

PENTA

E. Guigal Is Adding a Fourth ‘La-La’ to Its Famed Stable of Cote- Roties



Parcelle de Fongeant in the La Reynarde vineyard of the Côte-Rôtie appellation in Ampuis France. This vineyard is sourcing Guigal's fourth "la-la," highly sought-after wines from the appellation.
Courtesy of Domaine E. Guigal

The French wine producer E. Guigal's three powerful and highly desired single-vineyard Côte-Rôtie wines from the northern Rhône valley are soon to be joined by a fourth produced from another single-vineyard site from the region.

Soon, but actually not so soon. The vineyard known as La Reynarde was planted in 2010 when third-generation owner and winemaker Philippe Guigal's twin sons were born, their father says. Because of the challenges of farming the notoriously steep, rugged slopes of Côte-Rôtie's 600 acres, plus rules governing the appellation, it took until 2018 for the entire vineyard to be planted.

Add to that the required three years for the vines to produce fruit, plus 40-plus months of aging in oak barrels, and the first vintage from La Reynarde will be released to the waiting public in 2026, Philippe says.

The real question is, what will it be like? E. Guigal's three current single-vineyard Côte-Rôties are legendary among those who love the deep-fruited, earthy, Syrah wines of the northern Rhône. Each has a singular profile.

Before describing the aromas and flavors of these wines, some history and perspective may be helpful. Most Côte-Rôtie producers make wines from grapes grown in various vineyards throughout the appellation, so E. Guigal's single-vineyard approach was initially a departure that other winemakers have since followed.

The first from E. Guigal was La Mouline, a wine made from a 2.5-acre site that's existed for 2,400 years with vines planted 90 years ago. It was bought in 1963 by Etienne Guigal, Philippe's grandfather (and the E. in the company's name). The first vintage was made in 1966.



Philippe Guigal, third-generation winemaker at E. Guigal winery in Ampuis, France.

The second, La Turquie, was “the brilliant idea of my dad (Marcel), to give birth again to a legendary terroir of Côte-Rôtie,” Philippe says. Wines were produced from this 2.5-acre vineyard with southern exposure on a slope known as Côte Brune in 1935, and were “very highly regarded,” but the land didn’t produce another single-vineyard wine until 1985 under Marcel’s direction.

La Landonne is a 5.7-acre vineyard created by Marcel over a 10-year period through acquisitions from small growers and then replanted in 1975, the year Philippe was born. The first vintage was 1978.

The intensely aromatic and complex taste of these three wines all reflect Côte-Rôtie, but otherwise, “they have very little in common,” Philippe says.

La Mouline, which is from the appellation’s southern slopes known as Côte Blonde, is known for its elegance and finesse—considered “the most Burgundian of the three,” Philippe says—while La Turquie is more exotic and spicy, but with a polished sensibility. Aromas in both wines have the floral hints of Viognier, a white grape that grows in their vineyards (representing 11% of La Mouline and 7% of La Turquie) and is permitted in small quantities alongside Syrah in Côte-Rôtie.

La Landonne, which alone of the three is produced with whole clusters of grapes grown on a steep slope of limestone and clay on Côte Brune, is a “big wine, with big tannins,” Philippe says. This powerful wine has a “scorched earth” quality about it, in a great way.



Picking grapes at harvest in La Reynarde. Domaine E. Guigal

Collectively, these wines—all aged for 42 months in new oak barrels made at Guigal—are produced in quantities of less than 700 cases each a year and are known as the “La-Las.” Their quality and low yield have made them “some of the most sought-after bottles in the world,” according to wine writer Jancis Robinson.

No surprise then that these wines command prices upward of US\$400 a bottle, even for the most recent, 2020 vintages, according to the global retail site wine-researcher.com.

As for La Reynarde? In style it will be closer to La Landonne, produced with whole clusters of grapes, which will give the wines power, structure, and great ageability. But, it will taste somewhere between La Turquie and La Landonne, with an easy, more open approach than La Landonne, Philippe says. “It’s a very interesting balance—the *terroir* is amazing.”

Since Etienne Guigal founded his eponymous winery in the tiny village of Ampuis, France, in 1946, it has been run by family members. Even today, with annual production of 5 million bottles—half of which are in its dependably good and omnipresent Côte du Rhône (produced largely from purchased grapes)—Guigal is a tightly run family operation.

Philippe’s twins, Etienne and Charles, are only 13—going on 14 in December—but early signs point to the fact they likely will run E. Guigal in the coming decades—when the first vintage of La Reynarde has reached its optimum age.

Etienne—his great-grandfather’s namesake—is already thinking about oenology, ready to follow in his father’s footsteps, Philippe says. Charles is thinking more about commercial strategy and business. Philippe doesn’t think it odd that his boys already have ideas about their future, as he also was sure, even before age 13, that he wanted to be a winemaker.

“In our family, it’s not a job, it’s a passion,” Phillippe says. “If you’re passionate, [the work] doesn’t stop at night and during the weekends. We live with the winery, with the winemaking. During the harvest, it’s 20 hours a day ... the kids come, we eat at the winery, we don’t have time to go back home. It’s a family business.”