

MARC & ROGER LABBÉ

Savoie

Les Marches

For years, the whites of the Savoie have been my icon of vinous refreshment. They capture in a glass the clean mountain air, the alpine meadow flowers and the cold milky glacial flour racing through gorges. Sometimes, that image has been my poor stand-in for the refreshing reality, because few wines from this region have ever reached the United States.

The wines of Savoie are little-known even within France, although they inhabit the upper reaches of that famous river Rhône and the southwestern edge of Lake Geneva. Tourists drink most of the production, in fact some of you may remember that the last if not only international press these wines received was during the Albertville Winter Olympics, when the region's entire supply was drunk up in the first two months of that year!

André and Michel Quenard (c/o Kermit Lynch) remain an excellent source for a diverse range of Savoie wines, including rich red Mondeuse and terrific Bergeron (a.k.a. "Roussanne"). For several years though, I and my Paris-based colleague Tom Calder have been knocking on all the other Savoie cellar doors in search of "our own" grower.

There are seventeen appellations in the Savoie, but we sought someone who would concentrate all of their attention on those ultra-refreshing whites made from the Jacquère grape. At their best these are inimitable, but there is a whole lot of dilute, underripe Appellation Apremont and Aymes (a-BEAM) suitable for tourists to swill between slaloms but not worth your time or money back home in the U.S.A. The real thing is low-alcohol but RIPE, delicate and whistle-clean but full of flavor. I can now report: mission accomplished. (You never asked for it, but by golly you've got it now.)



Abymes

Varieties: *Jacquère*
Total acreage: *22 acres*
Average production: *9,000 cases.*
Vinification: *Ambient yeast
fermentation in tank.
Light filtration.
Bottling as needed.*

The Labbés control yields with rigorous pruning and control diseases without the use of pesticides or insecticides. Grapes are hand-harvested and delicately deposited in a gentle pneumatic press. Ambient yeasts undertake the fermentative labors in temperature-controlled tanks. After the wine is assembled, it is stored under pressure in tank and bottled as needed, with a minimum of filtration to maximize freshness and flavor.

Remember those ads for budget-priced beer that told you to "head for the mountains"? Well, this is cheap, thirst-quenching, and really does come from the mountains. I bet you'll find your-self heading for it rather often.

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