



Domaine de Rapatel

Gard, Languedoc, France

History of the Winery

Domaine de Rapatel was created by Gérard Eyraud's grandfather in 1905, to produce his own wine and raise his Nimes goats on land that was once a monastery farm. He kept the name "Rapatel", which means "hot sun" in Catalan. Toward the end of the 1960s, Gérard's father

took over and began sending the grapes to a cooperative. And in 1979, Gérard took his place at the domaine and brought the winemaking back in-house. As a person utterly in love with his land, it was important to Gérard to return the vines "to nature" by removing all chemical entrants in his farming and giving the vines years to recover from their previous treatment before making wine again. In the late 1980s, Gerard bottled his first wines, initially using low-intervention methods with very little sulfur. However, in discovering its odor disagreeable, Gérard stopped using sulfur for good. And so in 1989, he began a grand adventure in natural wine.

JS & Rapatel

We met Gérard at one of the smaller wine fairs in Montpellier, Roots 66. We were immediately struck by the wines, standing apart in style from everything else at the fair, and Gérard's presence. He has the kind of personality that you don't soon forget – passionate, inquisitive, cheeky, and utterly unperturbed by anyone's opinion. He told us that he has no interest in labels, certifications, or being fashionable, he makes his wines the way he likes to make them. He is, simply, Rapatel.

We had the opportunity to visit his estate with our team in early 2023, where we tasted a new range of wines in his traditional Catalan cottage, where he and his wife Christine prepared a feast of local products, including mussels cooked over an open fire pit outside and a roast of bull, a local speciality. The winery itself is in several connected old barns next to Gérard's home, with the oldest dating approximately to the year 930. The tanks used for winemaking are very large, and Gérard uses a system of suspended walkways in the rafters of these old buildings in order to reach the tops of these tanks. The winery, while at first glance might look to be a bit mad-scientist's laboratory, is immaculate, and having watched Gérard move through this space with extreme care for every detail gives a clear understanding of how his wines are so clean and precise, despite the complete lack of intervention in the cellar.

Viticulture

The viticulture can best be described as organically and biodynamically principled, but without any certification, as Gérard is not one for certifications or oversight. He farms holistically, without any chemical entrants. His only preventive or curative measures are the use of horsetail, nettle manure, and sheep's whey sprays. From December to March, dead wood is gathered and pulverized at the foot of the vines to add to the humus, to keep the soils renewed year after year.

The vineyards are spread over 15-20 hectares, with varied exposition. Soils are mostly sandstone and rolled pebbles. Grape varieties include Grenache, Syrah, Carignan, Mourvedre, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Marselan for the reds, comprising most of the estate. Roussanne, Bourboulenc, Chasan, Grenache Blanc, and Marsanne are the whites planted. Vine age ranges from 30-60 years and are pruned in gobelet or royal cords.

Vinification

Vinification takes place with spontaneous fermentation with indigenous yeasts for all wines in inox tanks of fiberglass or lined concrete. Some basic temperature control is used. All wines are aged multiple years in these tanks, some over 10 years before release. Each parcel is vinified separately, blends are assembled 2+ years after the different varieties have settled in tank. All reds are destemmed before fermentation. All whites are direct pressed and cold settled before fermentation. Wines are often bottled on-order or when Gérard simply needs the space, so precise aging times vary from wine-to-wine, but the absolute minimum is 2 years.

Wines



Cuvée Ginie Petnat 2020 The first sparkling wine of the domaine, this is a PetNat made entirely of Clairette, which after being bottled while still fermenting, was aged 3 years in a Champenoise style, slowly being turned until entirely vertical by November 2022 and then disgorged in April 2023. As with all of the Rapatel wines, careful, slow, patient winemaking was employed with this Petnat.



Petite Signature Blanc 2019 Blend Grenache Blanc and Marsanne, assembled 2+ years after fermentation completes and further aged from that point. This and the Grande Signature 2020 are the same blend and parcels, from two different vintages.



Grande Signature Blanc 2020 Blend of Grenache Blanc and Marsanne, assembled 2+ years after fermentation completes and further aged from that point. This and the Petite Signature 2019 are the same blend and parcels from two different vintages.



Cuvée 43 Blanc 2015 A blend of Grenache Blanc 85% and Muscat 15%. The varieties are direct pressed and vinified separately. They are blended after at least 2 years of aging and then are aged for a further 5+ years before release.



Vin de Pays du Gard Rouge 2018 A blend of the 7 red grapes grown at the estate: Syrah, Grenache, Carignan, Mourvèdre, Marselan, Cabernet-Sauvignon, Merlot. All parcels vinified separately and blended 2+ years after aging separately, then further aged together.



Cuvée Facile Grenache 2014 A single variety cuvée of Grenache from the youngest vines of the estate, 20-25 years old



NV Cuvée Caraque 100% Syrah from vintages 2008 and 2009, made as a mini-solera blend. Aged 10+ years before release.



NV Cuvée Bohémienne 100% Grenache from vintages 2011-2015, made as a solera. Some of the oldest vines on the estate are included in this wine, around 60 years old.



2010 C Si Rapatel \$17.50 100% Syrah, aged in tank for 10+ years in tank before release.



2009 Carignan \$17.50 100% Carignan. Daily punch-downs during fermentation give this wine power and structure. Aged 10+ years in tank before release.



2011 Clos Cyril \$24.50 Mostly Cabernet Sauvignon with a little bit of Merlot. Aged 10+ years in tank before release.