planet that can properly balance the wonderful burden of supreme terroir with the risk of innovation. Souhaut is one such creator whose idiosyncratic cellar work has served to imbue unforgettable distinctiveness without obscuring the magnificently articulate terroir. Souhaut's wines could only ever come from the Northern Rhone but there is no other wine quite like a Souhaut. They are generously perfumed, sumptuous beauties that purr into your ear, filling your head with streaming sensations of lavender, pine sap, bare rock and licorice. They are textured unlike any other wine with a downy softness that swaddles the drinker in

warmth and makes the space just as safe for casual consumption as intrepid flavor spelunking.

Like so many French vigneronns, Herve's path from his first career (in this case as a biologist) to his eventual vocation began with an encounter with the wines of the late, great Marcel Lapierre and then his nephew Philippe Pacalet. Souhaut became entranced, leading him to apprentice with fellow Rhone iconoclasts Rene-Jean Dard and Francois Ribo. Hard to imagine a more nourishing group of mentors for a curious mind!

The Souhaut method...

The Souhaut's method for reds is quite simple: whole clusters fermented with what Herve describes as 'progressive pigeage' by which he means incompletely crushed in the initial stages with each punch down pulling more juice from the must, releasing new sugars at a slow pace. The virtues of this technique are twofold: in the first case, the fermentation is kept cooler and slower, resulting in a more gentle extraction. The second is that many of the grapes ferment enzymatically as unbroken berries, imbuing a little of that 'carbonic' freshness but not so much that the treasured organoleptic qualities of his grapes are lost. To his way of thinking, carbonic macerations 'conceptualize and standardize' so many of the French natural wines, a pitfall he'd rather avoid.

The fermentations are conducted in steel for the most part with a smaller proportion in fiberglass and age on gross lees, racked only if a particular lot becomes reductive. Bottled the following spring just after a modest sulfite addition to hit that critical 25-30 ppm bandwidth, the wines are remarkably composed despite their youth and the intensity of their origin, a rather neat trick that makes these beauties broadly appealing.



The 2018 vintage...

Unlike so many of his contemporaries, Souhaut's wines go from vineyard to bottle in less than a year and are released soon after. Even his mentors Dard & Ribo tend to wait longer but the Souhaut wines never seem to need any more time. The current releases are all from the arid 2018 vintage. The year was hot up until harvest, with grapes across the region ripening quickly and evenly. The resulting musts maintained balance despite the lower acidity.





REDS

Southeronne - Taking its name from a colloquial attribution of Gamay within the village of Arlebosc, the wine is the assemblage of 6 parcels of Gamay, old selections of both the white juiced, more ubiquitous Gamay and the red-fleshed, Ardechoise variety that gives the wine a more earthen, heady character.

Syrah - From the granitic slopes of the nearby Doux river, the basic Syrah bottling is the beating heart of the Souhaut operation. Vinified with that same method, the 30 year old vines are from less extreme plots than the single vineyard bottlings and while the

wine may not be as attuned to subtlety as its more regal siblings, it is supremely enchanting all the same!

Clos de Cessieux - The family has only recently recovered access to this insanely steep parcel as a 25 year lease came to a close in 2013. The helicoidal nature of the vineyard results in an array of ripeness, with freshness coming more from the northern tip and power from the South East where the vineyard terminates in a circus. The resulting wine is wonderfully nuanced with an accordion-like depth that begs for decanting and contemplation.

St. Epine - This is from a unique terroir just behind Herve and Beatrice's home in the village of Tourney. The steep, terraced vineyard is home to centenarian vines that have somehow toughed out a hundred years in dry schistic soil. 2/3rds of the vineyard is 100+ years old and the remaining portion is about 30 years old. The wine is incredibly rare as Souhaut makes a mere 1,500 bottles in a good year.

WHITES

Domaine Romaneaux-Destezet Blanc - Although famed mostly for the reds, the Souhaut white wines are astounding. Though the white vines are much younger than the reds, the concentration and character of this wine is really spectacular. Of the family's 10 plots across 4 separate communes, the Viognier/ Roussanne for the white grow in the parcel closest to the winery itself in granitic soils. The white is pressed directly and aged on lees in barrel for 8 months without any battonage.

l'Etrati - This is an extremely rare wine from a small scrap of pure Roussanne within the Saint Joseph appellation. The vines are 15 years old, thriving in the granitic soils typical to the AOC. The wine takes its name directly from the plot and is vinified identically to the Ardechoise white: directly pressed, fermented as juice and aged on lees in barrel for about 8 months.

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