

Hugo & Pauline Villa

Saint Joseph



Hugo and Pauline Villa grew up immersed in wine culture in the northern Rhône village of Chavanay. Grower Pierre-Jean Villa was their father and his world became theirs, albeit with a tweak: while they followed in his footsteps, they consciously embarked on making wines reflective of their generation. Theirs emphasize camaraderie, joy and drinkability—bistro wines, they say, in contrast to Dad’s more serious and stern stuff meant for the cellar and fine tablecloths.

It started with Syrah, the northern Rhône’s iconic variety: how to define it? They had a parcel planted in the 1970s in the hills of Saint-Julien-en-Saint-Alban, down at the southern end of the northern Rhône, and they elected to make a crisp, open style of Syrah, one that was more “chill” than their father’s renditions (and that does indeed benefit from a chill!). Thus was born their cuvée *Histoire des Gosses*, or story of the kids.

Next came a decision with one little plot of vines in the center of the long St Joe appellation, up on the plateau in Ardoix, planted to Syrah, Gamay and Viognier. Pierre-Jean had recently acquired this plot, planted in the 1990s and pruned ever since with haphazard discipline, and he was going to rip out the vines to replant entirely with Syrah. But it was a plot he had already determined to give to his kids, and when he told them of his plan they said hang on, that’s a bit severe. They wanted to prune those mature vines carefully, harvest the whole plot at once, and co-ferment the grapes to see what might come of it. This didn’t accord with PJ’s way of thinking, but he was smart enough to back off. In this manner came about the cuvée *Chemin de la Croisette*, or a path in the road.

And so it went, parcel by parcel—for the vines played a role in these decisions as much as Hugo and Pauline’s own proclivities. Nowadays they work with a total of eight hectares, or just about 20 acres. Of those hectares, two they own, two they rent long term, and from four they buy grapes farmed by people they know. Their debut vintage was 2022.

Hugo, the eldest, did studies in winemaking and viticulture, and went on to do internships in Burgundy and in Terrasses du Larzac (at Domaine Pas de L’Escalette) before joining his father at the domaine just prior to the pandemic. Pauline studied commerce in Lyon and then Dijon for international trade of wine and spirits, followed by a two-year stint in a wine store in Vienne.

The wines are made in a new winery in Chavanay, designed by their father. It’s where he makes his own wines under the label of Pierre-Jean Villa. It has a state of the art screw press, a temperature-controlled grape reception room, various types of fermenters, plus a chilled barrel room full of all manner of aging vessels. Like dad, Pauline and Hugo are focused on farming without pesticides, herbicides or synthetic fungicides, and in developing agroforestry within their parcels.

<https://hpvilla.fr/en/accueil-english/>