

Decanter MARCH 2012

Rosemary George's pick from her top seven areas

FLGARIA 2009 **** 17.5

and Christophe Bousquet at Château Foch-Redon agree. He expects minerality in La Clape, with plenty of resin hints and balsamic notes. Other fine growers include Château Ricardelle, Château d'Anglès, Château Bouquette-sur-Mer and Mas du Soleil.

Limoux

- South-west of Carcassonne with four climats: 2066; Auzan, Colarique, Méditerranéen and Haute-Valle
- Blancquette de Limoux makes an AC in 1938. Other ACs are for Blanquette Méthode Ancestrale, Crémant de Limoux (2002) and Limoux white aimed for still wine.
- Blancquettes are based on Mauzac. Crémant allows Chardonnay, Chenin and Pinot Noir
- White Limoux: Chardonnay, Mauzac and Chenin Blanc
- Red Limoux: Bordeaux varieties, Grenache and Syrah

Monks of Limoux's abbey of St-Hilaire were making sparkling wine well before Dom Pérignon in Champagne. These wines were, and are, based on the cool (by flavour) of Maizac, but Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc and Pinot Noir have since been introduced and the more recent Crémant de Limoux AC uses a high percentage of these.

Apart from the Haute Vallée, Limoux is where Pinot Noir really comes into its own in the Languedoc, benefitting from the cooler climate to give some lovely silky flavours. Yet, originally, the AC rules for red Limoux allow for Bordeaux varieties but not for Pinot Noir. Political clout on the part of a big producer is the likely reason for that decision.

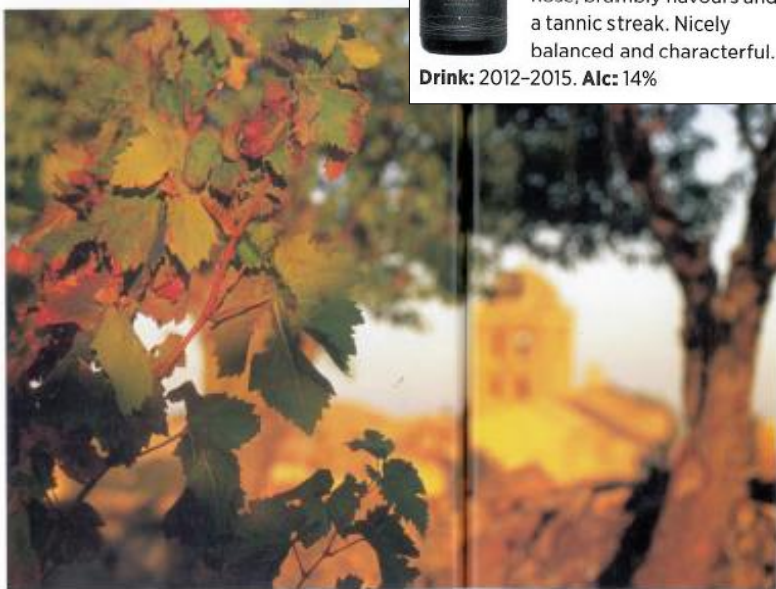
As for sparkling wine, Jacques Cabot at Domaine Laurens says 'the combination of the influence of the Mediterranean Sea and Atlantic Ocean make Limoux an ideal area for white and sparkling wines, which need a refreshing acidity'. He admits to 'being seduced by that potential'. Pierre Fort at Domaine de Mouscille, who specialises in still wines, also confesses about that climatic mix, a unique quality of Limoux. Other good producers include Château Rives-Blaques, Bernard Defnos, Domaine Régale and Laich.

Minervois-La Livinière

- A crux of Minervois, 280ha over six villages on La Petite Cause, centred on the village of La Livinière
- The Montagne Noire protects the vineyards from the prevailing north winds. A warm area, with low rainfall
- Soil a mixture of schist, clay and lots of stones
- A higher percentage of Grenache, Syrah and Mourvèdre in Minervois-La Livinière than in Minervois
- A longer ageing period than for Minervois - often, but not necessarily, oak barrels

Wines here taste of the hilly countryside: warm, wild and arid, and full of spicy, aromatic garrigue herbs. They are structured and tannic in their youth with ripe fruit - sometimes in a glass - and with more weight and depth than basic Minervois, a larger appellation which covers a much broader spectrum of terroirs and area.

For Patricia Domergue at Clos Casterelles, the typicality of Minervois-La Livinière depends on balance, ripe fruit, power and freshness. Other producers to watch include Château de Galatze, Château La Vieillesse and Boute de Maillet.



Faugères

Domaine de Cébène, Felgaria 2009 ** 17.5**

Mourvèdre, Grenache and Syrah. Fresh, spicy fruit nose, brambly flavours and a tannic streak. Nicely balanced and characterful.

Drink: 2012-2015. Alc: 14%

Above: grapes for the Minervois-La Livinière cru come from six villages centered around the village of La Livinière itself

Cabardès

- A Nive over 14 villages, north-west of Carcassonne. Achieved AC status in 1999 for reds and rosés
- Clay and limestone soils
- Cool climate, with both Atlantic and Mediterranean influences
- Maximum of 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec and Merlot and a minimum of 40% Grenache and Syrah

'Veni d'Est, Veni d'Ouest', the slogan of the Cabardès appellation gives a succinct image of its wines, for this is where the Mediterranean meets the Atlantic and the grape varieties of Bordeaux are blended with those of the south.

Elsewhere in the Midi, such a blend would more often than not be a vin de pays, but not in Cabardès, for nearby Malepère and Limoux. The wines may concentrate on one or the other - Domaine Gibrol's Veni d'Est, for instance, is predominantly Mediterranean with peppery Syrah fruit, while its Veni d'Ouest cousin is firmly Bordeaux in style, with more cassis and tannic - but a balance between the two families must be maintained.

The largest producer here is Château de Perrière, with cellars based at the De Lorge family home, a 17th-century château that has been lovingly restored. Clément Mengus at Domaine de Caraban is a young grower who has come here from Alsace, producing his first vintage in 2007, but his Cabardès has 'frill, finesse and freshness - everything to tempt the taste buds' and that is why he chose to settle here. His wines are some of the most characterful of the appellation. They amply illustrate its originality and, indeed, characterise the wonderful appeal of the broad and diverse Languedoc region as a whole.

Rosemary George MW has a second home in the Languedoc and writes a blog on the region at www.tastinglanguedoc.blogspot.com

For her travel feature on Languedoc, see page 4

To read about Brits who have moved to the Languedoc to make wine, see www.decanter.com/brits/wine

LANGUEDOC

George's pick from her top seven areas



Pic-St-Loup
Domaine de l'Hortus, Bergerie de l'Hortus Blanc, Val de Montlansac 2009 **** 17.5

£12.95 Berry Bros & Rudd, Caves de France
Chardonnay, Sauvignon, Viognier and Roussanne. Delicate nose and lightly peachy palate with good acidity. Drink: 2012-2014. Alcohol: 13%

Domaine de l'Hortus, Bergerie de l'Hortus Rouge 2009 ** 18**
£11.50-£12.35 Berry Bros & Rudd, Caves de France, Seven Cities, Stag
Second wine of Domaine de l'Hortus. Fresh berry fruit without a hint of oak. Delicately spicy with a leathery hint on the finish. Drink: 2012-2013. Alc: 13.5%

Château de Vallonsés, Espérance 2009 ** 17.5**
£10.95 The Tasting Room, The Wine Society
Firm nose, structured palate. Ripe fruit balanced by a leathery note on the finish. Still youthful with lots of ageing potential. Drink: 2012-2015. Alc: 14.5%



Faugères
Domaine de Cébène, Felgaria 2009 **** 17.5

£22.25 Cambridge Wine Merchant, Levee St James's Place Wines
Mourvèdre, Grenache and Syrah. Fresh, spicy fruit nose, brambly flavours and a tannic streak. Nicely balanced and characterful. Drink: 2012-2015. Alc: 14%

Domaine de la Sarhanade 2010
**** 17.5
£15.25 Les 4 Saisons, Premier Cabardès
Grenache, Carignan, Mourvèdre and Syrah. Round, spicy fruit and a tannic streak. Mid-weight with good balance. Drink: 2012-2015. Alc: 14%

Terrasses du Larzac
Soubasse le Clos du Sarras, Le Clos, Languedoc 2009 **** 18
£8.50-£10.99 Stone Vine & Son, The Sampler, Premier Collections
Lovely fresh fruit nose, elegant spicy palate. Supple and easy drinking, with a refreshing finish. Shine in a glass. Drink: 2012-2015. Alc: 13.5%

Max Plan de l'Or, Roucas, Languedoc 2007 ** 18**
£19.79 Berry Bros & Rudd
Salty, leather nose and palate with resin hints. Real depth of character. One to keep over. Drink: 2012-2015. Alc: 13.7%



La Clape
Château d'Anglès, Closique Rouge 2008 **** 17.5

£1.95 Wine Rack
Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre. Soft, brambly nose and warm, ripe fruit on the palate. From grapes trodden in sunshine. Drink: 2012-2015. Alc: 14%

Mas du Soleil, Les Bachelles 2007
**** 17.5
£10.95 Imperial Wine Co
Spicy, garrigue and tannic on the nose and palate, with a tannic streak and youthful oak. Full nose, warm and southern. Drink: 2012-2015. Alc: 14.5%

Limoux
Château Rives-Blaques, Blancquette 2008 **** 18
£10-£15.50 Cambridge Wine Merchant, Great Western Wine, James Hoeben, Levee St James's Place Wines
Malbec and Chenin Blanc. Round, light, herbal nose. Creamy palate and crisp body. Elegant. Drink: 2012. Alc: 12.5%

Domaine Biégaud, Placat Noir, Haute Vallée de l'Aude 2010 ** 17**
£10.50 Goodrich, Stone Vine & Son
Ripe fruit on the nose. Ripe raspberry fruit and a streak of tannin. Refreshing and youthful. Drink: 2012-2015. Alc: 12%

Minervois-La Livinière
Château Ste-Cathie, Cuvée Castilano 2008 **** 17.5
£11.50 (2009) The Wine Society
Syrah, Carignan, Grenache. Firm nose with a touch of oak. Round, elegant, fresh palate. Tannins give structure. Age-worthy. Drink: 2012-2015. Alc: 14%

Cabardès
Domaine de Caraban 2007 **** 18
£10.99 The Mixed Case
Herky and Syrah. Ripe fruit and spice on nose and palate. Tannic backbone, long finish. Drink: 2012-2014. Alc: 13.5%

For full details of UK stockists, see page 4

DOMAINE DE
CÉBÈNE

BRIGITTE CHEVALIER

LANGUEDOC



Why we love the Languedoc

'Languedoc-Roussillon will be viewed at the level of Bordeaux and the Rhône in 20 years' time' Michel Chevalier (see p60)

'Languedoc-Roussillon reminds me of the Côte du Rhône in the 1990s. The terroir is fantastic. They have all the conditions to make superb wines – serious, complex, structured, but also elegant in their own way. These are great wines for drinking for the price of one bottle of those big-name Bordeaux, you will be able to afford a case of delicious Languedoc' Harvey Tarrant, owner, Angolan restaurant, London

'The wines offer a range of flavours, aromas and textures, from creamy Chardonnays to spicy Syrah and Carignan blends to aromatic Muscats – with great value for money at every level. The most exciting AC for me at the moment is Terrasses du Larzac – this area has vineyards planted at

over 300m, giving wines with huge finesse and intensity' Andrea D'Accarelli, head sommelier for the Galvin Restaurant Group, London

'Fantastic terroir, interesting blends, small growers, the rediscovery and promotion of indigenous varieties, old low-yielding vines, and a wider move towards organics and biodynamics. For me, the most exciting AC is Faugères. The wines, especially those from schistous soils, have a meaty, wild, savage quality, and always express the flavour and aroma of the Garrigue so well' Doug Wragg, sales/marketing director, Caves de Pyrène, Surrey

'Ancient traditions and varied terroirs combine with innovative winemaking from dynamic growers to give fantastic quality and variety of styles. The most exciting AC for me is Coteaux du Languedoc – with some of the most experimental, innovative growers' Emma Craigie, owner, Tenor Languedoc, Wiltshire

Faugères

- Made an appellation in 1982; incorporated into the Coteaux du Languedoc in 1985
- 2,100ha spread across seven villages and 40 estates
- Schist soils throughout, planted mainly to Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre, Carignan and Cinsaut

Faugères lies at the foot of the Espiraoux range, which protect it from prevailing north winds. Narrow lines wind from hamlet to hamlet, past Garrigue-covered hillsides and slopes of vines. I often stop at a viewpoint by these old windmills to take in a particularly breathtaking panorama.

Schist adds ghouly acidity and wonderful perfumed flowers to the wines, made from the classic five varieties of the Languedoc. Syrah dominates. Cinsaut is used for red, while white Faugères (which became an appellation in 2004) is based on Merisime, Roussanne and Rolle, showing lovely supple, herbal flavours.

Producer numbers have doubled in the past 10 years, with many coming from outside the région, such as Bordeaux and Champagne, as well as Australia, England and Belgium. For Paul and Isla Gordon at the newly established Domaine de la Sabarède, 'Faugères ticked all the boxes. It's close to the mountain, close to the sea, has very good soil, good wines, nice villages and it's not too busy'. Other recommended growers include Domaine

Above: vineyards in the vast Languedoc region stretch all the way to the sea, notably in La Clape

de Cèbène, Ollier-Tullefer, Jean-Michel Alquier, Château Chémala, Les Farcinales, Domaine des Trinités and Mas d'Aléon.

Terrasses du Larzac

- 250ha declared in 2008 but 1,452ha recognised; first vintage was in 2008
- Runs from the village of Octon and the Lac du Séban to towards Arripe and Pic-St-Loup, and includes Montjoyoux and St-Saturnin
- Northerly, higher altitudes, cooler temperatures
- Clay and limestone soil

This is a relatively newly recognised part of the Coteaux du Languedoc, now up for cru du Languedoc status. You will find spicy flavours coming from the classic varieties of the south, but with the cooler climate there should always be underlying freshness and perfume, making for appealing drinking.

It's another area that is attracting newcomers: vineyard land is affordable, old vines are available and many are those who aspire to the challenge of earning a reputation from making, rather than taking over a well-established estate. There is a sense among the young generation that anything is possible. Take Sébastien and Bénédicte Fillet at Domaine le Clos du Serres in St-Jean de la Roque – they looked long and hard in Languedoc before settling here. Gervé Cristfield was the winemaker at

La Sauvageonne, also in St-Jean de la Roque, and has now bought vineyards of his own, and moved to the even more isolated village of Les Solons. He is pushing the boundaries with La Traversée. Julien and Delphine Terroret came south from Mareuil-sur-la-Ile in the Loire to plant vines at Pua de l'Escalotte. In St-Saturnin, Virgile Joly was the first new independent wine grower for 50 years, and in Montpeyroux (the Pic-St-Loup, dominated by its co-op) there are now a growing number of small producers, such as Mas d'Amic and Villa Dondonnis. Others to look out for include Mas de l'Estère, Cal Dentours and Domaine de Nantoumbes.

La Clape

- 1,000ha on the Massif de la Clape
- 30 winegrowers
- 3,000 sunshine hours, with long, dry summers
- Mainly 50% Syrah, Grenache and Mourvèdre

The massif of La Clape is a rocky outcrop of 214m with several valleys just outside the city of Narbonne. It was once an island and only became part of the mainland in the Middle Ages when the river Aude silted up.

With its proximity to the sea, La Clape earned a reputation for its white wines, made from Muscadine, Bourboulenc, Rolle and Grenache Blanc, producing some wonderfully herbal flavours with a refreshing,

Appellation & brand: confusion abounds

Coteaux du Languedoc This appellation covers the vineyards from Narbonne almost as far as Mireis, with numerous crus and terroirs. However, the AC is in a state of flux as Coteaux du Languedoc is now set to disappear in 2017 – rather than 2012, as originally planned – to be replaced by the AC of Languedoc.

Languedoc will be the basic AC for the whole of Languedoc-Roussillon, again with the various crus and terroirs that exist for Coteaux du Languedoc. Many crus are being classified as 'grand vin' or 'cru du Languedoc'. The putative 'grand cru' has been dropped.

Pic-St-Loup and La Clape are set to become crus du Languedoc; others considered are Montpeyroux, Gries de Montpeller, St-Georges d'Orques, St-Denis, Terrasses du Larzac, Planas, Limoux Blanc and Picoul de Pinet. The existing crus are Minervois, La Livinière, Corbières-Boutenac, St-Chinian-Sérilly and St-Chinian-Roquefort.

Siège de France A brand developed by the Languedoc-Roussillon regional body, covering all five departments, its aim is to give all products made here (not just wine, but also tourism) the common identity of the South of France.

sally tang. As for reds, the varieties are the usual five, but some of the highest sunshine hours in the whole of the south means that Carignan, which can ripen the long, dry summers, performs well here.

For Peter Clape at Château Comphons, the typicity of La Clape comes from its proximity to the wine, the Garrigue herbs and the influence of the