

LES VIGNERONS D'ESTÉZARGUES

A WOMEN-LED WINERY

Year Founded: 1965

Region: Estézargues, Rhone Valley, Southern France

Winemaker and Owner:
Cooperative cellar of 12 local growers, led by Armelle Rouault

Fun Fact: “Kiffe” is a common word used in French that refers to something that brings a sense of well-being and happiness.

Cool Fact #2: Estézargues is one of the rare cooperatives of this size (if not the only one) whose growers are nearly all certified organic and make wines without any additions, save for the occasional sulfur at bottling.

-Organic, Natural-

Just some twenty minutes from the famed medieval city of Avignon (Chateauneuf du Pape, anyone?), in an eponymous village, Les Vignerons d'Estézargues operates a very rare kind of co-operative. The caves co-op, as they call them in France, are a traditional and still very important part of the wine landscape, especially in the South, as sharing know-how and the cost of cellar space and equipment brings important synergies to the participating growers. In most cases, the co-ops make conventional wines in large batches and process grapes from many different vineyards together, focusing on quantity and cost-efficiency rather than quality or environmental respect. Les Vignerons D' Estézargues, on the other hand, is a whole different animal on both accounts. Estézargues was established in 1965 and, as early as the 1980s, shifted towards natural winemaking thanks to the arrival of Jean-François Nicq, a talented winemaker influenced by the ideas of natural wine legends like Marcel Lapiere. Nicq (now making wine in his own boutique Domaine des Foulards Rouges in Roussillon) put the cave firmly on track towards respectful farming and practically no additives in the cellar. No commercial yeast, no enzymes, no gum arabic, no acidifiers and also almost no sulfur. “We use a minimal amount of SO2 at bottling if needed, to make sure the wines are safe even when exported overseas, but that’s it,” says Armelle Rouault, Estézargues’ congenial current CEO and winemaker. Funnily enough, the company never felt the need to label themselves as vin naturel (“and we’re not going to start now, all of a sudden,” Armelle adds), but it’s a bit of a trade secret nevertheless: the well-informed patrons of Parisian bars as well as buyers overseas know that choosing an Estézargues label equals no-BS-added honest bottles.



2022 ‘Kiffe’ Red Wine

64% Carignan, 24% Grenache, 7% Clairette, 5% Syrah. This juicy medium-bodied red comes to us from the South of France, near the Rhône Valley. Planted to stony soils, these super old-vine grapes are hand-harvested, native yeast fermented and macerated for 10 days then left on their lees for 7 months in cement. The wine is then unfinned and unfiltered at bottling. It tastes of happiness and sunshine, with bright red and blue fruit on a medium, mouthcoating frame that ends with a long delicious finish.

