



KERMIT LYNCH WINE MERCHANT

DOMAINE ETXEGARAYA

Country: France

Region: Southwest

Appellation(s): Irouléguay

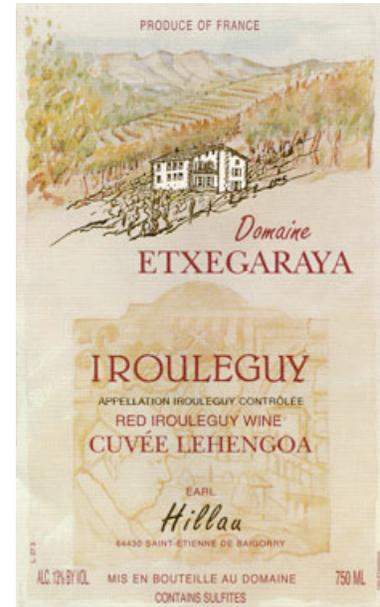
Producer: Marianne Hillau

Founded: 1994

Annual Production: Lutte raisonnée

Farming: Website: N/A

Saint Étienne de Baïgorry is a marvel of a village with half-timbered homes, a small river, and an ancient Roman footbridge. As one of the last posts of civilization before arriving into the high Pyrénées Mountains, it is also one of the last towns in France before reaching the Spanish border. However, little attention is given to political frontiers this deep into the mountains, because the village is the heart of the Pays Basque. This is unspoiled country as one rarely finds, and incredibly steep hillside vineyards define the dramatic contours of the landscape. Saint Etienne de Baïgorry sits within the appellation of Irouléguay, and the wines here are as powerful, rustic, and wild as the land itself. Since phylloxera devastated the vineyards from 1914-1918, the appellation has been slow to recover. Though the I.N.A.O. awarded Irouléguay its own A.O.C. in 1970, the majority of the production is sold to the local co-op. Even today there are only a handful of producers who have what it takes to venture out independently. Among the proud few are the Hillaus.



In 1994, Marianne and Joseph Hillau founded Domaine Etxegaraya (pronounced “Etch-uh-guh-RYE-uh”). The domaine sits protected in a shaded valley, below the town of Irouléguay, with a view of Spain from their classic, whitewashed home. The difficulty of the terraced terrain makes tractor work appealing, but highly risky—so much so that it tragically claimed the life of Joseph. With quiet intensity and characteristic Basque courage, Marianne and her daughter now manage their seven hectares of vineyards on their own. The vineyard land of Irouléguay is known for its reddish-brown sandstone, richly streaked with mica, silica, iron oxide, and dolomite. These minerals infuse balanced freshness into the hearty, earthy structure of Irouléguay’s traditional grape varietals. Marianne lends a certain tenderness to these complex wines which makes them more accessible than is typical for the region. The Hillaus have made considerable progress over the last few years, and *La Revue du Vin de France* credits Etxegaraya as having “...one of the most expressive mineral bouquets of the Southwest.” Make sure to try their single-vineyard Irouléguay “Cuvée Lehengoa.” *Lehengoa* means “yesteryear” in Basque—à propos given that the grapes hail from 150-year-old vines, said to be among the oldest left in France.

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DOMAINE ETXEGARAYA (continued)

<u>Wine</u>	<u>Blend</u>	<u>Vine Age</u>	<u>Soil Type</u>	<u>Vineyard Area*</u>
Iroulégu Rosé	50% Tannat 50% Cabernet Sauvignon	Tannat vines around 150 years old ; other vines between 20- 30 years old	Red Sandstone	5 ha
Iroulégu Rouge	60% Tannat 40% Cabernet Franc			
Iroulégu Rouge “Cuvée Lehengoa”	80% Tannat 20% Cabernet Sauvignon			

* “ha”=hectares; one hectare equals roughly two and a half acres

VITICULTURE / VINIFICATION

- Vineyards are farmed sustainably
- The grapes for the rosé are a parcel selection that is made before harvest; grapes then macerate on their skins for 12 hours before pressing
- Lehengoa is only bottled in the best vintages; years when it is not made, it is blended into their classic Iroulégu Rouge
- Wines are aged in *cuve*

MISCELLANEA

This dark monster is from 150-year-old Tannat and Cabernet Sauvignon vines! Marianne Hillau says her ancient vines regularly produce huge one-kilo grape bunches year after year and have no diseases or ailments to speak of. The blend in this cuvée is 80% Tannat and 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, and it boasts palate-staining dark, earthy fruit that has great structure and balance, refreshing acidity, plenty of rusticity, and a hearty yet well-ripened tannin. The reds chez Etxegaraya are proof that the Tannat grape doesn't have to produce a harsh, hypertannic wine but is capable of much more.

Kermit Lynch