

A new generation of winemakers

The estate, located in Eauze (Gers), enjoys a growing fame, including abroad. And even if the family-owned estate recently invested in purchasing ultra-modern equipment, its earthy roots has never been forgotten.

Behind the scenes of a centenarian winery lifted by the passion of wine.

By Alexander Léoty

- Pictures by Remi Benoit

The bottling line, which required an investment of 4.5 million euros, is brand new. Put into service in 2011, it is the pride of Rémy Grassa, the 37 year-old young man who runs, along with his brother Armin, Domaine du Tariquet. He recalls with a hint of emotion the time when, as a child, he wondered around these walls. "At the time, it was just a barn" he smiles making his way between the ultra-modern production lines. We were farming livestock..."

An "earthy" past that the young owner always conjugates to the present. "These are our roots, but also our DNA" he insists. "It is what drives us."

And, if today Domaine du Tariquet accounts for more than 1,000 hectares of vines in production, employs 88 permanent workers (to which should be added 50 seasonal workers) and achieves a turnover of 30-million euros, the company does not consider itself as an industrial player. "The contact with wine remains essential, it constitutes our wealth, our heritage" underlines Rémy Grassa whose eyes begin to sparkle when he talks about the history of the estate which is closely linked to that of his family. "We found here traces of distillation dating back to 1683" he explains. But it was much later that the family Grassa settled on these lands. "My great-great-grandparents were from Ariège. They were bear trainers in New York", explains the young winemaker. "Then, in 1912, they fell in love with the Domaine du Tariquet and decided to buy it." At that time, the vineyard accounted only seven hectares. The estate was then taken over after the Second World War by the grandparents of the current owners.

Then two of their children, Maïté and Yves Grassa, took over in 1972. Ten years later, the estate, historically oriented in the production of Armagnac, evolved towards that of white wines. "In 1982, it seemed absurd", remembers Rémy Grassa. "White wines had very bad press. There was a long way to go: with each delivery of Armagnac, we gave a bottle of white wine..."

"Marketing did not make the product"

But success was quickly achieved, including abroad. And over the years, the range significantly expanded. Today, Domaine du Tariquet produces nine white wines (seven dry and two sweet wines) which represent 93% of the winery's production, rosé wines (5%) and Armagnac (2%). The 9-million bottles produced each year are sold through wine merchants and restaurateurs in France (60%) and abroad (40%) to markets such as Scandinavia, North America and more recently Asia. And contrary to what one might imagine, if Tariquet achieved a growing fame, it is not the result of a skilfully orchestrated marketing operation.

"Marketing did not make the product", assures Ithier Bouchard, the Commercial Director of the estate. "For that matter, we do not really have any marketing plan. Just some common sense and we were lucky to be among the first ones on the market." Rémy Grasse confirms: "We were into marketing without knowing it. Initially, we did not even write 'Tariquet' the same way on all our bottles!" Now, its popularity needs to be managed. "We need to get the message across that there is just one Domaine du Tariquet" points out Ithier Bouchard. "Some present themselves as producing some 'Tariquet'. We protect ourselves and if things go too far, we do not hesitate to take legal action." The price of success.