

Les Wineries du Rhône

J. Denuzière



PORTRAIT —

PRECISION IN EVERYTHING

If there's one producer whose wines show just how close the northern Rhône Valley is to Burgundy, that producer is J. Denuzière. This historic Condrieu-based Maison, owned by the Picard family of Chassagne-Montrachet, has been in Caroline Moro's hands since 2014. Caroline is originally from Burgundy, and is committed to maintaining the Maison's style and preserving its reputation for fresh, precise wines.

It was the vines themselves that first attracted Caroline to the wine industry. She was fascinated by them as plants, intrigued to see how adaptable they were and how they grew in such a variety of soils and climates. She studied agronomy, viticulture and oenology in Bordeaux before travelling to various terroirs including Sancerre, Spain, the southern Rhône valley, Languedoc and Provence, where she became an expert on the rosés of St Tropez. Along the way she met numerous people who energised her and fuelled her passion for wine. One such encounter was with Henri Mayer, the famous vigneron from Vosne Romanée in Burgundy, who taught her that one should know about oenology simply to learn how not to use it.

Learning on her feet

Caroline began her voyage of discovery in the northern Rhône, spending vast swathes of time in the vineyards shadowing the Maison's partner winegrowers, and learning everything she could about the terroirs in all their glorious nuances. "There's so much variety here, all depending on the slopes,

exposure, microclimate and soils. If we watch carefully as the vine grows and taste the grapes to get a sense of the thickness of their skins, the colour and the maturity of the pips, we have all the information we need to assess the potential of the resulting wine," says Caroline. "If we know what we're bringing into the winery, all we need to do is interpret it in the way we think best."

Fresh, precise and focused

Rigorous selection starts in the vineyard and continues in the winery. The idea is to keep the link from vine to cellar. By making a larger number of micro-cuvées, Caroline can, in certain years, divide individual plots into two, making small amounts of wine vinified and aged plot by plot, as it is in Burgundy. Combining observation with intuition, and traditional techniques (including manual harvests, whole-cluster fermentation and grape-treading) with modern methods such as temperature-controlled tanks, Caroline and her team extract the best of the juices. Their aim is to express the grapes' provenance with pinpoint precision, producing wines that are fresh and smooth with excellent length of flavour and a finish that retains its vibrancy. "By vinifying the entire harvest in tanks, we can reduce that sun-scorched quality and high alcohol levels that have become more prevalent in recent years, and avoid any heaviness. What we hear most frequently from people tasting our wines is how fresh and light they are. And they're moreish too. One glass always makes you want another!"

Staying small

J. Denuzière is a small operation: small in size and with a small impact on the landscape. They make just a few thousand bottles each of Côte-Rôtie, Hermitage, Saint-Joseph, Crozes-Hermitage and Côtes du Rhône appellation reds, and Condrieu, Saint-Péray, Saint-Joseph and Crozes-Hermitage whites. They have no ambition to grow much larger – in any case, their methods wouldn't allow

Caroline Moro has been at the helm of J. Denuzière since 2014



Established: 1876
Employees: 15
2020 turnover: €6 million, of which 20% from export



"Precision can't be invented and can't be decreed. It has to be learned, and that takes time."

them to. Caroline knows she's lucky to have the freedom to make the wine she wants to make. The Picard family invested in the vineyards by buying a plot in Condrieu - a hectare of vines in the lieu-dit of Tinal, plus a little more on the terraces of Cornas, in the lieu-dit of En-Sauman. Things are moving forward, slowly and calmly.

In praise of uncertainty

While Caroline is sure there's no such thing as a "woman's wine," she's also convinced that men and women have a different approach to life, and feel things differently. "Women traditionally doubt themselves more than men. We have a tendency to question ourselves, and don't put our faith in past achievements as much as we should. Before you can make a great wine, you have to make mistakes, and learn from those mistakes. You need enough humility to question yourself, while having enough self-confidence to just go ahead and do it. It's a double-edged sword. Time and experience count for a lot!"



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