

Domaine Pierre Jean Villa

Saint Joseph



Pierre Jean Villa is a solid, well-built man, and maybe that's why he gravitates toward elegance in wine. He came from the Rhône Valley but learned to make wine in Burgundy, which may also explain his bent for finesse. He first learned the ropes working at Mommessin's Clos de Tart. After Boisset bought the Mommessin firm, Pierre Jean worked in Beaujolais and then for three years at Domaine de la Vougeraie with Pascal Marchand.

In 2003 he returned to the Rhône and became the manager for Vins de Viennes. This is the company that Yves Cuilleron, Pierre Gaillard, and François Villard created to resurrect the ancient vineyard area of Seyssuel, just north of Vienne on the left bank, as well as to do business as a *négociant*. For seven years Pierre Jean handled the administration and winemaking at the firm, eventually becoming the fourth partner. The other partners had their own domains to run; Vins de Viennes was Pierre Jean's bailiwick, and he made it what it is today.

In 2009, after a lot of thought, he handed in his keys and started his own domain from scratch. He began with parcels in St Joseph, Condrieu, and Côte-Rôtie, plus he had a parcel in Seyssuel for his Esprit d'Antan. He made his first vintage at Domaine Jean-Michel Gerin while converting an abandoned fruit processing building in Chavanay into a winery.

In 2013 a sharp young man named Justin knocked on his door in Chavanay to ask for a job. He had degrees in both viticulture and wine making from Toulouse and Montpellier, and he was doing a *stage* with Yves Cuilleron at the latter's nearby domain. Villa declined; he could just manage on his own. Justin returned several times and made it quite clear that he wanted to work here and nowhere else. Pierre Jean said okay, we'll give it a trial run.

Now Justin is a full-time employee and Pierre Jean says it's the best decision he's made since starting off on his own. Thanks to this persistent young man -- joined recently by another one named Brian -- the domain has been able to farm its 14 hectares, a mix of old and new plantations, in an increasingly organic manner and with ever more detail. Of course, it's the details that count. In 2017, experiments began on the hillside parcels using a special mulch under certain vines and sowing sedum under others to see if either worked well enough to replace herbicide, which would be the final step for 100% organic farming. Sedum seems to work the best--it takes little water, it grows low to the ground and so doesn't attract humidity, and it checks erosion. Plus, the stuff is local--it grows on the rock walls!

Pierre Jean likes his wines, of course, but it's the vineyard work and the progress he is making with cutting edge organics that he is most proud of."

The cellar work remains hands off: spontaneous ferments--many with a percentage of stems, some without any, a decision taken at each harvest--normally no fining or filtration and racking and bottling is done according to the lunar calendar. The domain started in 2009 with a cellar full of new barrels, but by vintage 2015 Pierre-Jean managed to transition to having most of his *élevages* take place in older barrels. Going forward, this will be the norm, with now and again a small percentage of new replacement barrels entering the cellar.

Stylistically, Pierre Jean's wines are clean, pure, deep, mineral and elegant.

Geological/Lieux-Dits Map of Côte-Rôtie: <http://cote-rotie.com/presentation/sols.html>"><http://cote-rotie.com/presentation/sols.html>

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