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# Sommelier INDIA

## THE WINE MAGAZINE

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# Rhône Valley's new rising star

Mira Advani Honeycutt is impressed by the wines of the Ventoux region in the southern Rhône



Château Pesquié's 220-acre vineyard is farmed to organic and biodynamic practices. Photo: Courtesy Château Pesquié



Château Pesquié is one of Ventoux's oldest wineries with an annual production of 50,000 cases

**W**ines from the Ventoux region made a splash at the recent Hospice du Rhône (HdR) three-day event in Paso Robles, California. Among the four seminars scheduled, the one on Ventoux titled, "Red Hot Cause It's Cool" was presented by a collective of five winemakers from Ventoux.

That's when I met Frédéric Chaudière, one of the seminar panelists and president of Ventoux AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée). The third-generation winemaker at his family's Château Pesquié, Chaudière shared with me the current stage of negotiations with Mumbai-based wine and spirits importer, Vishal Kadakia of The Wine Park, who he had met at the Millésime Bio fair in Montpellier, France last March. "Vishal Kadakia is very much a Rhône lover and he's looking for hidden gems," Chaudière told me when we sat down at lunch during the Hospice du Rhône weekend. At the time of this story's deadline, the hopeful Chaudière noted in an email exchange: "We are in advanced discussion."

Château Pesquié is one of Ventoux's oldest wineries among a handful that were exporting wine earlier on. With 75% of their 50,000 annual-case production dedicated to exports in some 40 countries, it was only natural for the Chaudière family to explore possibilities in India.

Frédéric's grandparents, René and Odette Bastide founded the winery in 1971 in the commune of Mormoiron. Two years later, in 1973, the Ventoux AOC was established as Côtes du Ventoux, which was later renamed, Ventoux in 2009. In 1985, Paul and Edith Chaudière took over and in 2003 passed the torch to their sons Frédéric and Alexandre. Château Pesquié's 220-acre vineyard is farmed to organic and biodynamic practices with



plantings of Grenache, Syrah, Mourvedre, Carignan and Cinsault among the reds as well as whites such as Clairette, Grenache Blanc and Bourbelenc.

At the foot of Mont Ventoux, Château Pesquié's vineyards enjoy cool temperatures from the influence of the Alps and the warmth of sunshine from Provence. This combination plus the multiple variety of soils from limestone and gravelly clay to sand and blue marl is what gives freshness, delicacy and minerality to the wines. The region is also the most late-ripening terroir of the southern Rhône Valley. This, however, has shifted in recent years due to climate change.

"My father used to start harvest at the end of September; now we start around the 10th of September," Chaudière commented, signifying his vineyard enjoys an advantageous impact from global warming. "Harvest is late and that's the good side."

**In 1985, Paul and Edith Chaudière took over the winery and in 2003 passed the torch to their sons Frédéric and Alexandre**

At the Hospice du Rhône seminar tasting, Chaudière presented two wines. A ruby-hued blend of Grenache and Cinsault from the Single Vineyards series, the **2019 Silica** displayed floral elegance with a compote of fresh berries on the palate. The **2020 Quintessence**, a beguiling blend of Roussanne and Clairette, was crisp and bright with laser-focused salinity expressing the region's chalky soils. Both wines represent the Ventoux region's classic freshness with waves of berry fruit flavours and vibrant acidity.

Ventoux for a long time has been under the shadow of its celebrated neighboring appellations such as Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Gigondas, Beaume de Venise and Tavel among others. "Our area remained known for bulk wines made just for the locals," Chaudière explained. "In the late 80s, the winemakers started thinking that we have something special that no one pays attention to." So, the

The Chaudière family, Frédéric, Edith, Paul and Alexandre, owners of Château Pesquié



Line-up of the lighter, more fruit-driven reds, whites and rosés from Château Pesquié

## WINES OF CHÂTEAU PESQUIÉ

### Single Vineyards

Red Ascencio – Grenache and Syrah  
Artemia – Syrah and Grenache  
Silica – Grenache and Cinsault  
Juliette – Clairette and Grenache Blanc

### Quintessence

Rosé – Mourvedre, Cinsault and Clairette  
Red – Syrah and Grenache  
White – Roussanne and Clairette

### Terrasses

Rosé – Cinsault, Grenache and Syrah  
Red – Grenache and Syrah  
White – Viognier, Grenache Blanc, Roussanne and Clairette

movement shifted from winegrowers to family-owned estates making their own wines with modern techniques.

While Syrah rules in the Northern Rhône Valley, Grenache leads in the southern part followed by Syrah and Mourvedre plantings, which have been catching up in recent years. Ventoux's red wine blends lead the local production with 54% of all the wines, followed by rosés which make up 40% and a small 6% of white wine blends. Ventoux's annual 6.5 million-gallon wine is produced from 14,000 acres of vineyard planting.

The region's collection of 150 wineries spread through 51 communes (villages) represent 10% of the Rhône Valley's production. These are mostly family-owned and sell their wines in local markets.

"There's definitely a big trend towards making better wine among the more ambitious winemakers," Chaudière noted. And the affordability of land here has attracted winemakers from other parts of France as well as from Germany, Canada and America.

"Many nationalities have come in. It's easier for them to acquire land. Basically, it's 15 times cheaper to buy in Ventoux than Châteauneuf-du-Pape," Chaudière pointed out.

Stressing the quality and affordability of Ventoux wines in the price range of US\$15 to \$25, Chaudière said, "There are plenty of

good wines at \$15 for everyday drinking." Higher-priced wines are also produced but none are more than \$100. "

Chaudière credits wine critic Jeb Dunnuck's support for the success of Ventoux wines. "He saw the potential and started giving us 95 to 97 points, which had never happened before," said Chaudière. In addition, Robert Parker's 'The Wine Advocate' and the 'Wine Enthusiast' also showered 95-plus points on Ventoux wines. "The French are also supportive," Chaudière added.

All of this attention from the wine media has added to the allure of Ventoux, a region most people associate with the Tour de France and Mont Ventoux, and the region's designation as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. But now Ventoux is emerging as Rhône Valley's new rising star.

So, are we on the verge of a Ventoux revolution? "We are definitely starting to be on the radar," said Chaudière. "It's just a matter of letting it be known to the rest of the world."

A breakthrough region, producing noble wines, France's Ventoux region has been the least exploited Rhône Valley appellation. But perhaps not for long. If Ventoux is discovered by Indian enophiles, it will be a treat for consumers when they get a taste of the lighter, more fruit-driven reds, whites and rosés from the southeastern part of the Rhône Valley. ♦