



Arlequin One-Bottle Club
April 2018
Vignobles Despaigne-Rapin Maison Blanche
Montagne Saint-Emilion 1999
Bordeaux, France

Varietal: *Merlot and Cabernet Franc*

Winemaker Winemaker Corinne Lateyron Despaigne descends from a long line of Saint-Emilion winemakers. When she married Nicolas Despaigne, himself the scion of one of Saint-Emilion's oldest families, she assumed winemaking duties for the Despaigne's Maison Blanche estate, which is located in the "satellite" Saint-Emilion village of Montagne, a few miles north of Saint-Emilion proper. The appellation status of Montagne-Saint-Emilion was established in 1936. Like the rest of Saint-Emilion, the region's vineyards are dominated by Merlot, with Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Malbec (a.k.a. "Côt") and Petit Verdot also allowed. Anchored by a gracious, 19th century chateau made of white stone, from which the estate takes its name, Maison Blanche has been owned by the Despaigne family since 1812. Since inheriting full ownership of Maison Blanche from the Despaigne family in 2009, Nicolas and Corinne have converted its vineyards to biodynamic viticulture, a labor-intensive process that began in 2006 and was completed in 2013, when the property achieved Demeter certification.

Vintage It's rare to come across perfectly aged, decades-old Bordeaux that comes directly from the cellar of the maker. So we were delighted to snap up a few cases of this 19-year-

old Saint-Emilion from its importer, which recently arranged with the Despaigne family for the release of a few select library wines. Saint-Emilion suffered a massive hailstorm in early September in 1999, after which its growers given special permission to pick grapes early to prevent the spread of rot.

Winemaking Vinifications at Maison Blanche are straightforward and no-nonsense compared to more "modern" estates in Bordeaux. Wines are fermented in tank with native yeasts before being racked into a combination of new and used oak barrels, where the reds rest for up to 18 months.

Vineyard Unusually for Saint-Emilion, the Maison Blanche vineyards are planted to more Cabernet Franc than Merlot, with about a 60/40 split. Because Merlot is an early-flowering variety, and because frost tends to hit Montagne-Saint-Emilion particularly hard, the large percentage of Cabernet Franc helps to ensure a decent harvest even in frost-prone years. The vines are generally old, with an average age of about 50 years, and spread across 80 acres. The soils are predominantly clay, with traces of limestone and iron. Since 2001, soil life and plant immunity have been stimulated by bio-dynamic sprays. The estate achieved organic certification in 2009 and biodynamic in 2013.

Tasting Notes An early harvest in 1999 translates in the glass into a wine lighter in weight and higher in acidity than usual. At 19 years of age, this red's fruit flavors have mellowed into subtle tones of dried black currant that are accented by notes of leather, anise and tobacco, and lead to generous, caramel-stippled finish.

Food Pairing Savory red and white meat dishes with enough fat to counter the wine's acidity, and enough protein to marry with its tannins, are ideal. Roast or seared veal or duck, beef tenderloin and a rich root vegetable gratin suffice nicely.