

## St-Chinian & Faugères

Wines made in the adjacent Languedoc appellations of St-Chinian and Faugères have very subtle differences based on nuances of terroir, explains Rosemary George MW

THIS IS ONE of those instructions that were the curse of school exam papers – compare and contrast; in this case, St-Chinian and Faugères. But it is logical here. The two appellations adjoin each other and there is even one estate that makes both, now under the de Lorgeril banner. Both became appellations in 1982, three years before the creation of the all-embracing Coteaux du Languedoc, and they have similarities as well as differences.

St-Chinian is the bigger, more complicated appellation, while Faugères is more compact and uniform. Whereas Faugères is part of a line of schist that goes from the edge of the Minervois to beyond Cabrières, St-Chinian not only has schist, but also clay and limestone. Perceived wisdom says that the schist is to the north and west of the Vernazobre river that crosses St-Chinian, and the clay and limestone is to the south. In reality, there is also sandstone and the different soils are much more mixed. Consequently the syndicate is conducting a study to help growers establish which plots might be the best source of their grandes cuvées. Another difference is the prevailing wind; in St-Chinian it is westerly, in Faugères it is northerly.

St-Chinian has developed two crus, both recognised in 2004, based on villages with powerful cooperatives, namely Roquebrun and Berlou. Faugères, instead of a cru, is concentrating on the development of a new category that is also dependent on price – Terroir de Schiste. The minimum price will be €10 (to the French consumer), with all the wines tasted to ensure quality. Faugères also prides itself on the amount of vineyards cultivated organically, currently one-third of the appellation, with the realistic expectation of 50% within the next five years.

### Degrees of separation

Both are lively appellations that have evolved significantly in the past few years. Faugères is notable for the number of new producers, 13, from outside the Languedoc – not only from other parts of France, but also from other countries, including England, Australia and Switzerland. And in the past two years, four new estates have been created. St-Chinian, too, has its share of new producers, but not the same number of outsiders.

The key similarity is grape variety, which for red wine is the usual Languedoc five of Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre, Carignan and Cinsaut. Regulators have some say in the permitted percentages and blends, but essentially it depends on growers' personal preferences. Most make two or even three cuvées: easy drinking, entry level, and a more structured wine that is often aged in oak and destined for some more ageing. I find it difficult to detect a clear difference between St-Chinian and Faugères. Maybe St-Chinian is a little richer and spicier, and Faugères a little fresher, but both have some deliciously appealing fruit.

Yields were down in 2012, but the wines are ripe nonetheless with an underlying freshness. And they are generally affordable; there may be the odd producer who has elevated ideas about price, maybe because they have invested in new barrels that need to be paid for, but most St-Chinian and Faugères wine provides delicious drinking at an acceptable price. They are wines that conjure up the warmth of the Languedoc, with sunshine in a glass. ➤



### St-Chinian & Faugères: know your vintages

**2012** A good year with lovely fresh fruit. Already drinking well, 2013-2020.

**2011** A big yield and less concentrated than 2012. For early drinking, 2013-2016.

**2010** A very good year, with a small yield making for concentrated wines with ageing potential until 2020.

**2009** Very good quality, with a small yield following a fine summer. Drink 2013-2018.

**2008** Good wines with nice fruit in St-Chinian. Half of Faugères suffered badly with a hail storm. Drink 2013-2015.

**2007** A great vintage; quite tannic but with good balance, depth and elegance. Drink 2013-2018.

**2006** Average quality. Drink up.

**2005** A fine vintage; rich and concentrated and drinking beautifully, until 2015.

### St-Chinian & Faugères: the facts

**Faugères**  
1,926ha in seven villages  
**Average yield** 33hl/ha – one of lowest in the Languedoc  
**Red** 77% **rosé** 21% **white** 2%  
57 independent producers and one co-op

**St-Chinian**  
3,300ha in 20 villages  
**Two crus** (recognised in 2004): Berlou, 250ha, and Roquebrun, 400ha  
**Average yield** 42hl/ha  
**Red** 85% **rosé** 13% **white** 2%  
106 independent wine growers and eight co-ops

Rosemary George MW is the Regional Chair for Languedoc-Roussillon at the Decanter World Wine Awards

## The results

Fewer than 60% of wines were recommended, with the tasting somewhat of a 'quality minefield', but we shouldn't lose sight of the incredible value these areas can offer, said our panel. Georgina Hindle reports

AN ENJOYABLE, IF mixed, tasting with both Languedoc appellations receiving favourable remarks from our experts. The scores reflect large variance in quality, but the judges praised a number of these 'good value, drink-now wines'.

Simon Taylor summarised the sentiment: 'We looked at wines from two appellations (over six vintages) and I can't say that one is better than the other, rather that they both have very different characters.' Andrew Jefford drew on the nuances of flavour and texture: 'Faugères typically has a finer grain. It's less flamboyant and opulent on the nose, less seductive, often less blowy, more intellectually aromatic but with a very mineral palate. St-Chinian has opulence, sweetness and amazing fragrance, especially with the Syrah-rich wines. A much more hedonistic appellation.'

Further to the contrasts in taste, the judges noted an inconsistency in quality terms: 'We were swinging quite wildly with our marking from very, very low marks for some wines and high marks for others,' said Jefford. The main factors behind this included: mixed ripeness 'suggesting not terribly good viticulture, probably from co-operative sources', brettanomyces as a 'major problem in many wines', as well as the consensus that oak in general

*'The Languedoc remains one of the great-value regions of the world for red wine'* Simon Taylor

was 'overused'. Jefford said: 'I feel that probably 70%-80% of all the money spent on oak in the Languedoc is wasted.'

Rosemary George MW added: 'New oak doesn't do the Languedoc any favours at all. It just overwhelms the lovely fruit. If you have a choice between the *cuvée traditionnelle* (unoaked) and the *cuvée mis en fût de chêne* (oaked), go for the traditional one and you'll get nice, ripe, sunshiney garrigue fruit.' Taylor also lamented the high percentage of Syrah aged with new oak: 'The wines we tasted had 50% and upwards of Syrah and many were 80% to 100%. You do get some blurring of terroir with these wines, especially when they are covered with lashings of new oak.'

Despite these flaws the judges were keen to highlight value, diversity and drinkability. 'If you want a more consistent product that guarantees to deliver a certain

### The scores

77 wines tasted  
 4 Outstanding  
 4 Highly recommended  
 37 Recommended  
 29 Fair  
 1 Poor  
 2 Faulty  
 13 Good value (€13 and under)

style, you can go to the southern Rhône, but the Languedoc is much more exciting and diverse,' said Taylor, who added: 'This remains one of the great-value regions of the world for red wine. It's hard to beat for wines that have personality, ageability and a sense of place.'

In terms of vintages, Jefford felt 'the younger the better', favouring 2010, 2011 and 2012; whereas Taylor labelled 2007 as 'wonderfully ripe' and 2009 as 'more structured and even better'. It wasn't entirely straightforward, however: 'I was puzzled,' added Taylor, 'that there were some really youthful, exciting and vibrant 2009s, then some 2010s that really needed drinking.' Overall, he encouraged ageing: 'The better *cuvées* from the good producers are worth ageing for at least five years after the vintage.' But Jefford disagreed: 'I've yet to be convinced that Languedoc makes ageworthy wines. They are great wines to drink in the first flush of youth.' George agreed: 'You don't have to think about Languedoc wines too much - just enjoy them for their lovely, upfront pleasure.'

In summary, Jefford said while the quality was mixed, 'I was getting repeatedly into a highly enthused state and that's all I want from a wine tasting. These appellations are still a bit of a minefield, but if you do your research you will be handsomely rewarded. Read *Decanter*, look for our stickers on the bottles, then enjoy!'

**Entry criteria:**  
 Producers and UK agents were invited to submit one wine from their latest vintage of Faugères and St-Chinian

## Outstanding 18.5-20pts (95-100pts)



### L'Ancienne Mercerie, Couture, Faugères 2010

Decanter average score: 18.5/20pts (95/100pts)

Individual judges' scores:

Rosemary George MW 18.5 Andrew Jefford 18.5 Simon Taylor 18.5

POA Club Gascon

This is one of the newer estates of Faugères. Natalie and François Caumette, who made their first vintage in 2000, have 16 hectares around the village of Autignac and make two *cuvées*, Les Petites Mains and the more serious Couture, so called as François' grandmother was the village haberdasher. The vineyards are organic, and work in the cellar is careful, with 12 months' ageing in older oak barrels for Couture, which is a blend of Carignan and Syrah with some Grenache and a little Mourvèdre.

**Rosemary George MW** This wine has a lovely, deep colour with a firm, powerful nose. The palate is restrained and a bit tannic but with some youthful depth and plenty of potential.

**Andrew Jefford** Gruff but compelling aromas of earth and underbrush. Very dense, textured and stony-schist: a challenging but rewarding wine of great length and breadth. This wine is liquid schist! Just a little more aromatic charm would send it into the stratosphere.

**Simon Taylor** Appealingly refined cassis aromas. The palate is more extravagant, offering a wild gush of blackberries and spice, with an impressive grip. So expressive of the south, and very much on the way up.

Drink 2013-2020 Alcohol 15%

## The tasters' verdicts

### Rosemary George MW



George was one of the first female Masters of Wine, becoming an MW in 1979. She has worked as a wine journalist, is a vice-president of the Circle of Wine Writers and has written 11 wine books, most recently *Treading Grapes: Walking Through The Vineyards Of Tuscany*. She writes a blog on Languedoc, [tastelanguedoc.blogspot.com](http://tastelanguedoc.blogspot.com).

#### George's verdict

'Faugères and St-Chinian immediately give you a sense of place. You only have to drink

a glass of one or the other to sense the warmth of the Languedoc and the sun-soaked garrigues of the hills surrounding the appellations. They use the same five grape varieties, but there are soil variations. St-Chinian includes clay and limestone, as well as schist, and also some sandstone, while Faugères is purely schist. So I wondered if I would detect any distinctive characteristics, but I have to admit that I could not.

'Much depends on the winemaker and what they do in the cellar. The blend of grape varieties can vary considerably, while the principal decision is the maturation: whether to age in vat or barrel, and if in barrel, what size. I have a certain allergy to excessive use of oak in the Languedoc. Oak needs careful handling, and often larger demi-muids of 500 or 600 litres give more satisfactory results than the standard barrique of 225 litres. Given the choice between a *cuvée* tradition with no wood and a *vieille en fût de chêne* (oak-aged) I tend opt for the first - and it's usually cheaper!

'Although I think that most of these wines would age, the delight of this tasting was their immediate drinkability, with wonderful ripe flavours, conjuring up the herbs and scents of the Midi.'

### Andrew Jefford



Jefford is a columnist for *Decanter* and *Decanter.com*. He has been writing and broadcasting about wine (and food, whisky, travel and perfume) since the 1980s, winning many awards. After spending 15 months as a senior research fellow at Adelaide University, he is now writing a book on Australia's wine landscape and terroirs. He lives in the Languedoc.

#### Jefford's verdict

'As with every part of the Languedoc,

levels of ambition and winemaking standards vary greatly in Faugères and St-Chinian: if you are able to buy one of our recommendations rather than take pot luck, that's safest. And you should: the best wines of these two established appellations offer superb value for money, with richly constituted, generously fleshed and often hauntingly perfumed wines.

'Locally, they tend to say that Faugères (from schist soils alone) has a finer grain and more elegance to it, whereas St-Chinian (which has both a schist and a limestone sector) is more generous, but it was hard to find this echoed in our tasting. The style, essentially, depends on the exact vineyard site and the skill of the winemaker. It's easy to overdo the oak here, and in my view it's rarely a good idea to give these wines an extended maturation, since so much of their pleasure is connected with the exuberant expression of youthful virtues.

'What's certain is that either appellation can represent the very best of the Languedoc as a whole, with hugely exciting wines that manage to combine herb and garrigue scents, mineral notes and rich, vivacious, beguiling flesh. Tuck in!'

### Simon Taylor



Taylor studied art history and worked for 23 years at Sotheby's as a picture expert and manager, before switching careers to found *Stone, Vine & Sun* - a mail-order wine merchant specialising in Languedoc-Roussillon, the Rhône, South Africa and South America.

#### Taylor's verdict

'On balance, I preferred the wines from Faugères: this confirms my long-held opinion that this appellation (unlike so

many in France) is a really reliable bet. A preponderance of proud and industrious growers (and little volume from the cooperative), all with vines on the homogeneous schistous soils, nearly guarantees quality. Secondly, oak seemed well handled here: there were many pure and graceful wines, allowing the schist terroir to express itself.

'There were some terrific wines from St-Chinian too, both from the schist in the north and the warmer clay-limestone soils in the south: the latter usually showing rich black fruit, lots of flesh and highish alcohol. But the tasting was marred by a number of poor bottles. Too many wines, particularly those based on Syrah, slipped into an anonymous international style: inky colour, over-extracted and with chocolatey, grippy, charred oak. A number also appeared to be maturing very rapidly and developing secondary (often nice) meaty and savoury notes.

But let's not be too critical: a lot of these wines will sell for €9 to €14 a bottle, and some - the charming Faugères from *Domaine Marie*, for example (16.75/89 points) - for less. Many of the wines we tasted offer remarkable character and food-friendliness for the price.'



### Château Milhau-Lacugue, Les Truffières, St-Chinian 2010 18.5 (95) RG 18.5 AJ 18.5 ST 18.5

N/A UK [www.milhau-lacugue.com](http://www.milhau-lacugue.com)

When asked how he saw the typicity of St-Chinian, Jean Lacugue talked about two soil types that share a similar climate. His is an old family estate that now totals 120ha, producing vins de pays and Languedoc wines, as well as St-Chinian. He has 40 years' experience and his methods have inevitably evolved over the years. Perhaps the defining characteristic is that he no longer uses oak. He says Les Truffières, made only in the best years, has enough fruit concentration without needing help from a barrel.

**RG** A rounded ripe nose, with appealing southern spice. Similarly, a ripe palate, with soft cherry fruit and balancing supple tannins. A lovely mouthful of flavour - very harmonious, with depth and a long finish.

**AJ** Solid, chunky fruits. Dense, deep, rich, vivid and blissfully unoaky. This is an absolutely lovely wine on the palate: wonderfully singing fruits combined with super-generous extractive force. Dense, deep, resonant and long: superb raw materials here.

**ST** The nose is powerful with lots of savoury hints that are almost hidden. The palate is smooth and refined, with an almost silky texture. Afterwards you can sense the subtle depths of cool, black fruit.

Drink 2013-2020 Alc 14.5% ➤

## Outstanding (continued) 18.5–20pts (95–100pts)



**Château Viranel, St-Chinian 2011** 18.5 (95)  
RG 18.5 AJ 18.5 ST 18.5

£10.99 (2010) Cambridge Wine Merchants

Château Viranel is one of the oldest estates of St-Chinian and has belonged to the Bergasse family since 1551. Georges Viranel bottled his first wine in 1986 and now it is his two sons, Arnaud and Nicolas, who run the estate. They have 38ha of vines, including 18ha of St-Chinian, in the garrigues outside the village of Cessenon. They favour a subtle use of older barrels and *délestage* for a gentle extraction of tannin and flavour.

**RG** A lovely deep colour. Quite a solid, dense nose, with some spice. A rounded, full-bodied palate. Quite ripe and rich, with a streak of tannin. Nicely textured with layers of flavours. Southern warmth, a long finish.

**AJ** Glossy, saturated black-red. Sweet, warm, svelte aromas of black fruits and subtle spices. A lush, rich, voluptuous and nonetheless intellectually satisfying palate, packed with sweet, velvety fruits qualified by crushed stone and perfumer's spices. Magnificent, compelling wine of place: bravo!

**ST** Lots of vigour. Fleishy, with a gush of red and black cherries. Then a hit of pepper. Very meaty and substantial. Bring on the wild-boar sausages.

**Drink** 2013–2018 **Alc** 13.5%



**Vivien Roussignol, Les Païssels, St-Chinian 2011** 18.5 (95) RG 18.5 AJ 18.5 ST 18.5

£13.80 Pierre Hourlier

Vivien Roussignol made his first wine in St-Chinian in 2011. He and girlfriend Marie studied oenology at Montpellier and worked vintages in California and Australia, and then at other Languedoc estates. Roussignol's parents, members of the St-Chinian co-op, gave them a hectare of old vines; Païssels is a blend of equal parts Syrah and Carignan, with some Mourvèdre and Grenache. The terroir is schist.

**RG** Ripe, red fruits with lots of spice on the nose and a lovely reminder of the garrigue. The palate has a great grip, but the tannins are supple. This wine is Midi sunshine in a glass.

**AJ** Aromatically light, sweet and cherryish; great lifted charm with a floral touch. On the palate, very ripe, almost Porty, but excellent depth, texture and old-vine authority. Lots of perfume on the aftertaste, too. Impressive.

**ST** This is very rich with a lush oak overlay. There are plenty of concentrated fruits here, which are layered, and behind all that there is a suggestion of mint. Youthful and dramatic.

**Drink** 2013–2016 **Alc** 14.5%

## Highly Recommended 17–18.25pts (90–94pts)



**Cazal Viel, Vieilles Vignes, St-Chinian 2009** 17 (90)  
RG 17 AJ 17.5 ST 17

£13 Earle Wines

So delicious: a gush of vibrant red cherries and raspberries, pure and fragrant, with just a lick of sweet oak. Tight-knit in style, with great length and generous extract too. **Drink** 2013–2020 **Alc** 14%



**Domaine La Madura, Grand Vin, St-Chinian 2009** 17 (90)  
RG 16 AJ 17.5 ST 18

£21 Flint Wines

Subtle, finely composed fruit scents, with plenty of lush ripeness. Black plum and cinnamon scents coming through as well. Vivid, deep and mouthfilling wine, with a fine core of flavour to it. Amply satisfying as a drink, too: balanced, harmonious and nourishing. **Drink** 2013–2018 **Alc** 14.5%



**Laurent Miquel, Bardou, St-Chinian 2008** 17 (90) RG 17 AJ 17.5 ST 18

£15.08 The Fine Wine Co

True Syrah character; spicy, meaty and leathery. Fresh, oaky aromas; almost like young claret. Lush, rich, textured, deep and vivid. A really exciting St-Chinian Syrah, proving how well that variety can do in this terroir. **Drink** 2013–2020 **Alc** 13.5%

*'Either appellation can represent the very best of the Languedoc as a whole, with hugely exciting wines'*

Andrew Jefford



**Lorgeril, Le Pigeonnier, Faugères 2011** 17 (90) RG 16 AJ 17 ST 18

£9.79 Le Bon Vin

Earthy scents; quiet but with half-hidden profundities and pretty aromas of cassis and roses. Bright but also appealingly delicate and transparent. Impressive length and depth, and already delivers so much pleasure. **Drink** 2013–2018 **Alc** 13.5%

## Recommended 15–16.75pts (83–89pts)

Wine	Score	RG	AJ	ST	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Château du Prieuré des Morgues, Grande Réserve, St-Chinian 2009	16.75 (89)	18	17.5	15	Fresh, sweet blackcurrants with a little wildflower. Vivid, poised, with Syrah perfumes of orange blossom and a hint of smoke. Meatiness; refreshing bite.	14.5%	2013–2020	£18	Whittaker Wines
Domaine Marie, Faugères 2011	16.75 (89)	15	17	18.5	Lively cherry, a raspberry perfume. A very juicy style with furry tannins and a bit confit. True schist wine, slightly edgy and exciting, with good potential too.	14%	2013–2020	£7.99	Waitrose
Borie La Vitarèle, Les Schistes, St-Chinian 2011	16.25 (87)	16	16	17	Aromatic; liquorice and herb-scented core of black fruit, which really expands on the palate. Soft, ripe and supple; characteristic of the Languedoc.	14.5%	2013–2016	£16	H2Vin
Domaine de Cébène, Felgaria, Faugères 2011	16.25 (87)	16	17.5	15.5	Elegant aromas of perfumed spices, currant and smoke. On the palate it's rich and textured, with spice-influenced fruits; earthy. Perfectly judged oak.	14%	2013–2023	£28–£30	Cambridge Wine Merchants, Leon Stolarski, Vine Trail
Abbaye Sylva Plana, La Closerie, Faugères 2011	16 (86)	18	15.5	15	Savory aromas with a hint of farmyard; very full. Rich, mouth-coating with tannin streak and lots of wild flavours. A lovely drink with ageing potential.	14.5%	2013–2020	N/A UK	www.vignoblesbouchard.com
Château Anglade, Comete, Faugères 2010	16 (86)	15	16.5	17	Refined, mature, with a cedar and black-fruit nose. The smokiness is indicative of the schist terroir. This has been crafted with a gentle hand.	14.5%	2013–2018	N/A UK	chateau.anglade@wanadoo.fr
Château de la Liquière, Nos Racines, Faugères 2011	16 (86)	15	16.5	16.5	A rounded nose with a deep, currant, fresh, lively yet subtle palate of impressive complexity. Good solid tannins for keeping too.	14.5%	2013–2020	£12.50 (2010)	The Wine Society
Domaine La Linqière, La Sentenelle 310, St-Chinian 2010	16 (86)	16.5	16.5	15	Deep, earthy, long and searching flavours: the Mourvedre proves its worth. Thunderously impressive, dramatic, dense; a wine of profound aromatic force.	14.5%	2014–2020	N/A UK	linquiere@neuf.fr
Domaine Rimbart, Les Travers de Marceau, St-Chinian 2012	16 (86)	15	17.5	15.5	Fresh, sweet and citrusy. Light, simple, accessible, but with armfuls of St-Chinian character, too. A wholly admirable, simple wine.	12.5%	2013–2015	£8.32	Cambridge Wine Merchants
Les Amants de la Vigneronne, Dans la Peau, Faugères 2010	16 (86)	15	17.5	15.5	Extravagant with a touch of spice and chocolate. On the palate, cassis and vanilla notes. Stunningly good mineral-infused black fruits with a firm finish.	14%	2013–2020	N/A UK	www.lesamantsdelavigneronne.com
Les Vignobles Foncalieu, Apogée, St-Chinian 2010	16 (86)	15	18	15	Very deep tone, an earthy gruff. Deep, lush, voluptuous and full on the palate. A splendid red wine by any criterion; hugely powerful, resonant and long.	14%	2013–2020	£28	City Beverage Co
Mas Gabinèle, Inaccessible, Faugères 2010	16 (86)	16	15.5	17	Quite a dense chocolatey nose with a leathery note. Dense, cassis and mocha palate. Delivers plenty of that mineral intensity one hopes for in Faugères.	15%	2013–2020	N/A UK	www.masgabinele.com
Domaine Cathala, Absolue, St-Chinian 2011	15.75 (85+)	15	17.5	15	Lovely fresh, spiced citrus with loads of freshness and a rounded, ripe, sweet, oaky palate. Lovely tobacco and herbal complexities – pure delight to drink.	14.5%	2013–2016	N/A UK	+33 6 07 01 97 62
Domaine Cottebrune, Transhumance, Faugères 2011	15.75 (85+)	16	16	15.5	Appealing mocha and black-fruit aromas with lively, fresh poise and mineral interest. Quite youthful, firm tannins with good ageing potential.	13.5%	2013–2020	£22	Berry Bros & Rudd
Domaine La Maurine Rouge, Secrets de Paul, St-Chinian 2010	15.75 (85+)	16.5	16.5	14.5	Charred oak and ripe berry fruit scents. This is a wine with a lot of power and force and a tight-knit structure.	14%	2013–2018	N/A UK	www.lamaurinerouge.com
Domaine Ollier Taillefer, Castel Fossibus, Faugères 2010	15.75 (85+)	14	17.75	15.5	Distinctively citrusy Languedoc Syrah dominates the nose. On the palate, this is vivacious, perfumed and flamboyant: a total charmer.	14%	2013–2016	N/A UK	www.olliertaillefer.com
Domaine Les Fusionels, Re-Naissance, Faugères 2011	15.75 (85+)	16	16.5	15	Rich spice with a hint of oak and chocolate and ripe, dense, sweet fruit. A firm streak of tannin – mature and solid.	14%	2013–2020	N/A UK	www.les-fusionels-faugeres.com
Benjamin Darnault, St-Chinian 2011	15.5 (85)	15	15.5	16	Notes of truffle and a touch of oak; rich and full, with ripe strawberries and blackberries. A generous and ambitious wine with some excellent qualities.	14.5%	2013–2020	£12	Naked Wine
Calmel + JJoseph, St-Chinian 2011	15.5 (85)	14	16.5	16	Pure and floral in its aromatic style: lots of citrusy lift and charm here. Youthful, crisply red-fruited wine, delivering plenty of spice.	13.5%	2013–2015	£8.99	Daniel Lambert Wines
Cave de St-Chinian, Esprit de Renaud de Valon, St-Chinian 2009	15.5 (85)	17	15	14.5	Very ripe aromas with some sweetness and warmth on the palate. Nicely rounded with spicy fruit and a harmonious finish.	14%	2013–2014	N/A UK	www.vin-saintchinian.com
Château Belot, Best of Belot, St-Chinian 2010	15.5 (85)	16	15.5	15.5	Ripe and sweet with some rounded spicy aromas. Vivid and lively, with bags of character and an overlay of chocolate.	15%	2013–2016	POA	Wine Hunters
Château Veyran, Tradition, St-Chinian 2012	15.5 (85)	16	16.5	14.5	Zippy, sweet and fresh: nice young red-fruit scents. Juicy, boisterous and sweetly fruited, but with some of the innate complexity of its origins behind it.	13%	2013–2015	N/A UK	www.chateau-veyran.com
Clos Bagatelle, Veillée d'Automne, St-Chinian 2010	15.5 (85)	16	15	15.5	Bittersweet, rosehip character to nose with a touch of orange. A lively palate with a touch of spice.	13.5%	2013–2020	£14.95	Dusty Road Wines, Swig
Domaine de Pech-Ménel, St-Chinian 2009	15.5 (85)	16.5	15	15	Plenty of power and depth with a good body and great texture. This has ageing potential.	14.5%	2013–2020	N/A UK	www.pech-menel.com
Domaine des Prés Lasses, Castel Viel, Faugères 2010	15.5 (85)	16	16.5	14	Big, very powerful wine with an exciting sturdy, gutsy and spicy palate – a rather Spanish style.	15%	2013–2020	£22.49	Enotria
Domaine la Sarabande, Faugères 2010	15.5 (85)	16	15.5	15	Perfumed oak with clean aromas and plenty of appellation character. Bright, crunchy black-fruit attack, with a touch of spice.	14%	2013–2020	£13–£16.95	Cambridge Wine Merchants, Lea & Sandeman
Mas d'Alezon, Montfauette, Faugères 2011	15.5 (85)	13	17	17	Rich but vivid; softly textured, with lots of coffee notes. Real potential. Very pure fruit, backed by fine tannins and a very promising finish.	12.5%	2013–2018	N/A UK	www.masdalezon.com
Abbotts & Delaunay, Boréas, Faugères 2010	15.25 (84)	15	15.5	15.5	Warm, relaxed and resonant; rather intriguing. Sharp blackberry fruit flavoured with mocha oak and lots of schist-mineral action.	14.5%	2013–2020	£16	Averys
Calmel + JJoseph, Faugères 2011	15.25 (84)	16	15	15	Sweet and charming with fresh black-fruit aromas. Ripe, fleshy fruit on the palate; quite spicy and solid.	14%	2013–2020	£8.99	Daniel Lambert Wines
François Lurton, Domaine du Ministre, St-Chinian 2010	15.25 (84)	16	14.5	15.5	A structured nose with chocolatey aromas and some dry spice. A sturdy palate with lots of fruit to hold it up.	13.5%	2013–2016	£12	Fields Morris & Verdin

*'The delight of this tasting was the wines' immediate drinkability, with ripe flavours and scents of the Midi'*

Rosemary George MW

**Recommended (continued)** 15–16.75pts (83–89pts)

Wine	Score	RG	AJ	ST	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Mas de Cynanque, Acutum, St-Chinian 2009	15.25 (84)	15	15	16	Lifted, currant and menthol scent – and consistent on the palate, all cassis tempered by mint. Refined, not overdone.	14.5%	2013–2018	£12	Cambridge Wine Merchants
Château Rigaud, Faugères 2010	15 (83)	14	16.5	14.5	Very densely coloured. Rich, deep, vivid and long with splendid fruits, lovely spice and a streak of tannin.	14%	2014–2018	N/A UK	chateau.anglade@wanadoo.fr
Cours La Reine, St-Chinian 2012	15 (83)	16	13.5	16	A lovely strawberry and soft spice character that is rather charming and easy to drink.	13.5%	2013–2018	£7.95	Corks Out, Mill Hill Wines, Island Wine Co, Oxford Wine Co, The Salusbury Winestore, Worth Bros
Des Pradels, Ch Quartironi de Sars, Haut Coup de Foudres, St-Chinian 2009	15 (83)	16	14	15.5	This wine has lots of fresh red fruit that is spicy, juicy and has balanced tannins. A real energy and bite.	14%	2013–2018	N/A UK	www.vins-quartironi.com
Domaine Leon Barral, Jadis, Faugères 2009	15 (83)	15	14	16	An appealing nose of black fruit, just beginning to develop secondary hints of leather. Supple mouthful of black cherries, a hint of pepper and menthol.	14%	2013–2020	£21.90	Exel, Les Caves de Pyrène
Laurent Miquel, L'Artisan, Faugères 2011	15 (83)	15	14	16.5	Spicy with leathery notes and a palate of dense black and red fruit. A lively acid gives this an elegance. A little rustic but still exciting.	13.5%	2013–2018	£7.99	Majestic
Les Terrasses de Gabrielle, Et moi et moi et moi, St-Chinian 2009	15 (83)	15	15	15	This wine is sexy and sheeny with intriguing herbal scents and vibrant red fruit. Supple and subtle.	14.5%	2013–2015	£13.75	Aske & Humphris, Hallamshire Wine Shipping

**Fair** 13–14.75pts (76–82pts)

■ Château La Dourmie, Elise, St-Chinian 2009 14.75 (82)  
 ■ Château Combebelles, St-Chinian 14.5 (81) ■ Château des Estanilles, Inverso, Faugères 2010 14.5 (81)  
 ■ Château des Peyregrandes, Marie Laurencie, Faugères 2010 14.5 (81) ■ Domaine Boissezon Guiraud, Comme à Cayenne, St-Chinian 2011 14.5 (81) ■ Domaine du Météore, Clos de Bijou, St-Chinian 2011 14.5 (81) ■ Mas Champart, Clos de la Simonette, St-Chinian 2010 14.5 (81) ■ Château Bousquette, Cuvée Pruneyrac, St-Chinian 2010 14.25 (80+) ■ Château Galtier, l'Obstinée, St-Chinian 2010 14.25 (80+) ■ Domaine des Mathurins, Tango pour Hélène, St-Chinian 2011 14.25 (80+) ■ Domaine Deslignes, Delphine, St-Chinian 2010 14.25 (80+) ■ Domaine Navarre, Le Laouzil, St-Chinian 2010 14.25 (80+) ■ Canet Valette, Une et Mille Nuits, St-Chinian 2010 14 (80) ■ Cave de Roquebrun, Terrasses de Balaussan, St-Chinian 2010 14 (80) ■ Château Coujan,

Gabrielle de Spinola, St-Chinian 2011 14 (80) ■ Domaine de Montplo, Louise, St-Chinian 2008 14 (80)  
 ■ Domaine des Jouglas, Initiale, St-Chinian 2012 14 (80)  
 ■ Domaine du Sacré-Coeur, Jean Madoré, St-Chinian 2009 14 (80) ■ Domaine La Grange Léon, l'Audacieux, St-Chinian 2011 14 (80) ■ Domaine Marion Pla, St-Chinian 2009 14 (80) ■ Terres Falmet, A Contre Courant, St-Chinian 2008 14 (80) ■ Domaine Moulinier, Les Terrasses Grillées, St-Chinian 2010 13.75 (79)  
 ■ Les Eminades, Sortilège, St-Chinian 2010 13.75 (79)  
 ■ Cave de St-Chinian, Le Secret des Capitelles, St-Chinian 2010 13.5 (78) ■ Domaine de la Reynardière, Grand Terroir de Schiste, Faugères 2007 13.5 (78)  
 ■ Domaine St Martin d'Agel, La Chapelle, Faugères 2010 13.5 (78) ■ Donnadieu, Cuvée Camille & Juliette, St-Chinian 2011 13.5 (78) ■ Lorigeril, Château de Ciffre, St-Chinian 2011 13.5 (78) ■ Domaine Binet-Jacquet, Faugères 2011 13 (76)

**Poor** 11–12.75pts (70–75+pts)

■ Domaine Pech de Lune, L'Espace d'un Moment, St-Chinian 2009 12.25 (74)

**Faulty**

■ Domaine du Météore, Les Orionides, Faugères 2009 (oxidised) ■ Domaine du Tabatau, Cambrigou, St-Chinian 2011 (excess sulphites)

For full UK stockist details, see p103

**Next month's panel tastings**  
 Victoria & Tasmania Pinot Noir and St-Aubin blanc 2011

**Expert summary:** Rosemary George MW

Neither appellation outperformed the other, and both displayed their wines' variety and dynamism, but high expectations did lead to a few disappointments



Rosemary George MW is the Regional Chair for Languedoc-Roussillon at the Decanter World Wine Awards

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE to say that one appellation performed better than the other. True, St-Chinian has produced three Outstanding wines, as opposed to Faugères' one, but then St-Chinian is the larger appellation. One of the Outstanding St-Chinians comes from a new, tiny estate, with Vivien Roussignol and Marie Toussaint making wine from just one hectare. The other three Outstanding wines were each the top cuvée of the estate, two with some maturation in oak, and one, more originally, with no oak. In the Highly Recommendeds, St-Chinian again accounted for more than Faugères, with Laurent Miquel making two of the four wines (the Miquel family has owned Château Cazal Viel since 1791, and Bardou is a plot within the estate). The de Lorigeril family is based in Cabardès at the magnificent 17th-century Château de Pennautier, but it has ambitions well beyond the horizons of that small appellation. It bought the Moulin de Ciffre a few years ago, and now makes a series of cuvées, both St-Chinian and Faugères. Curiously, it was the lesser of two wines in the tasting that performed best, Le Pigeonnier from Faugères, while its Château de Ciffre from St-Chinian rated only Fair.

There were a solid 37 Recommended wines. These include many established names, as well as some relative newcomers. There were wines aged in oak, and wines that

were not, and with five grape varieties to play with, there are numerous permutations available. The vintages are the most recent, showing the easy drinkability of the appellations, even in wines that have ageing potential.

Among the Fair category, there were disappointments, but that is often the way with blind tastings. And there were also omissions. It is a pity that Domaine Jean-Michel Alquier did not send samples. Jean-Michel is generally considered one of the leading producers in Faugères, and his father Gilbert was one of the first to plant Syrah and use small barriques. Nor was Simon and Monica Coulshaw's Domaine des Trinités in the line-up.

Faugères and St-Chinian are two of my favourite appellations in the Languedoc, so if I am being coldly objective, I might have hoped for more Outstanding and Highly Recommended wines, but the results show that both appellations provide some delicious drinking. **D**

*'The vintages are the most recent, showing the easy drinkability of the appellations'*

**My top three**

Rosemary George MW

■ **Domaine La Madura, Grand Vin, St-Chinian 2009** Cyril Bourgne's Grand Vin, as opposed to his Cuvée Classique (note the Bordelais nomenclature) is barrel-aged but well crafted; it amply illustrates St-Chinian's charm. **16 (86) Drink** 2013–2018

■ **Domaine La Madura, Grand Vin, St-Chinian 2009** Domaine Les Fusionels is a classic example of outsiders setting up in Faugères: Jem Harris is Australian and wife Arielle is a Champenoise. This cuvée is rich and youthful, with southern warmth and ageing potential. **16 (86) Drink** 2013–2020

■ **Domaine Ollier Taillefer, Castel Fossibus, Faugères 2010** This was by no means my favourite wine of the tasting, even though it comes from one of my favourite Faugères estates. Castel Fossibus is its oaked cuvée; however, I have always preferred the estate's entry-level Les Collines, and the more serious but still unoaked Grande Réserve, which benefits from lower yields and a selection of the grapes. Domaine Ollier Taillefer is one of the older estates of the Faugères appellation. **14 (80) Drink** 2013–2016

**My top three**

Andrew Jefford

■ **Château Milhau-Lacugue, Les Truffières, St-Chinian 2010** Complex, refined, balanced – and poised between showy youth and denser, chewier secondary complexities – Les Truffières is a wine that you could feel confident about stowing away in the cellar for a few years or so. **18.5 (95) Drink** 2013–2020

■ **Domaine de Cébène, Felgaria, Faugères 2011** There are few more thoughtful or wide-horizoned winemakers hereabouts than Brigitte Chevalier, and her 2011 Felgaria is a magnificently complex, intricately crafted example of its terroir: a wine that is both perfumed and profound. **17.5 (91) Drink** 2013–2023

■ **Domaine La Linquière, La Sentenelle 310, St-Chinian 2010** A magnificent and monumental wine, with some of the most charming aromas and thunderous flavours on show today. Almost explosively energetic: pure excitement, pure drama. **16.5 (88) Drink** 2013–2020

**NB: the tasters' top wines are not necessarily their top-scoring, rather those which, on learning the wines' identity, they feel are the most notable given their provenance, price or other factors**

**My top three**

Simon Taylor

■ **L'Ancienne Mercerie, Couture, Faugères 2010** This Autignac estate is new to me, but, what a terrific wine! I'm usually a sucker for wines that show cassis on the nose and palate, but this offers much more: it's powerful, rich and spicy, but the oak is perfectly judged, and it's so expressive of the Languedoc. **18.5 (95) Drink** 2013–2020

■ **Domaine La Madura, Grand Vin, St-Chinian 2009** I picked this out as a good example of a showy, oaky wine, with plenty of cinnamon and mocha accents but also exhibiting vibrant black fruit; energetic, with some good keeping potential too. **18 (93) Drink** 2013–2018

■ **Borie La Vitarèle, Les Schistes, St-Chinian 2011** Jean-François Izarn isn't a consistent winemaker (a bit of a nightmare for any importer) but he makes fascinating wines: this is so aromatic and intense, showing all the herbs, spice and lifted brambly fruit one could hope for in a schist wine. **17 (90) Drink** 2013–2016

**CHATEAU MONTLABERT**  
 SAINT-ÉMILION GRAND CRU

*Château Montlabert - 2010*  
 James Suckling 2011: 89-90/100

"Blueberry character, with firm tannins and a good finish. Chewy."  
 The colour is so deep and dense it is almost opaque. The nose is expansive, complex and elegant with vibrant black fruit aromas alongside praline and hints of mahogany, while the palate is full and luscious, its richness balancing beautifully with a vein of elegant minerality. Well-structured tannins give a velvety, succulent mouthfeel.

www.chateau-montlabert.com  
 www.facebook.com/ChateauxetDomainesCastel  
 www.twitter.com/ChateauxCastel

RCS B. 482.283.694 - Octobre 2012