



Natural Sancerre

Sébastien Riffault, Sancerre



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A Parisian bistro wine since the post war era, many Sancerre producers gave way to the international trend of the 1990's to make more fruit forward wines, in part because Sancerre was often overly herbaceous. A small group of vigneronns stuck to their guns and continued to make wines that were terroir driven without the off putting scent of, to put it bluntly, a litter box. Ironically, these folks seem like iconoclast today. Sébastien Riffault's father, Etienne, was one of these stalwarts and today, the younger has taken what his forbearers started to become one of the most esteemed and innovative producers in Sancerre.

Sébastien was gifted five acres of vines in 2004. One of the first things he did was apply organic viticulture with one eye towards biodynamics. His efforts so impressed his father that strict organic principles were applied to the rest of the land, another 25 acres. Today, Domaine Etienne & Sébastien Riffault is Ecocertified.



Most of Riffault's vineyards are south facing. Riffault makes several wines, some from 'silex' (flint), limestone and clay. All of the grapes are hand picked and fermented with wild yeasts. With the exception of Les Quarterons, which is vinified in stainless steel tanks, large, older oak barrels are used during fermentation and elevage. In spite of the crisp, intense acidity, all of the wines undergo complete malolactic fermentation. They are bottled without fining or filtration.

Les Quarterons is the most traditional of Riffault's Sancerres. Two of the others, Skeveldra and Akméniné, are made from older vines and have an oxidized quality that is sometimes found in 'natural wines.' While these celebrated wines are for a more specific (read geeky/adventurous) audience, Les Quarterons is a style that all can appreciate and enjoy as it displays the characteristics of both Sauvignon Blanc as it manifests itself in Sancerre and the terroir itself.

Sébastien Riffault Sancerre Les Quarterons, 2010

Quarterons is made from chalk dominated, rocky soil. Medium-bodied with floral and mineral aromas suggestive of geraniums and chalk, grapefruit rind and almond water on the palate, this is a Sancerre with immense finesse.

Cuvée Akméniné is completely different. In Lithuania (Sébastien's wife is from Lithuania), it means made from stone and indeed, the wine comes from a three-acre parcel of 35-year-old Sauvignon Blanc vines. The soil is composed of limestone rocks called 'caillottes.' The wine was aged in casks for six to nine months and bottled without additional sulphur.

Sébastien Riffault Sancerre Cuvée 'Akméniné,' 2009

Akméniné has an amber color, a preview of the conglomerate of flavors that are to come. Rich yet at the same time lively on the palate with apple skin, citrus, honey and herbs interspersed by a smoky minerality, this Sancerre is not just for the audacious but for all who want to a palate expanding experience.

Also, check by famed blog Wine Terroirs: www.wineterroirs.com/2007/04/riffault_sancer.html