



Domaine Brana

Region: Southwest

Village: Saint Jean Pied de Port

Appellation: 22ha Irouleguy

Growers: Jean Brana Martine Brana

Website: <https://www.brana.fr/>

The appellation of Irouleguy stretches along steep hillsides in the Pyrenees within the French Pays Basque. The 245 hectares are planted almost exclusively to red grapes. The vineyards which range in altitude between 200 and 450 meters can have inclines up to 70% and are often planted along narrowly cut terraces that require an enormous amount of hand labor. The characteristic soil of Irouleguy is a red sandstone that is rich in iron. This is complemented by a richer mix of clay/limestone and some outcrops of limestone. The vineyards face south and are protected by the surrounding mountain peaks from the wet weather coming off the Atlantic. The cool and wet springs are balanced by an “Indian summer” that allows the full ripening of the grapes into October.

The Branas started as wine and spirits negociants in the Pays Basque in 1897, an activity that continues today. A few generations on, in 1974, Etienne Brana decided to plant a pear orchard and build a distillery in Saint Jean Pied de Port that would focus on distilling local fruits such as pears, plums and raspberries. Ten years later in 1984 and one hundred years after phylloxera ravaged the Basque vineyards, Etienne planted 20 hectares of vines, making the Branas the first in Irouleguy to replant on a meaningful scale. Tragically in 1992, the year before the completion of the Brana’s stunning winery, built into the steep hills above Saint Jean Pied de Port, Etienne died. He left his wife, Adrienne, and their two children, Martine and Jean, to carry on with his projects. Jean took over the vineyards and winemaking after studying oenology and then interning with Basque neighbor and winemaker at Chateau Petrus, Jean-Claude Berrouet. Martine took over the sourcing of fruit and the distilling. Most recently, in 2018 a new structure was built housing a new distillery and tasting room. The accomplishments of the Brana family are recognized not only in the Pays Basque, but internationally and their Eaux-de-Vies are considered among the best in France.



Jean Brana's farming philosophy could be called bio-diverse. He gave up his certification of organic farming because the treatment of his vines required an application of copper that produced toxicity in his soils. He also abandoned most of the bio-dynamic remedies he employed, moving instead to a biodiversity that encouraged the natural flora and fauna to co-exist with the vines. The result has been the return of insects and birds that hadn't been seen in the vineyard for years as well as one hundred and ten plant species that co-habit with the vines. To celebrate this development, Jean redesigned all the wine labels so that each one features one of the indigenous birds found in the vineyards.

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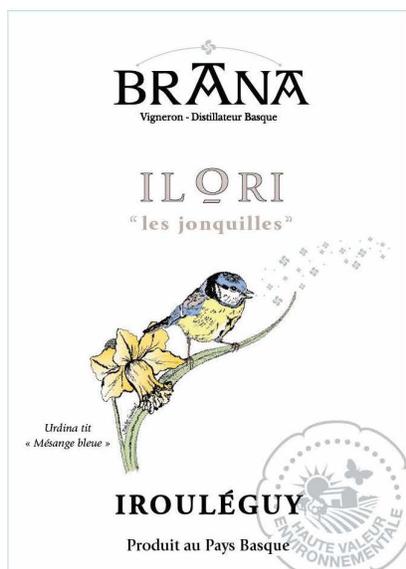
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Irouleguy Blanc “Ilori”

The Irouleguy Blanc “Ilori” cuvée varies a bit according to the vintage. It is always primarily Gros Manseng, 50% to 70%, with Petit Courbu and Petit Manseng making up the balance. The Branas are one of the few families to have replanted the Petit Courbu. It is a traditional varietal of the region but has trouble with the wet and unpredictable spring weather and is not terribly productive. Fermentation with indigenous yeasts is preceded by a gentle maceration of the skins “maceration pelliculaire” and a settling of the must “debourbage”. The wine is fermented in stainless steel tanks and rests “sur lie” until bottling the following spring. Ilori is the basque word for daffodil.



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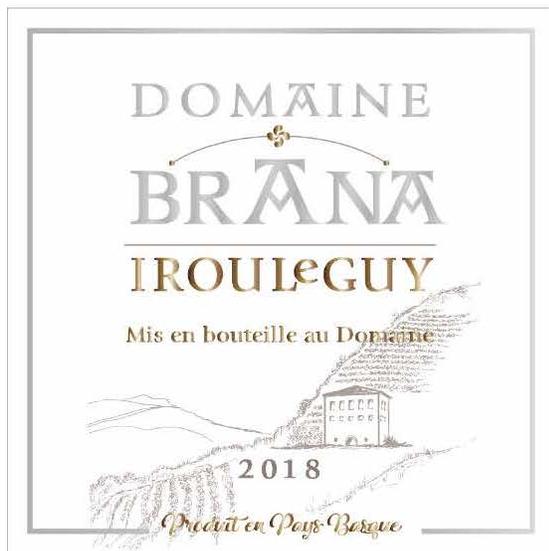
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Irouleguy Blanc “Domaine”

The Irouleguy Blanc “Domaine” cuvée is a blend of 70% Gros Manseng and 15% each of Petit Manseng and Petit Courbu. The grapes are selected from vineyards in the higher elevations with Gros Manseng planted in soils of compressed sandstone called “argilite” and the Petit Manseng and Petit Courbu planted in limestone soils. Using indigenous yeast, the wine is fermented 70% in stainless steel and 30% in barrel. The wine stays in contact with the lees for nine months before an assemblage is made. The wine is filtered but not fined before bottling in June.



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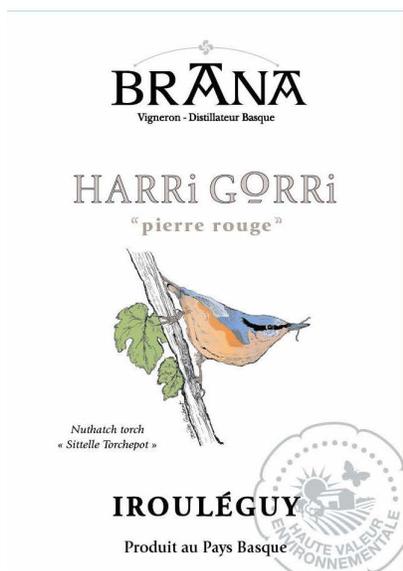
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Irouleguy Rosé “Harri Gorri”

The Harri Gorri Rosé cuvée varies a bit according to the vintage. But it always seems to be a blend of at least 50% Tannat and the remaining percentage Cabernet Franc. The wine incorporates both the “saignée” method, with a maceration sufficient to give a deep color, good body and lots of spice and “direct press” which yields a juice with little color and delicate aromas. The Brana Rosé is not bottled until the summer and is normally sold in the U.S. market the following spring. “Harri Gorri” is basque for red stones and refers to the red sandstone found locally in Irouleguy.



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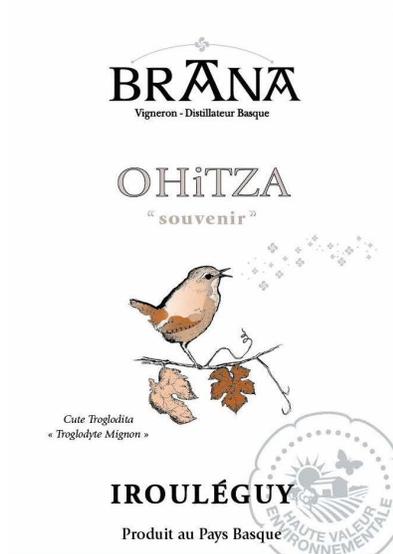
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Irouleguy Rouge “Ohitza”

The Irouleguy Rouge “Ohitza” cuvée is typically made from 50% Tannat and 50% Cabernet Franc. The parcels are from sandstone soils at mid-elevation. Fermentation takes place in stainless steel with a maceration of around seventeen days. The wine is aged 70% in barrels of 3/4/5 years and 30% in cement tanks. Every three months the wine is racked and assembled and then redivided among the barrels and tanks. After a year, a final assemblage is made which then continues to mature in barrel and tank until bottling in June, eighteen months after harvest. Ohitza is the basque word for tradition.



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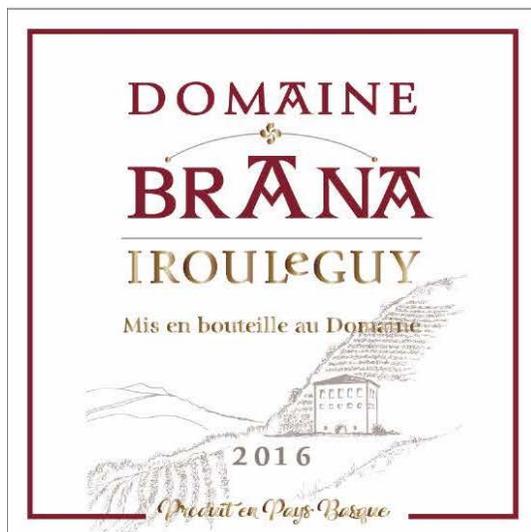
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Irouleguy Rouge “Domaine”

The Irouleguy Rouge “Domaine” cuvée is typically a blend of 60% Cabernet Franc and 20% each of Cabernet Sauvignon and Tannat. The parcels are on both sandstone and limestone soils. Fermentation is done with indigenous yeasts and maceration lasts for two to three weeks. The wine is aged in barrels for twelve months with rackings done every three months. Jean Brana uses primarily barrels that are one year old, but includes in the mix a small proportion of both older barrels and new barrels.



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Vin de France “Bizi Berri”

The cuvée “Bizi Berri” is produced from the native varieties; Arrouya and Erremaxaoua. Originally the blend included Axeria (Cabernet Franc), but after a few vintages the Axeria was dropped. This was done in part because the French government wouldn’t allow the name “Axeria” to appear on the label in place of the French synonym, “Cabernet Franc.” The wine is produced from a mere 1,000 plants grown at high elevation in soils of red sandstone. Fermentation is done in stainless steel tanks with a maceration of up to two weeks. The wine matures for 18 months before being blended and bottled. Production is two barrels. “Bizi Berri” is basque for “new life.”

