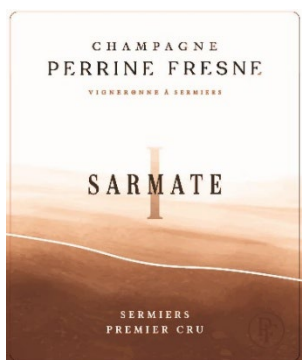


Champagne Perrine Fresne

Sermiers



Perrine Fresne (*frein*) made her first wine in Sermiers with the 2020 harvest. She inherited 7.5 acres but only used her finest plots amounting to 2.5 acres to make three cuvées, the foremost of them being “Sarmate I”. *Sarmate* refers to an inhabitant of Sermiers, and the Roman numeral one signifies her first edition of this cuvée, buttressed with reserve wine from her father but made with the intent to express the best of her village in that vintage. She created a label premised on topography and the colors of autumn, her favorite season.

She pruned for moderate yields, used only the first pressing of the grapes, and let the wine rest on its lees in tanks for a nice relaxed *élevage* of ten months before bottling for the secondary fermentation. At disgorgement, she gave it two grams of sugar. She grew up helping her father in the vines and subsequently spent five years working with grower Champagne Nominé Renard while passing WSET levels 2 and 3 and earning degrees in wine marketing in Reims and winery management in Avize. Her father worked the French circuit of consumer-direct fairs and reliably sold what he produced. It's important to understand that Perrine stood to inherit a successful family business. The moral problem confronting her was that she couldn't get behind the product, so she elected to put the domaine on a starkly different course with all of its unknowns and obvious risks. She moved to a far more progressive viticulture program, to a much more Burgundian approach in the cellar, and to completely re-branding the business in her own name. With Sarmate I, she wanted a vinous Champagne above all.

Her father worked some 22 acres that he split among his two brothers and his daughter upon his retirement. Perrine's 7.5 acres divide into 11 lieux-dits, breaking down into 26 plots with about 90% of that growing in Sermiers, a village on the southern tail of the Petit Montagne de Reims; the remainder is in neighboring Viller aux Noeuds. Both are premier cru communes on the cool northern side of the greater Montagne de Reims, a mountain best described as a forested plateau, with vines on its various flanks. The terroir of Sermiers, located in a bowl with a notably cool microclimate, has a lot of sand in its limestone soils on top of chalk bedrock, and Pinot Meunier is a variety that thrives in cooler temperatures and lighter soils. Her 7.5 acres are consequently composed of roughly 50% Meunier, 30% Pinot Noir, and 20% Chardonnay. Their average age is 45 years.

She works closely with her husband Kevin, whose day job is as export manager at a small house in the Marne Valley. She is one of three *récoltants-manipulants* in Sermiers, a village dominated by a co-op (by contrast, Écueil, just down the mountain, bursts at the seams with RMs), and the only woman among them. In the vines, she quit all use of pesticides immediately, and the 2.5 acres she's currently reserved for herself are practically free of herbicides. She's determined to stop all herbicides as soon as resources permit investments in new machinery and additional labor. Concerning fungicides, she adapts to each season, with a less is more approach. She's altogether interested in organic and biodynamic treatments but is wary of certifying agencies and being hamstrung by their often overly restrictive policies.

After Sarmate I, several parcels stood out to her with the quality of their grapes, and now she makes single plot wines when a year merits their being singled out. The ethic with them is one plot, one grape and one year. In the cellar, in terms of barrels, she favors neutral 228L and 450L barrels from Burgundy's Côte de Beaune (her current batch came from Domaine Leflaive), but she continues to use steel for some ferments and could well age another rendition of Sarmate entirely in steel, as she did with number 1, if she thought the year called for it. In warm years, she tries to inhibit malolactic fermentation and in cold years she encourages it. She's only steadfast about racking; that's always done by gravity.