

# BACK TO NATURE

The trend for organic, biodynamic, minimal intervention wines is hot, but what does it all really mean, and which producers are the ones to watch?



So-called “natural” wines are considered by many to be more authentic, expressive of terroir and respectful of the earth than those that are manipulated in various ways during the winemaking process. And we agree: When successful, natural wines can exhibit unique and nuanced characters.

Unlike organic grapes and wines, which follow a rigorous certification process, there are no specific requirements for using the term “natural wine.” But it’s generally agreed that they should be made from grapes certified organic or biodynamic, and should be fermented with indigenous yeasts.

The mantra of its proponents? Let the wine make itself. It sounds simple, but it also has its pitfalls.

Some natural wines are prone to problems like stuck fermentations (common with some yeast strains), oxidation, funky aromas and off flavors. Even worse problems can occur when the winemaking is entirely hands-off.

To be clear, “organic wine” can have no added sulfur dioxide ( $\text{SO}_2$ ), and naturally occurring sulfites less than 10 parts per million (ppm). Wine “made with organic grapes” may contain up to 100 ppm of  $\text{SO}_2$ . Organic wines may be natural, but not all natural wines are certified organic.

Confused? Try some of our recommended natural wines. Decide if it’s just the latest buzz, or a way to make wine better.

For more natural wine recommendations, go to [winemag.com/natural](http://winemag.com/natural)



## AUSTRIA

**Birgit Braunstein 2012  
Magna Mater Chardonnay  
(Burgenland); \$75**

It’s the healing, life-giving energy of nature that Birgit Braunstein wants to honor in her “Magna Mater” or “Great Mother” wine, named after her childhood pilgrimages to the shrine of Magna Mater, the Virgin Mary, in Mariazell, Styria. The Chardonnay is fermented on its skins in 300- and 500-liter amphorae—clay vessels that spend eight months submerged in the soil behind Braunstein’s family winery in the village of Purbach, in Austria’s most easterly wine region.

Braunstein wanted to make a wine like just her Celtic predecessors—who introduced viticulture to the region—may have made, acquiring her first amphora in 2009. Braunstein’s amphorae have exactly the same onion-dome shape as the region’s churches, but upside down.

“This way, you draw and focus all of the energy into the wine,” says Braunstein.

After eight months, the wine is scooped out of the amphorae by hand and transferred to used barrels to mature for another one to two years. The wine is then bottled without added  $\text{SO}_2$ , filtration or fining.

—Anne Krebiehl



## FRANCE

**Domaine de l'Ecu 2013 Granite  
(Muscadet de Sèvre et Maine);  
\$23**

Guy Bossard has long been a pioneer. In the Muscadet region where, in the 1970s, volume and chemicals reigned equally supreme, he gradually did away with both—proving that biodynamic methods could work even in this cool ocean climate.

He uses wild yeasts, replants with massal selection (choosing the best vines from which to propagate), and uses minimal sulfur in the winemaking.

Although he sold Domaine de l'Ecu in 2010 to Frédéric van Herck, Bossard is still at the domaine overseeing the production of what remain exemplary Muscadets. The range is large and includes a sparkling wine, La Divina, named after Maria Callas. However, it is his terroir-driven wines that best express the impressive intensity he can draw out of the Melon de Bourgogne grape: Gneiss, Granite and Orthogneiss.

—Roger Voss