

DOMAIN MUCYN, SAINT-JOSEPH “LES SALAMANDRES”

NORTHERN RHÔNE, FRANCE 2016

FRUIT



EARTH



BODY



TANNIN



ACID



ALCOHOL



Devoted acolytes of Syrah will find no ground more sacred than Hermitage—but it's hard to argue with the ground right across the river in Saint-Joseph, especially when you factor price into the equation. Then you might find yourself on the steep, granitic hillsides of a village like Ozon, right in the “classic” heart of Saint-Joseph, where Domaine Mucyn farms a few acres of old-vine Syrah for today's “Les Salamandres” bottling. It sure looks a lot like Hermitage, and tastes like it, too, but what a difference 13 kilometers makes in terms of price! –Ian Cauble, Master Sommelier

Factor in a talented couple who met in wine school, who've assembled an “archipelago” of choice vineyards throughout the northern Rhône, and you've got one of the most exciting Saint-Joseph finds we've come across in a while. Since 2001, Héléne (the viticulturist) and Jean-Pierre (the winemaker) Mucyn have been crafting powerful, elegant Syrahs not just in Saint-Joseph but in Crozes-Hermitage as well. When it comes to Syrah, “I want to express the elegance of the variety,” Jean Pierre has said, “and be attracted by the wine when I drink it.” That's a sentiment we can all get behind—don't miss the chance to see it translated into wine!

When Héléne and Jean-Pierre first met in a viticulture and enology class in Beaune, they couldn't have imagined the bucolic life they'd someday build together. Jean-Pierre seemed destined to inherit his family laundry business, for one thing. Yet when passion comes into play—passion for winemaking or for anything else—people change course. The couple bought and renovated an 18th-century riverside boat lodge in Gervans, which they transformed into their winery. A cellar beneath the building provides ideal temperature and humidity for the vinification of white wines, while reds are housed in an old restored barn with thick granite walls for optimal insulation.

It takes extra elbow grease to grow fruit in this area: hillsides rise to 300 meters plus in altitude in a steep, unforgiving gradient. Syrah for “Les Salamandres”—a wine named for the lively, spirited lizards that dart through the vineyards—comes from 40-year-old vines that thrive in schist and gneiss over a granite base. With intent to coax the truest expression from the land, the Mucyns are in the process of converting to organic farming practices.

The 2016 Les Salamandres delivers amazing power and concentration for Saint-Joseph Syrah—along with an elegance that's all Mucyn. While 2016 was a challenging harvest in the Northern Rhône, bringing hellacious hailstorms, the surviving fruit was universally celebrated for its focus, purity, and freshness. These berries basked just long enough to gain plenty of flavor before being hand-harvested in late October. Fruit was gently destemmed (not crushed) then vinified with natural yeasts and subjected to daily punch-downs for full extraction of its brilliant color and tannin. The wine was then aged in a combination of neutral oak and in vats for one year. The result packs a serious punch—Les Salamandres is an ink-hued beast of a Syrah, but a beast with table manners. Its well-perfumed bouquet of dark fruit and spice invites curiosity, and the luscious palate brings the full force of blackberry, cherry, and cocoa. Don't be shy to pop this cork on this wine today, but know that it will be even better after another couple of years in the cellar. Decant it about an hour before you intend to serve it, ideally at 60°F. Pairings for Les Salamandres are limitless—charcuterie, roast turkey, duck—but I love Syrah with wild game. So, check out this elegant preparation of venison attached. Enjoy!

“Héléne and Jean-Pierre Mucyn farm an “archipelago” of choice vineyards across several Northern Rhône appellations. Their Saint-Joseph fruit comes from two key villages just across the river from the iconic Hermitage hill.”

SOMM SELECT



COUNTRY
France

REGION
Northern Rhône

SUB-REGION
Saint-Joseph

VARIETAL
Syrah 100%

ALCOHOL
13.5%

OAK
Neutral French

SOIL
Schist, Gneiss, Granite

FARMING
Organic Practices

SERVICE TEMPERATURE
60°F

GLASSWARE
Burgundy Stem

DRINKING WINDOW
Now-2026+

DECANTING
60 Minutes

PAIRING
Venison Loïn
(<https://www.greatbritishchefs.com/recipes/venison-loin-recipe>).