

Ao Yun

From terraces at 2,200-2,600 metres in Yunnan, Ao Yun 2019 distils Himalayan clarity into a Cabernet-led blend: pure dark fruit, fine mineral drive, and powdery tannins framing a poised, ageworthy profile.

Ao Yun 2019

, China



Region and Vineyards

High in the foothills of the Meili Snow Mountains, Ao Yun farms a mosaic of hand-tended terraces across the villages of Adong, Shuori, Sinong and Xidang, at **2,200-2,600 metres**. The altitude's intense light and marked **diurnal range** extend the season, building colour and fine tannins while preserving acidity. Free-draining alluvial-colluvial soils and steep gradients favour low vigour and concentrated berries, with irrigation guided by mountain snowmelt and precise canopy work to temper the sun.

The 2019 season delivered one of the estate's smallest crops (**~16 hL/ha**). After a cool, rainy winter and late budbreak, a warm, very dry spring set the pace; summer brought a touch more rain than average, then a cool, dry finish. The harvest—picked by micro-parcel over **72 days** (9 September-21 November)—balanced ripeness bands across the slope: roughly 32% from Shuori and 24% from Adong (the higher, cooler sites), with 23% Xidang and 21% Sinong adding mid-slope density and spice.

Winemaking

Ao Yun 2019 is a Cabernet-framed blend of **67% Cabernet Sauvignon, 17% Cabernet Franc, 10% Syrah and 6% Petit Verdot**—notably **no Merlot** in this vintage. Each terrace was vinified separately with gentle, gravity-led handling to protect fruit purity and altitude-derived finesse. Alcohol sits around **14.5% vol.**

Élevage was calibrated to preserve aromatics: **about one-third new French oak, one-third older oak and one-third Chinese stoneware jars** (≈35/35/30) for roughly a year, followed by settling prior to bottling. The stoneware component safeguards freshness and texture, while discreet oak adds polish and length. Final blending is performed at sea level to avoid the dehydrating effect of high-altitude air, yielding a wine of **fine-grained** structure and seamless integration.

Alcohol :15,00 %

Composition: 67% Cabernet Sauvignon, 17% Cabernet Franc, 10% Syrah, 6% Petit Verdot

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Tasting Notes

- **Color:** Deep ruby with a youthful purple rim.
- **Aroma:** Blackcurrant, blackberry and blueberry layered with wild mountain herbs, violet, cedar and graphite; hints of licorice, clove and discreet tobacco.
- **Palate:** Full-bodied yet aerial; cool-toned dark fruit wrapped in **powdery** tannins and vibrant acidity. Savoury spice and stony minerality carry a long, vertical, impeccably balanced finish.

Did you know?

Ao Yun 2019 is the first modern-style blend here **without Merlot**, introducing **Syrah (10%)** to amplify floral lift, peppery spice and mid-palate energy—an altitude-driven twist on the classic Left Bank template that underlines the site's singular Himalayan identity.

Wine Pairing Ideas

- **Five-spice duck breast:** aromatic spice and dark fruit mirror the glaze, while brisk acidity cuts richness.
- **Herb-crusted lamb rack:** Cabernet structure and mountain-herb notes echo the crust and tame the fat.
- **Charcoal-grilled ribeye:** dense fruit and fine tannins complement Maillard depth and marbling.
- **Aged Comté:** nutty umami and firm texture resonate with the wine's mineral length.

Ao Yun 2019

Robert Parker (RP) : 96 Points (2019)

This is the best vintage of Ao Yun to date and also the highest-scoring Chinese wine I have ever reviewed. It, therefore, requires a more detailed account to understand why. The 2019 Ao Yun is a blend of 67% Cabernet Sauvignon, 17% Cabernet Franc, 10% Syrah and 6% Petit Verdot (this latter emanating from the village of Sinong). Notably, Merlot did not make the grade in 2019, which was less to do with vintage but, according to winemaker Maxence Dulou, more a function of Merlot vines at an adolescent stage of development (at five to six years of age, Dulou feels Merlot doesn't produce the most interesting fruit compared with younger or older vines). The relatively cooler and wetter winter prior to 2019 gave the vines decent reserves, but the drier and warmer than expected spring meant some irrigation was required around budburst and flowering. Overall, across Ao Yun's different villages sites—Xidang, Sinong, Shuori and Adong—2019 witnessed a warm, healthy growing season and not too warm autumn with yields at their lowest to date (around 16 hectoliters per hectare rather than the average of 20-22 hectoliters per hectare). The long harvest commenced in Xidang on September 9th and finished in Adong on November 21st. Of the varieties above, the proportion of fruit was drawn from the villages in order of elevation as follows: 23% from Xidang, 21% from Sinong, 32% from Shuori and 24% from Adong. In the harvest as a whole, only 53% went into Ao Yun's top wine, with tiny percentages being used for the Villlage Cru reds (6% each) and 2% for the 2019 Chardonnay. Thus 33% of the harvest was not used for Ao Yun at all. But what of the wine? The 2019 Ao Yun has an intensely deep purple appearance. On the nose, there is already appealing, immensely powerful dark fruit showing abundant cassis, black cherry, bramble, blackberry and blueberry fruit with some subtle, leafy herbaceous character (sage, green bell pepper, mint) combining with very well-integrated new oak notes of vanilla, clove, toast and smoke (note that Ao Yun only sees around 35% new French barriques with the remainder being matured in stoneware vessels and old oak). On the palate, the wine is immensely full-bodied but far from heavy, with vibrant acidity and very coating, ripe, fine-grained and polished tannins. Dulou reports that this was the first vintage when the entire harvest was gravity-fed through their winemaking facility in Adong with much gentler crushing resulting in partially opened berries retaining seeds inside (even through to racking the wine off gross lees). He also now opts to ferment in narrow, higher-filled vessels, which results in easier cap management, a less-aerated cap with less thermal variation. All of which helps explain the refinement and integration of tannin in the 2019. There is a scintillating core of complex fruit, herbaceous character and subtle new oak notes that are harmoniously integrated. With its very long length, the 2019 Ao Yun is unsurprisingly very youthful and will show better from 2023 at the earliest, even if it can already be appreciated. It will also develop impressively in bottle over the next 15 years or so. In sum, 2019 is the completest statement to date of everything Ao Yun has aspired to be in terms of attaining the best blend achievable from this complex patchwork of vineyard sites stretched across different villages at markedly different elevations.