

Château Coupe Roses (organic)

Minervois



The family of Françoise Le Calvez—parents, son and daughter—manage Château Coupe Roses with passion and acumen high in the Mediterranean hinterlands. Their vineyards are in Le Causse and Le Petit Causse (a *causse* refers to an enormous outcropping of exposed rock—in this case, limestone—that supports little more than *garrigue* and can cultivate little more than olives and vines). These two delimited areas make up the highest growing zones in the Minervois appellation. At 750 to 1,350 feet above sea level, these zones have relatively cool nights and the growing season is the longest in the AOC (domains down on the plain often begin harvesting a full two weeks earlier). The wines from Coupe Roses have excellent acidity and freshness, which Françoise adores, without any plodding, overripe character, which she really doesn't adore.

Françoise's father hails from Brittany (Le Calvez turns out to be a common Breton name), but her mother's side of the family has been in La Caunette for at least twelve generations. The village essentially is a one-street village strung along a bench at the base of a tall limestone cliff that towers above the Cesse River. Cesse shares the root word of cease and cessation, because in summer this river stops running. La Caunette, for its etymological part, is Occitan, referring to small cave dwellings; in ancient times, the locals lived in caves burrowed into the cliff. Just upstream is the village of Minerve, which gives its name to the appellation of Minervois. It sits high on a pinnacle of limestone at the confluence of the Cesse and the Rieussec, hidden in a mountain valley behind the first range of mountains after the vast Mediterranean plain. It was here that the Cathars (*catharsis*--to purge!) had a stronghold, which held out for months before surrendering early in a twenty-year crusade launched by Pope Innocent III in 1209 that swept over the Languedoc and burned infidels wherever they could find them. They found a lot in Minerve.

Most of Coupe Roses' vineyards are on the plateau above the cliff, an arid, windswept place of scrub and rock--calcified limestone that microorganisms living in the threadbare soil eat into, creating pockets for water, soil and roots. Pascal is fond of taking visitors up to the plateau to show them vineyards that appear to be growing in pure rock. He points out the odd olive tree here and there, the remnants of an ancient Roman road, and the fiendish rabbits that eat his young vines. Then he tells everyone to hush and listen. There is nothing to listen to; the silence is overwhelming. If you want to go crazy, he says, this is the place to do it.

In 2008, Françoise and Pascal purchased six hectares of vineyards in Petit Causse that are part of the Minervois cru of La Livinière. These vines are high on the southern side of the Cesse Canyon, a rugged watershed that begins on the other side of Minerve and winds its way deep into the Black Mountain. The largest of these parcels grow a short distance from the edge of the canyon (where, if insanity took hold, one could leap into the abyss and dive hundreds of feet to end the grip).

In 2008, Françoise and Pascal purchased six hectares of vineyards in Petit Causse that are part of the Minervois cru of La Livinière. These vines are high on the southern side of the Cesse Canyon, a rugged watershed that begins on the other side of Minerve and winds its way deep into the Black Mountain. The largest of these parcels grow a short distance from the edge of the canyon (where, if insanity took hold, one could leap into the abyss and dive hundreds of feet to end the grip).

That acquisition took their vineyard holdings to 40 hectares (nearly 100 acres). Save for the six hectares in Le Causse, all of their vineyards are a hodgepodge of plots mostly on the mountain plateau above their village of La Caunette, and these vineyards constitute the heart and soul of Coupe Roses. The soil is a classic French mix of limestone and clay. The mountain elevations make for a cool microclimate in the sunny south of France.

The winery itself is a large nondescript building on one side of the village, while the "château" is an old automobile service station that Françoise's father operated decades ago on the other side of the village. For years, it housed the office and the old garage was insulated to store the bottled wine. It used to be that the sum total of high-tech wizardry that they had was limited to their grape press and their narrow-gauge Lamborghini tractor. In 2009-10, the old garage was completely revamped. Now there's a tasting room and a new bottling line. In 2013, the domain earned organic certification for its farming practices. In 2016, following his studies in enology, Françoise's son Mathias took over as cellar master (he's pictured on the edge of the Cesse Canyon, a few yards from their *vigne de vertige* vineyard). Daughter Sarah recently joined the team as well.

A cool bit of trivia is that since 1991 a friend and colleague of Françoise and Pascal, one François Serre, has been the consulting enologist at Coupe Roses, and he's assisting Mathias now. For an even longer period, Serre has been the consulting enologist at Château Rayas in Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

The domain received certification for organic viticulture in 2013.

[-www.coupe-roses.com](http://www.coupe-roses.com)