

My Internship at Chateau de Roquetaillade Mazères, France

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Introduction

Located in the Graves, Bordeaux region of France, Chateau de Roquetaillade serves as both a tourist attraction and wine producer. The location consists of two castles, and a wine cellar on 27 hectares. The land is divided into orchards, cattle pastures, wheat fields and vineyards. The main castle was restored by Eugene Viollet le Duc in the mid 1800's, the same architect who was responsible for the reconstruction of the famed Notre Dame cathedral in Paris.



A bottle of red wine from Chateau de Roquetaillade, 2010. This is the more popular of the two wines produced, and sells for 10 Euro (\$12.46 US).

Wine Production and Vineyard

Chateau de Roquetaillade produces both red and white wine on site. These wines are sold at the Chateau visitors office, throughout the Bordeaux region, as well as internationally. Approximately 3,000 hectare liters of red wine, and 10,000 hectare liters of white are produced. The chateau also produces 20,000 hectare lecture liters of grape juice for blending, which is sold to a separate producer. The vineyard is a composition of Syrah, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Chardonnay grapes.



A picture of "Jeango", the name of the Chardonnay portion of the vineyard.

Responsibilities

Much of my work involved vineyard maintenance. Each row first had to be positioned so that the branches were pulled inward and pinned together at the top, with secondary branches pointing outwards, as is the custom in France. A machine pruner was then used to trim rows of vines on both the left and right sides, as well as the top. Newly planted vines had to be maintained by hand, cutting away all non-grape plants that might take root alongside the vines. I also labeled and packaged more than 1500 red and white wine bottles in preparation for shipment to markets in Australia.



This vine was planted in 2012, and had already been overrun by local grasses and weeds.



Local weeds and grasses that had taken root alongside the new vine were removed, allowing the vine to use more nutrients, sunlight, and water.

Summary

There are many differences in wine production between southern France and Washington state. Most notable is the vineyard size and maintenance practices. Most vineyards are well under 100 acres, and due to French agriculture laws, irrigation is usually forbidden. This has a direct effect on workforce requirements and production. The result is a wine profile that is unique to France. My experience in France has helped me to better understand the function and direction of the Washington wine market. By working in and around contrasting grape growing techniques, I feel I am a better viticulture student. I can identify different vine training methods based on environment and culture. This has enabled me to begin to develop my own ideas on which grapes I may want to grow in the future.



Me in the Visitor's Office, holding a bottle of the 2011 Chateau de Roquetaillade White Wine. One bottle sells for 8 Euro (about \$10 US).