

Exclusive: St.-Cosme's Louis Barruol Purchases Vinsobres Estate in Southern Rhône

The owner of the Gigondas powerhouse believes the 50-year-old vines have great promise



Château de Rouanne's old vines enjoy a high elevation at the north end of the southern Rhône Valley, which means cooler temperatures. (Yannick Libourel)

By James Molesworth
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Louis Barruol, owner and vigneron of Château de St.-Cosme in France's Gigondas appellation, has purchased the Château de Rouanne estate in neighboring Vinsobres. The historic estate totals 177 acres, including 153 acres of vines, along with a cellar and buildings dating to the early 19th century. The property borders domaines Chaume-Arnaud, Jaume and Coriançon. The purchase price was not disclosed.

"It reminds me a lot of St.-Cosme when I took over in 1992," Barruol told Wine Spectator. "It's an unknown sleeping beauty waiting for a vigneron to truly love it."

Barruol is already plenty busy. At St.-Cosme he oversees production at the Gigondas appellation's flagship estate. He also has a négociant arm that produces wines from both the Southern and Northern Rhône and is working on a new vine nursery in Gigondas that will be used to propagate selection massale cuttings for the appellation. He also co-founded Forge Cellars in New York's Finger Lakes, producing outstanding Riesling and Pinot Noir.

But the opportunity to renovate Rouanne was too good to turn down. "It's not that I'm bored," said Barruol with a light laugh. "But I do like a new project. And I've known the fruit from this estate, buying it for many years for my Côtes du Rhône. I think the terroir is fantastic. The cellar is in good shape. I think we can do some really good things here."

First on the to-do list is getting the vineyards back into full production. Barruol estimates that 30 percent of the vines are dead and none have been replaced in over 20 years.

"But the vines that are here were planted in the 1960s, and are really good material, with Grenache, Syrah and some Mourvèdre," said Barruol. "We are also converting immediately to organic [farming]. The soils are a limestone and sandy marl mix—just perfect. And the slope of the vineyard, with the forest at the top to help regulate temperatures, reminds me of Clos des Lambrays [in Burgundy]." Barruol assisted with the winemaking for the 2018 vintage, which will be released later this year.

Vinsobres was elevated to AOC status in 2005. Located at a cool elevation above the valley, it has provided an intriguing opportunity for vintners seeking to mitigate the effects of climate change; along with Barruol, the Perrin family of Château de Beaucastel have made considerable investments in the area. The appellation totals 2,965 acres, but only about 1,900 are currently planted.