IPO WINES

2025 Alban Central Coast Viognier

IMPORTED BY IPO Wines

COUNTRY
USA

REGION
California

APPELLATION
San Luis Obispo County

SOIL TYPE
Loamy

VARIETAL(S)
100% Viognier

FARMING
Sustainable

WINEMAKER
John Alban



ABOUT THE PRODUCER

Starting in 1985, John Alban planted grapes for other people until he bought an estate in 1989. Alban Vineyards' is the first American winery and vineyard established exclusively for Rhone Varieties. Alban came to be a pioneer of the Rhone Rangers movement, and is considered one of the most influential American Rhone producers. Robert Parker's declared in The Wine Advocate that John Alban is "...the spiritual and qualitative leader of the movement..."
On beginning to grow Viognier, Alban stated "I almost single-handedly doubled the world's acreage," referring to a time when its cultivation was reduced to 50 acres (20 ha) in two areas of the Rhône Valley, Condrieu and Château-Grillet. Alban's work, along with that of Josh Jensen of Calera Wine Company in San Benito County, helped to significantly expand plantings of Viognier in California at a time when the varietal was near extinction.
”For the last 8000 years, wine has been the most prized beverage of our species. That is why we have been asking ourselves how best to assure our farm and viticultural practices are ready for the next 8000 years. Go ahead and chuckle! But then embrace how wonderfully real this goal is: the land our vineyards sit upon is hundreds of millions of years old. Its ability to support life is equally enduring. So we just need to protect what it will do naturally. It is this premise that gave birth to our viticultural techniques: Albanic farming. It is founded on the fact that if we bring to our soil exactly what we take, it can go on, and on, and on. In our early efforts to explain this concept in lay terms some 30 year ago, I coined the phrase ‘closed loop farming’: don’t add or export anything. Easy enough to say, but 'wow' can it be challenging to achieve. How do you get everything back into the soil, coexist with weeds, and keep pests in balance? In the early 2000’s we settled into the idea that we could spread all our lees, pomace, stems, and seeds in the vineyards and feed them to sheep as they mowed the rows and hoovered up decaying leaves. There is only a tiny amount of nitrogen in a bottle of wine so if everything else is returned, you can offset any export just by feeding the sheep your yearly green waste: we keep a ‘sheep bin’ in our kitchen and haul it out to them each day. The sheep compost everything under the vines and unlike mechanical mowing, their digestive tract destroys the eggs and larvae of pests atop the cover crop. Pest control isn’t about eradication, it’s about balancing the predators with the prey and not letting the latter get too big a head start in the spring. Because our native flock is ours and only ours, the loop stays closed. We don’t eat them, milk them, or interfere with their natural life cycles in any way: no vaccines, medications, or hormones. They allow us to farm with just 3 natural components- elemental sulfur, carbonates (basically baking soda), and affection: our holy trinity for the next 8000 years.” - John Alban

WINE NOTES

This is the story of a bottle of Condrieu that a dear friend Dan Stromberg brought to their mutual birthday celebration while both were attending viticulture/enology school. At wine school, that sort of thing counts as studying, and they were both very diligent students. Beyond the name on the bottle, he knew nothing about Condrieu- never heard even of it. A year later John was living in that tiny village- the homestead of Viognier, helping with harvest. While it all happened pretty fast, it wasn’t as easy as it sounds.
As the recipient of a French wine studies scholarship, he had the opportunity to go just about anywhere he wished- so long as he worked for free, and didn’t complain (perfect criteria for anyone wishing to start their own winery). Everything was going great until John asked for a ‘post’ in Condrieu. Nobody in Condrieu ‘wanted’ him. Not even for free! The short version is that the region had been in decline for

decades and was just beginning to get back on its feet. The handful of growers who remained in the appellation were xenophobic; afraid that he would plant a bunch of Viognier back home and overburden the market. These folks were simply, and understandably scared. They had worked for decades hoping their appellation could re-emerge while teetering on the edge of extinction. While John could empathize, he was feeling a bit of youthful frustration. He argued that it was really in their best interests to help him. Just about no one in the U.S. had heard of Condrieu. The only way to tell the story of Viognier is to tell the story of Condrieu. If his wine caught folks' attention, the next wine they would try would likely be from Condrieu. This plea resonated for one grower, who upon promise of anonymity, agreed to let him work at his place.

John's assertion that sharing information and showcasing Viognier, along with other Rhone varieties, would be beneficial to us all wasn't just the voice of desperation. This sentiment was, and is, in his soul and prompted him to co-found and promote Hospice du Rhone. In 2005, about 20 years after he pled his way into a job in Condrieu, the producers of that appellation and its neighbor- Cote Rotie, honored him as a Decurion. A sort of citizen for life in recognition of the attention and acclaim he helped bring to the region. It was one of the most humbling and unanticipated moments of John's life.

A Central Coast bottling that is hand harvested at night all from their estate vineyard (they just call it 'central coast'; but it's 100% estate): fermented 85% in concrete, 10% neutral barrels, and 5% terracota. 300 cases bottled in May of 2025. It showcases the forward heady stone fruit of this variety.

Over the last three plus decades, the idea that white wine can successfully be something other than chardonnay has become a wonderful reality. In the 80's there were fewer than 30 acres of Condrieu under vine: today the entire appellation is planted- in excess of 400 acres. California went from a handful of test blocks to more than 3000 acres of Viognier: globally there are over 40,000 acres. They feel truly humbled reading the wonderful role the wine world attributes to Alban Vineyards for this amazing transformation. But it may be their unique way of farming and thinking about viticulture that proves to be their sweetest legacy. We shall see…