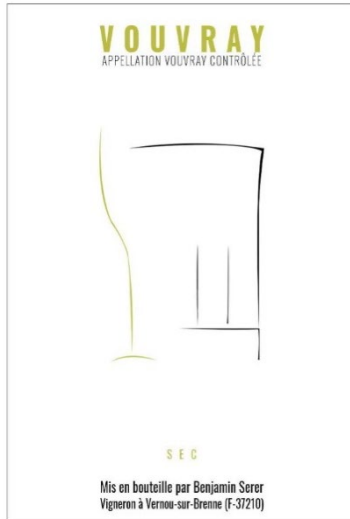


Benjamin Serer

Vouvray



*Bought a bottle of Vouvray
and poured out its bouquet
of the French countryside
on the plains of Middle America
and that fragrance
floods over me
wafts me back
to that rainy hillside
by the banks of the Loire
Vouvray tiny village
where I sat with rucksack
twenty-eight years old
seafarer student
uncorking the local bottle
with its captured scent of spring
fresh wet flowers
in first spring rain
falling lightly now
upon me*

--Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Drinking French Wine in Middle America, first stanza

Benjamin Serer originally wanted to be a chef. He got as far up the ladder as opening a restaurant in Switzerland for the Alain Ducasse Group and then cooking at Ducasse's Le Louis XV in Monaco for a year. The latter was an intensely competitive experience: when he wasn't sleeping, he was in that kitchen, and at some point the joy just went out of it.

He returned to his native Tours in 2006 and opened a brasserie, which he managed until 2017. At lunch, he cooked; at dinner, he ran the front of the house as a wine bar (evenings, the kitchen simply served platters of charcuterie and cheese). He became more and more intrigued with wine, an interest encouraged by growers whom he had befriended, and eventually he enrolled in the wine school in Amboise. Key internships followed with Mathieu Cosme, Vincent Carême, and Philippe Foreau of Domaine du Clos Naudin.

In 2019 he took a leap of faith and rented 1.6 hectares of vines. These averaged 50-years of age and grew on what's known as the *première côte* (the first south-facing hillside rising above the Loire) in the commune of Vouvray. He made one wine in that vintage, labeling it simply as Le Sec.

In the same year he took a job managing 18 hectares of vines on the plateau of Vernou-sur-Brenne for a friend who had just bought them from a retiring vigneron. The understanding was that Benjamin would come to know the vines while at the same time putting together finances in order to buy what most appealed. In November of 2022 he did just that, choosing several choice parcels—one a stone's throw from Hüet's famous Clos du Bourg parcel—totaling 5.4 hectares. The following year he quit the viticultural gig (his friend sold the remaining parcels to others) and went full time on his own domaine, which now came to 7 hectares or 17.29 acres in Vouvray and Vernou-sur-Brenne.

Right away he started farming organically and expects to be fully certified in 2026. In the cellar, he's equally mindful. Prior to 2019, he had tried his hand at making natural wines with a number of varieties and came away agreeing with Friuli's Josko Gravner that in minimal doses at the right time, SO₂ was the sole addition needed during the winemaking process. For Benjamin, the right time is at bottling, when the wine leaves his care.

Until then, he doesn't use SO₂, particularly not at pressing--which is often done to secure healthy juice--because it dumbs down the wine. Consequently, even though he has a cool cellar burrowed into a hillside, he frequently sees malolactic fermentation starting with or soon after the start of his alcoholic ferments (all ferments are spontaneous). It's important to understand that he doesn't aim for ML, but neither does he stop it if it occurs. He has learned that if the malolactic fermentation happens early in the alcoholic transformation, then it adds a lot while taking away only a little (it's when ML starts at the end, or after, alcoholic fermentation that it results in a perceived lack of acidity and a heaviness in Vouvray). To compensate, he often chooses to harvest on the early side and to let his alcoholic fermentations go for extended times to eat up all sugars. The result is a wine with good stability, enabling him to forgo filtration and to use only a touch of SO₂ at the end.

He favors vinifications in steel and in neutral 500L barrels. He doesn't fine and only filters lightly if a wine doesn't undergo ML and has enough residual sugar to be of concern. For operations in cellar and in vineyard, he follows the lunar calendar, but he's quick to say that he's not a biodynamic farmer, that such steps take years of observation and he hasn't reached that point of decision yet.