

Les Wineries du Rhône

Pierre Vidal



PORTRAIT —

RESPONSIBLE CHOICES

Pierre Vidal likes to select, reveal and share. Just over 10 years after it was founded, his business has acquired a new cellar in Courthézon.

Commitments, values and questions: in conversation with a community-minded winemaker.

When the careers master asked what he wanted to be when he left school, Pierre said he'd like to be an oenologist. His teachers burst out laughing. "Half of them didn't know what that meant, and the other half thought I wanted to be an alkie!" laughs Pierre. They all had a good giggle – apart from the physics teacher, who later helped him apply to the business school in Dijon where he studied oenology and took a master's degree in International Wines and Spirits Business.

After his studies, Pierre left for Germany, to work on the Franz Keller estate in the Kaiserstuhl. He then spent a year in London managing a Nicolas wine shop, subsequently joining Castel to look after their Languedoc and Provence wines. Eventually he decided it was time to settle somewhere closer to his wife, a winegrower in Châteauneuf-du-Pape, and took up a position as technical director at Cellier des Dauphins. In 2010 he left to set up his own winery.

Starting with the basics

"When you leave school, you know nothing. I see this time and time again with the young people joining my business." It was a realisation that led Pierre to start right at the bottom of the ladder. Working in a winery means rolling up your sleeves, cleaning the

tanks, pumping the wine and filtering it. That, he says, is where he learned the most. If you want to learn to sell, the best way is to run a shop.

Practice makes perfect.

Pierre and his wife aren't pushing their children to follow in their footsteps: they're more interested in passing on their values. "Wine speaks to everyone," says Pierre. "There's no need for words or special vocabulary, or even to speak the same language when you simply want to share the pleasure. That's what keeps us going. It's what we love about what we do."

Pierre Vidal has three favourite words: select, reveal and share. All his wines are single vineyard selections from some of the Rhône Valley's leading terroirs. His company negotiates agreements with winegrowers, who then adhere to a strictly defined growing regime. Pierre decides when to harvest, the growers take care of vinification in their wineries, and the wines are then aged either at their premises or his. All his wines are sold in bottles, primarily to large-scale retail. Over 50% are organic, designed for a society that consumes less, but better.

New premises

Pierre started his new business from a room in his own home; eight years later, it was bursting at the seams. By 2018 it was time to find new premises. Pierre knew exactly what he wanted – a building that was economical to run and as eco-friendly as possible. It took six months to build one, plus an extra two to install the equipment he needed. But it gave him the opportunity to put his values into practice. "All the companies working on our new winery were French, and we asked them to source French materials – which they did, with a 98% success rate," says Pierre.

He applies the same values to his own business: all Pierre's labels and bottle collars are printed in France. It seems obvious to him that a business should give back to the community whenever possible. Pierre also sponsors a rugby club (the Avenir Sportif de Bédarrides Châteauneuf-du-Pape), has helped a shepherd settle in a valley in his childhood home of Ariège and has signed an

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Established: 2010
Employees: 3
2021 turnover: €4 million, of which 20% from export.



“Covid gave us a chance to strengthen our bonds”

agreement with the ONF (France's national forestry office) to clear paths in the Bassiès Valley where he once managed the refuge.

Time to reassess

Pierre is worried about inflation. The price of empty bottles has risen by some 20-30%, boxes by 50% and capsules by 15%. He also worries about climate change, covid and the war in Ukraine. For the first time in his life, he has stopped making plans, saying he'd rather be like a tortoise, drawing his head and limbs into his shell for protection. He has passed very little of the price increases on to his clients, absorbing most of them to control costs and stay competitive. "We are forward-looking both in our business and on our markets. We'll continue to do what we do best. We'll keep listening and investing, we just won't make any long-term plans," says Pierre. "Who knows what could happen? Everything could change, from one day to the next."



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