

HERRI MINA

Irouléguay

Irouléguay, an AOC since 1970, is a tiny Basque appellation on the foothills of the Pyrenees in south west France. Vineyards are few and far between in this picturesque green rolling farmland. Many of the domaines are virtually inaccessible, located up tortuous single-lane tracks with sweeping views over the valleys below. The appellation is composed of sloping vineyards, 65% of which are cultivated in terraces, where the harvest is carried out by hand.

Château Pétrus Winemaker Returns To His Roots

About 250 acres of vines are cultivated by 60 growers. One of them is Jean-Claude Berrouet, the acclaimed Bordeaux winemaker, who has overseen the production of such famous châteaux as Pétrus (since 1964) and other Jean-Pierre Moueix properties in Pomerol and St-Emilion. Berrouet, whose father comes from the Basque town of Itxassou, went back to his family roots and purchased 4 1/2 acres of vineyards in the commune of Ispoure, in the obscure wine appellation of Irouléguay. To find vineyards, he first had to be accepted by the local winemakers. Fortunately, he was helped by the Brana family, one of the most important names in the region. Berrouet started planting in the beautiful sandstone terraces of the Arradoy in 1992, and the first vintage of Herri Mina was 1998. He produces an average of 600 cases a year.

Berrouet Dabbles in Basques Whites

Although the Bordeaux-born Frenchman is renowned for his red wines, he decided to focus on the white varietals, planting Gros Manseng, Petit Courbu and Petit Manseng, all of them characteristic grapes of nearby Jurançon.

The blend for his dry white Irouléguay is 55% Gros Manseng, 40% Petit Courbu and 5% Petit Manseng. Gros Manseng confers acidity and freshness, while Petit Manseng provides ripe fruit, roundness and complexity. Petit Courbu, being the oldest vines, gives some vinosity to the final wine. The grapes are picked in small baskets, sorted, then pressed. The juice ferments in stainless steel vats and the wine stays on lees until it is bottled in the spring. Berrouet endeavors to make an expressive wine, without technical intervention that might muffle the

terroir. His philosophy is to let nature have the highest possible influence, and thus bring a sense of the Basque country to the many expatriates who now live in the United States.

"Herri Mina"

Many of the region's wines are labeled in the Basque language, and Berrouet chose a Basque name for his wine: Herri Mina. Herri means Country and Mina means homesick, thus the name Herri Mina stands for

"nostalgia." Berrouet explains: "The choice of this name was very symbolic. I am sentimental, and buying this property was the best way for me to rediscover my roots. I am the youngest son of a Basque family from Itxassou, who gave me a love of our beautiful region with its strong cultural heritage. I wanted to return there to explore my passion for wine and the vine."

Jancis Robinson has written several articles on lesser known Atlantic whites, and praised Berrouet's wine as "by far the most expressive and distinctive Irouléguay I have yet come across."

