

Mas de Valériole, “Vé” Rosé IGP Méditerranée



Just upstream of the ancient city of Arles, the mighty Rhône abruptly forks, and its resultant two arms—the southeasterly-flowing Grand Rhône and the southwesterly-flowing Petit Rhône—encircle the largest river delta in western Europe: the Camargue. The area is renowned for its distinctive agricultural products: salt, from vast marshes that hug the Mediterranean; varyingly hued and deeply nutty wild rice; and, of course, wine. Only a handful of wineries exist here, and Mas de Valériole—built in the 15th century and owned by the lovely and dynamic Michel family since the late 1950s—is the Camargue’s leading light, working their vineyards organically since 2006 and producing whites, reds, and, most notably, rosés that combine precision with soulfulness in irresistible fashion. “Vé” is the family’s flagship rosé, produced primarily from the local drought-resistant Caladoc variety in a light, vibrant, breezy style that nods to classic Provence rosé yet feels very Camarguais in its underlying salinity.

Produced from a variety of cepages, including Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, plus crossings like Caladoc (Grenache and Malbec) and Marselan (Grenache and Cabernet Sauvignon) which are particularly well-suited to the Camargue’s climate, Mas de Valériole’s wines combine the breezy freshness one expects from Provence with a sense of wildness and an underlying salinity that is very Camarguais.

Neal Rosenthal

Winery

Ten miles due south of Arles, the Michel family stewards Mas de Valériole, a 45-hectare estate founded in the early 15th century and purchased by the Michels in the late 1950s. Mas de Valériole’s vineyards, which today comprise 33 of their 45 hectares, encompass a variety of soil types: sand, clay, limestone, and alluvial loam deposited by the Rhône. Steady wind from the Mediterranean mitigates the Provence heat, facilitating their organic approach to farming (certified as such) and nicely moderating the wines’ alcohol levels.

Winemaking

Harvested at night for maximum coolness of fruit; lightly macerated before pressing; fermented at a controlled temperature; aged on fine lees in stainless steel for 4-5 months before bottling.

Wine

“Vé”—a local Provençal expression meaning “Look at that!”—is a blend of 80% Caladoc (a crossing of Grenache and Malbec particularly well suited to southern France’s drought conditions) and 20% Merlot, from soils of sand and loam, pressed gently after a very brief period of cold maceration. It offers bright, salt-tinged flavors of raspberry and ripe citrus fruits on a refreshingly low-alcohol frame, with a lengthy, clinging finish befitting a wine costing far more.

Vineyards

Region: Provence

Appellation: IGP Méditerranée

Soil: limestone, clay, sand, and silt deposited by the Rhône

Age: 15 years on average

Eco-Practices: Certified organic

Winemaking

Varietals: 80% Caladoc (a crossing of Grenache and Malbec), 20% Merlot

Aging: 4-5 months in stainless steel on the fine lees