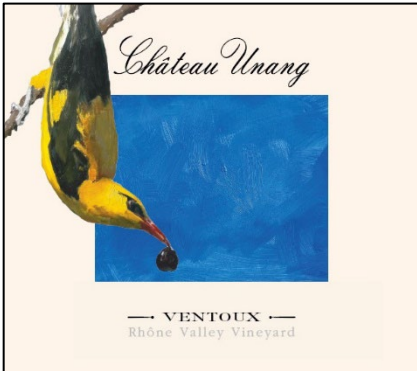


# Château Unang (organic\*)

## Ventoux



In 867, the Bishop of Venasque was given Château Unang, then known as Villa Unango. Nestled amid woodland on the flank of a hill high above a gorge, it faced east, basking in the rising sun until the sun began its descent over the hilltop to set in the west. The estate was almost certainly already old in 867. It may well have once been a Roman villa, for the Romans were in the neighboring village of Methamis. One could speculate further and suggest that if it were once a Roman villa, then it may have been built upon a former Greek villa—for the Greeks first came to the Rhone Valley in the mid-7th century BC and *Unango*, a most unFrench word,

bears an interesting resemblance to the ancient Greek word for...wine vessel.

The bishop was given the estate because the nearby village of Venasque was the capital of the Comtat Venaissin until 1320, when the seat of government moved to Carpentras. The Venaissin state (comtat) was an independent enclave within France that came to house the Roman Curia and eventually gave rise to the Wine of the Pope, ie, Châteauneuf-du-Pape. For over 800 years Unang was passed down from one bishop to another, until it was sold at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (while Papal control of the Comtat continued until 1791, when France absorbed the enclave following the Revolution). Presumably, since the 9<sup>th</sup> century, a cross has stood on top of Unang's hill.

In the late 18th century, an Italian aristocrat married into the family that owned Unang. Subsequently, the château was spruced up with a facelift, and a formal garden was designed to step down the hillside, following the path of a natural spring. Three terraced gardens were planted, each anchored by a fountain fed from the spring. In 1882 a six-meter wooden cross was mounted on a stone plinth on the hilltop, a restoration of an earlier cross. Frustratingly, the original date of the cross and other inscriptions in the stone have weathered away; much of that history, along with the origins of the name Unang, has been lost.

The property sits deep in the tail end of the Nesque Valley, named after the Nesque River that flows out of the high Vaucluse Plateau to the east and runs through a rugged limestone gorge. Unang is an isolated, self-contained do- maine with, interestingly enough, its own geological category: *les sables d'Unang*. This refers to a particular type of sandy soil that lies ovetop limestone. Apart from Unang's hillside, pockets of the sands of Unang are also found in the Gigondas AOC.

Unang's vineyards all grow on site, mostly facing east with some to the south between 220 and 320 meters above sea level. Significantly, all are surrounded by forest, promoting biodiversity, enabling James to work organically without worry about neighbors who farm conventionally, and promoting cooler temperatures. It's cooler here than many other parts of the Ventoux appellation, and certainly cooler than the Rhône Valley floor to the west. The Giant of Provence, Mount Ventoux, stands guard to the north, its bald dome of white limestone lending it all the gravitas a guardian needs. In 1990, UNESCO recognized the mountain as a World Heritage Site.

When James and Joanna King bought Unang in 2001, there were twenty hectares (49 acres) of vines in various parcels up and down the hillside, and in varying degrees of health. Six hectares (15 acres) of poorly sited and/or diseased vines were torn out, and a new cellar was put in. In 2003, James slowly began to replant, and he plans to grow to eighteen hectares of vines, or a little more than forty-four acres. The white varieties grow farthest down the hillside in the coolest zone, while the reds occupy the mid and upper slopes. What James likes in wine is elegance and depth, and his site enables him to make such wines par excellence. These are high-altitude, limestone wines of superb freshness, vigor, and minerality.

Harvesting under the Kings has been by hand from the beginning. In 2006, all use of pesticides and herbicides were discarded, and in the years that followed the \*domaine received organic certification in Europe from Ecocert (note that Unang is not certified in America by the USDA). . Beginning in 2023, James began implementing biodynamic treatments, something he'd been thinking about for a number of years. Initially, he's starting with the two classics: horn compost to aid root health and promote depth; and quartz to aid photosynthesis. He's also considering tisane treatments such as chamomile and willow (chamomile seems to help with the stress of drought, and willow has shown promise as a preventative against downey and powdery mildew).

[www.chateauunang.com](http://www.chateauunang.com)