



KERMIT LYNCH WINE MERCHANT

DOMAINE LES HAUTS LIEUX

Country: France

Region: Hautes-Alpes

Appellation(s): IGP Hautes Alpes

Producer: Mickaël Olivon

Founded: 2019

Annual Production: 540 cases

Farming: Organic (Certified)

Website: www.domaineleshautslieux.fr



Loire native Mickaël Olivon often traveled to the southern Alps in his youth to go rock climbing, but little did he know he would eventually make his home in the shadows of these dramatic peaks to become a vigneron. Raised on the rural outskirts of Nantes, he was exposed early on to the country tradition of growing and transforming his own food—his grandfather and mother taught him how to make pâtés, jams, and other preserves—but wine was never part of the story. Despite having no family ties to the wine world, Mickaël always had a fascination with viticulture. He felt drawn to the idea of creating a product from scratch, managing the entire process from start to finish, so he moved to Burgundy to pursue studies in viticulture and enology.

Upon receiving his degree, Mickaël sought vinification experience through numerous internships in cellars in France and abroad. He then worked for ten years as an agronomic consultant in the northern Rhône, allowing for formative exchanges with a number of reputable vignerons. Later, on a year-long bicycle trek through the Alps and beyond, Mickaël learned more about the challenges of viticulture in extreme terroirs. This journey of self-discovery further inspired him to settle in the mountains, sparking ideas for a future project of his own.

The seed planted years prior finally sprouted in 2019. Charles-Henri Tavernier, an eccentric artisan who pioneered natural winemaking in the remote Hautes-Alpes, was retiring, and Mickaël would take over. He had worked the harvest with Tavernier in 2016 and looked up to the old man whose life path mirrored his own: a transplant to the Alps drawn to the mountains, graced with a spirit of independence that led him to build something from the ground up and succeed against all odds.

The domaine sits above the town of Embrun in the Hautes-Alpes *département*, between the Alpine city of Gap and the French-Italian border. At the far north of the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region, the area enjoys a continental climate with strong Mediterranean influence, more similar to Alto Adige than neighboring Savoie or Provence. In fact, the Hautes-Alpes are distinct from both the Provence and Savoie wine regions, in terms of terroir as well as their winemaking traditions. “You need to have a pioneering spirit to make wine here,” says Mickaël, pointing out that local wines have rarely ever been produced on a commercial scale (even today, just a handful of small domaines call this area home). As a result, a hodgepodge mix of grapes—hybrids and transplants from other regions—are found on these Alpine slopes, with Mollard being the only true native. Mickaël has already begun replanting with varieties he feels are better adapted to the mountain terroir, including Savagnin, Pinot Noir, and Persan.



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DOMAINE LES HAUTS LIEUX (continued)

Mickaël's 2.5 hectares (including new plantings yet to begin producing) are scattered across several tiny parcels on soils of glacial moraine and rocky scree at 900-1,000 meters above sea level. While the dry air at this elevation facilitates organic farming, the Alpine conditions present a number of new viticultural challenges. Vintage effects are amplified due to the unpredictable weather, but the diverse mix of grape varieties—often co-planted old vines—provide some protection from climatic mishaps. He prunes late to mitigate the risk of frost that runs well into May, and he does not trim the vine shoots to protect the fruit from summer hailstorms. "Optimization is key," he asserts, highlighting how conventional grape-growing wisdom does not always apply in this extreme setting.

Armed with strong convictions from his many years of experience—among them, a distaste for herbicides and a penchant for sulfur-free vinification—Mickaël produces two whites and two reds from his little cellar nestled beneath magnificent snow-capped summits. With little winemaking precedent in this uncharted region, he is free to follow his instincts, adapting his methods to create something completely novel in a beautiful, but challenging environment. Mickaël's cuvées are original wines of purity and class, characterized by floral aromatics, bright, fresh fruit, and stony minerality from these Alpine slopes. Born from the most unlikely of places, these unique wines illustrate heroic viticulture at its finest.

<u>Wine</u>	<u>Blend</u>	<u>Vine Age</u>	<u>Soil Type</u>	<u>Vineyard Area*</u>
Hautes Alpes Blanc "Grand Pic"	40% Marsanne, 20% Jacquère, 20% Altesse, 15% Müller Thurgau, 5% Chasan	Planted in 1980s	Moraine and scree (dolomite, silt, gravel)	1.8 ha
Hautes Alpes Blanc "Grains de Clotinaile"	70% Chasan, 30% Chardonnay	Planted in 1980s		
Hautes Alpes Gamay "Coste Rouge"	Gamay	25, 35 years old		
Hautes Alpes Mollard "Hors Piste"	50% Mollard, Portugais Bleu, Gouais, Gamay; 50% Aubun, Hibou Noir, Chenançon, other varieties	70+ years old		

* "ha"=hectares; one hectare equals roughly two and a half acres



DOMAINE LES HAUTS LIEUX (continued)

VITICULTURE / VINIFICATION

- Vineyard plots sit at 900-1,000 meters elevation (2,950-3,280 ft)
- Organic viticulture (certified by Alpes Contrôles)
- Natural grasses are left to grow between the vineyard rows and are mown 2-3 times per year
- Vine shoots are not trimmed to protect grapes against the threat of summer hail
- Grapes are hand-harvested
- Wines are not fined, but clarify naturally during the cold winters
- Les Hauts Lieux translates to “The High Places” and is the title of a book about the Alps
- Cuvées are named after nearby peaks in the Massif des Écrins—each of which Mickaël has climbed

Hautes Alpes *Blanc* “Grand Pic”

- Named after the Grand Pic de la Meije, the second-highest peak in the Massif des Écrins
- The wine’s chiseled, precise style mirrors the jagged summit of the Grand Pic
- Grapes are directly pressed after harvest
- Fermentation begins in stainless steel tank at low temperature; wine is racked to barrel partway through
- Wine naturally completes malolactic fermentation in the spring
- Aged for 1 year in neutral (4-10 years old) *demi-muids* and *barrisques*

Hautes Alpes *Blanc* “Grains de Clotinaille”

- Chasan is the offspring of Pinot Noir and Listan Blanco (aka Palomino), a cross created in Montpellier in 1958 that is well adapted to the Alpine conditions thanks to its short vegetative cycle (late budding and early ripening)
- Sourced from four parcels in the commune of Châteauroux-les-Alpes on the slopes of the Pic de Clotinaille, which reaches an elevation of 2,563 meters (8,409 ft)
- In Occitan, a *tinaille* is a vessel used for fermentation; the wine is named after the Pic de Clotinaille which towers over the vineyards
- Grapes are directly pressed after harvest
- Fermentation begins in stainless steel tank at low temperature; wine is racked to barrel partway through
- Wine naturally completes malolactic fermentation in the spring
- Aged for 1 year in neutral (4-10 years old) *demi-muids* and *barrisques*



DOMAINE LES HAUTS LIEUX (continued)

Hautes Alpes Gamay “Coste Rouge”

- Coste Rouge is the name of a mountain ridge in the Massif des Écrins
- Sourced from two small parcels
- Fermented in stainless steel tank
- 80% destemmed with 20% whole clusters
- Grapes are gently crushed by foot after 48 hours in tank
- Spontaneous fermentation with indigenous yeasts
- Maceration lasts 15-25 days
- Aged for 1 year in neutral (4-10 years old) *demi-muids* and *barriques*

Hautes Alpes Mollard “Hors Piste”

- An old-vine field blend from two parcels co-planted to roughly fifteen different grape varieties, in the spirit of the region’s historical winemaking customs
- Due to the diverse mix of grape varieties, the parcel contains many levels of ripeness at harvest; Mickaël picks everything in one pass to achieve unique character and complexity
- The name, which translates to “off trail,” is a nod to the wine’s unusual blend and style
- Mollard is the region’s only true indigenous grape variety; the others have historically been grown here but are not native
- Fermented in stainless steel tank
- 80% destemmed with 20% whole clusters
- Grapes are gently crushed by foot after 48 hours in tank
- Spontaneous fermentation with indigenous yeasts
- Maceration lasts 15-25 days
- Aged for 1 year in neutral (4-10 years old) *demi-muids* and *barriques*
- Bottled unfiltered