

# Les Wineries du Rhône

Les Vins  
André Brunel  
La Cerise



## GATHERING NO MOSS

Changes are afoot in this estate whose roots date back to the 18th century.

In conversation with Fabrice Brunel as he takes over from his father André in Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

The Brunel family have been vineyard owners for a very long time. Written evidence dating back to 1774 tells us that the first plot of vines was bought that year by one of Fabrice's forebears from the Bishop of Avignon. Today Fabrice Brunel, representing the eighth generation of the Brunel family, is at the helm of both Domaine André Brunel Les Cailloux and its negociant arm, La Cerise. The Domaine as we know it was created by Fabrice's grandfather in 1954. Fabrice's father André joined the team in 1971, followed by Fabrice himself in 2013.

Fabrice comes to the wine world from a completely different life. As a trained engineer with an additional qualification in business, he spent 10 years working as a consultant in Paris, helping companies optimise their production processes. So for him, this is a considerable change. "Initially, I wasn't comfortable with a career in wine," he says, "but my father introduced me to it. He was passionate about the vines and could spend hours in the vineyards nurturing them. He was a true winegrower." Fabrice himself is more into Excel spreadsheets, and puts his skills to good use in the management, sales and organisational side of the Domaine, while experienced cellar master Romain Pitaut has been retained to let Fabrice concentrate on what he does best. The Domaine is about to embark on a widespread vine replanting programme, and work started in 2021 on a new vinification and storage cellar.

### A new winery to meet new needs

"We simply needed more space," explains Fabrice. The new winery is due to be operational for the upcoming harvest, giving the Domaine the capacity to vinify and store an extra 3,000 hectolitres: the old and new cellars combined can make and stow 9,000 hectolitres. Extra capacity was needed largely due to the burgeoning success of the Domaine's negociant arm, La Cerise, which is now buying in grapes for winemaking as well as wines for blending. In terms of production volume, La Cerise has overtaken the Domaine itself, which consists of 20 ha of Châteauneuf vineyards, 40 of Côtes du Rhône, and a further 40 of Vin de Pays. The new winery is located on one of the main roads leading into Châteauneuf-du-Pape, giving Maison des Vins André Brunel improved visibility as well as the opportunity to welcome customers and open a new on-site wine shop.

### Conserving natural resources

Fabrice isn't currently looking to convert to organic farming, finding the process too bureaucratic and time consuming. Helping to save the Earth's resources, however, is another matter, and he plans to install solar panels on the roof of the new winery. This should not only produce 50-60% of its energy requirements, but also be ample to recharge the batteries in the Domaine's electric vehicles. Meanwhile, all newly replanted vines have subsurface irrigation systems, reducing water consumption by 60-70%.

It's a win-win situation. There's less evaporation, water is delivered directly to the vines rather than surrounding weeds, and vine roots are encouraged to plunge more deeply into the soil. The next step is agrivoltaics, and a project to grow 4 hectares of vines under solar panels positioned 5 metres off the ground. This should provide enough energy to power 800 homes with a clear agricultural purpose. "From midday until 4pm, the panels will be horizontal, reducing evaporation and hydric stress, which in turn increases juiciness and freshness in the fruit, and

Fabrice Brunel



*Established: 1954*  
*Employees: 11*  
*2021 turnover: €5 million, of which 80% from export.*



**“You only build a winery once in your life, so you have to try and do it well.”**

gives the wines better balance,” says Fabrice. “If it hails, the panels tilt horizontally, and if frost should hit, we can get through it without too many problems thanks to the couple of degrees of extra warmth the solar panels give us.”

### Freshness and fruit

Since he started, the apprentice winemaker, as Fabrice likes to call himself, has learned a lot. He still can't drive a tractor (he prefers a motorbike) but he's become proficient at blending, and represents the Domaine on all his business trips. His father, who enjoyed both classic Châteauneuf-du-Papes and easy-drinking, quaffable wines, gave the Domaine a distinctive style and its own identity. “We like to make affordable wines with good concentration and plenty of fruit. We think Côtes du Rhône wines should be approachable and packed with fruity flavour, perfect to enjoy on a night out with friends. Wood-based flavours have no place here,” says Fabrice. This is borne out in the Domaine's Châteauneuf-du-Papes, which clearly focus on balance rather than power. The one we tasted had a striking freshness and tension.



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