

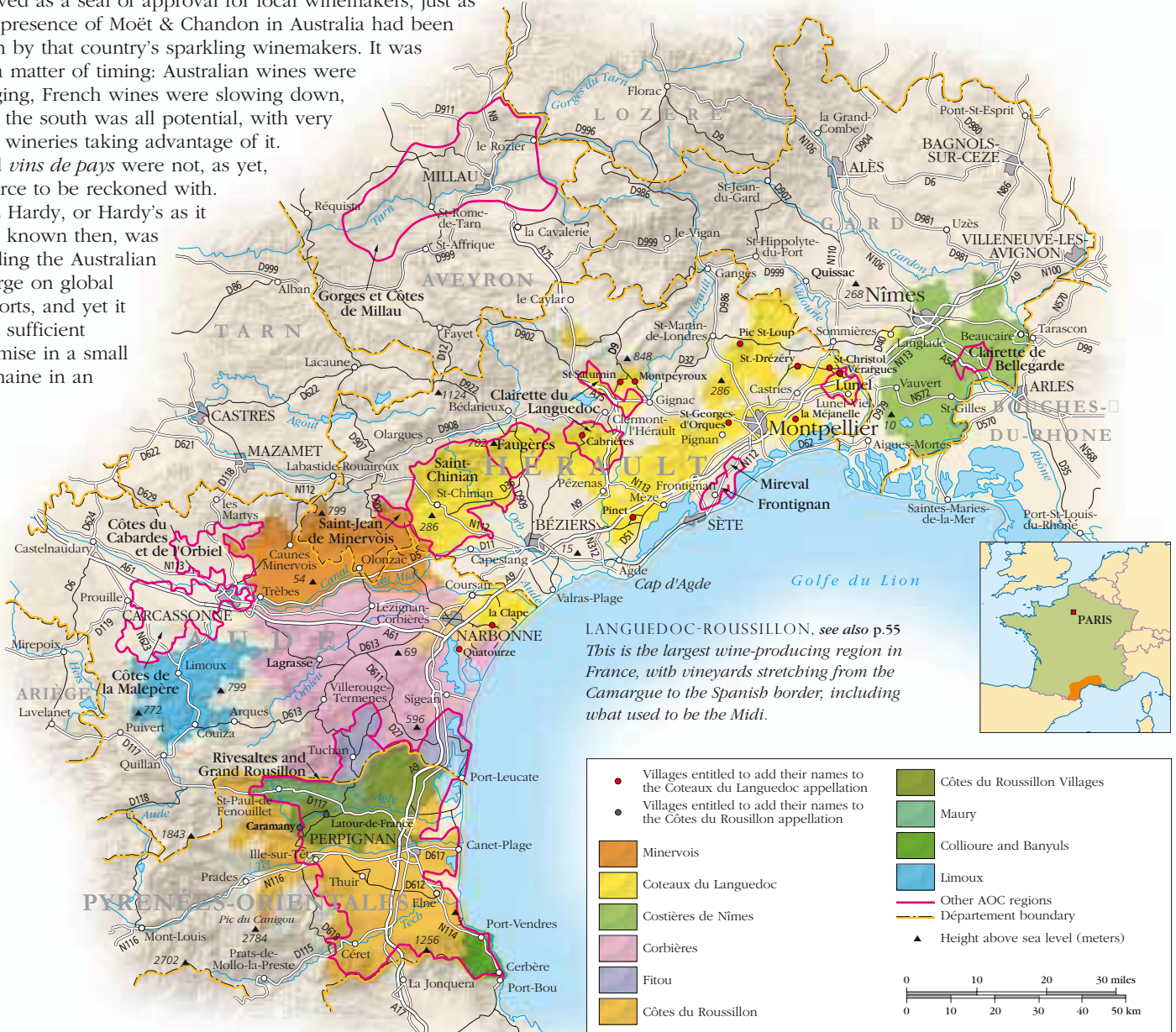
LANGUEDOC-ROUSSILLON

The 1990s saw an influx of Australian winemakers, who have since played a not insignificant role in the raising of standards; but the sale in 2003 of the Australian-owned Domaine de la Baume could signal a swing back to a more homegrown stimulus. Domaine de la Baume is not significant in terms of the total production of this region, but there is no denying that its purchase by BRL Hardy in 1990, at the beginning of Australia's inexorable success on export markets, gave local wine producers a psychological boost.



VINEYARDS AT BAGES
The Mediterranean coastal vineyards of the Côte du Roussillon, around Perpignan, are reputed to be some of the hottest in France.

IN A STRANGE WAY, the presence of a top Australian group was viewed as a seal of approval for local winemakers, just as the presence of Moët & Chandon in Australia had been seen by that country's sparkling winemakers. It was all a matter of timing: Australian wines were surging, French wines were slowing down, and the south was all potential, with very few wineries taking advantage of it. And *vins de pays* were not, as yet, a force to be reckoned with. BRL Hardy, or Hardy's as it was known then, was leading the Australian charge on global exports, and yet it saw sufficient promise in a small domaine in an



unknown part of France to be sidetracked into purchasing it outright. The next few years saw the rise of *vins de pays*, particularly Vin de Pays d'Oc, including those of Domaine de la Baume, which became a commercial success on the UK market, against the tide for most other inexpensive French wines. During this time, there was an internationalization of grape varieties and wine styles in the south of France, and, barring some unfortunate experiments in the late 1970s and the 1980s, this development was far from regrettable.

Some French producers had started putting their own houses in order long before the BRL Hardy purchased Domaine de la Baume. Indeed, a number of domaines began bottling their own wines in the late 1970s, when the government's *vins de pays* program was encouraging quality-conscious growers to reduce yields. The problem was that there were never enough "quality-conscious" growers. But those who were formed a new generation of elite winemakers. They combined modern technology with the best traditional practices, including the use of some aging with new oak, to create exciting new wines in the early 1980s. As other growers observed the vastly increased prices that their pioneering neighbors were attracting, more of them switched from selling in bulk to domaine-bottling, and it was this potential that attracted the Australians.

It was thus the French who created the newfound pride in this region, but it was the Australians who grabbed the limelight, focusing international attention on the fabulous potential. It is almost possible to give consumers an iron-clad guarantee that if they buy ultrapremium *cuvées* from Languedoc-Roussillon they will not only be delighted with the wines, but they will also be

RECENT LANGUEDOC-ROUSSILLON VINTAGES

2003 Higher-altitude appellations, such as Pic-St.-Loup, have fared best, but it will be a mishmash of good, bad, and ugly elsewhere, with a very small scattering of stunning reds.

2002 The year of the floods, with only those areas that escaped (essentially western and southern extremities, and higher-altitude vineyards) managing to produce a decent quality.

2001 The best year all around since 1998, with excellent quality achieved in all styles.

2000 A good, but not great, year in which Roussillon generally fared better than Languedoc.

1999 An average year except for Corbières and Minervois, which excelled and in some cases produced wines of the decade.

cheaper than and far superior to medium-priced wines bearing the most famous French appellations.

When BRL Hardy sold Domaine de la Baume to Les Grands Chais in 2003, the Australians left this wine region in a far better commercial position than they found it 13 years earlier; so the French in general, and Les Grands Chais in particular, have no excuse if they fail to take Languedoc-Roussillon to the next level of success. That will require a twin philosophy that does not restrict the planting of classic grapes and yet encourages a resurgence of the most interesting local varieties.

FACTORS AFFECTING TASTE AND QUALITY



LOCATION

A crescent of vineyards situated in southern France between the Rhône to the east and the Pyrenees to the southwest.



CLIMATE

The Mediterranean-influenced climate is generally well suited to the cultivation of the vine, although it is subject to occasional stormy weather. Two winds dominate: the cold and parching Mistral, which blows down from the heights of the Alpine glaciers, and the wet and warm Marin, which comes in from the sea and can cause rot at harvest time. There are many microclimates in this collection of isolated vine-growing areas.



ASPECT

Famous for its unending tracts of flat, *vin ordinaire* vineyards that stretch across the vast plains; the best sites of Languedoc-Roussillon, however, mostly occupy south-, southeast-, and east-facing *garrigues* and hillsides, or nestle beneath protective overhanging cliffs.



SOIL

In general terms, the plains and valleys have rich alluvial soils, while the hillsides are schist or limestone and the *garrigues*, or former moorlands, are comprised of stony, carbonaceous soils over fissured limestone. However, specific situations vary enormously.



VITICULTURE AND VINIFICATION

This remains the great *vin ordinaire* region of France, where everything is mechanized and the vines of the plain are farmed like wheat or corn. There is a trend toward developing single-domaine vineyards that have potentially expressive *terroirs*, growing classic varieties and combining various traditional methods with modern techniques. Limoux still practices the ancient *méthode rurale*—in Blanquette Méthode Ancestrale AOC (*see below*)—although the majority of the wines are pure traditional method and sold under the new *crémant* appellation.



GRAPE VARIETIES

Aspiran Noir, Aspiran Gris, Aubun (*syn.* Counoise), Bourboulenc (known in some areas as Malvoisie or Tourbat), Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Carignan, Carignan Blanc, Cinsault, Clairette, Duras, Fer, Grenache, Grenache Blanc, Grenache Gris, Lladoner Pelut, Listan Negra (the black version of Spain's Palomino), Malbec, Macabéo, Marsanne, Merlot, Mourvèdre, Muscat d'Alexandrie, Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, Muscat Doré de Frontignan, Muscat Rosé à Petits Grains, Négrette, Oeillade, Picpoul, Picpoul Noir, Roussanne, Syrah, Terret, Terret Noir, Ugni Blanc, Vermentino (*syn.* Rolle).

THE APPELLATIONS OF LANGUEDOC-ROUSSILLON

BANYULS AOC

The most southerly appellation in France, the vineyards of this *vin doux naturel* are literally a stone's throw from those of Spain. The vines are grown on precipitous slopes of schist where man and mule have great difficulty in maintaining a foothold, mechanization is out of the question, yields are extremely low, and ripeness very high. You will often see "rimage" on labels; this word is derived from the Catalan *rime*, or "grape," and refers to the vintage.

RED This is the deepest and darkest of all VDNs. A rich, sweet, red Banyuls (without too much barrel-age) has a chocolaty, bottled-

fruitiness, which is the nearest France gets to the great wines of Portugal's Douro region. It lacks the fire of a great port, but has its own immense charm. After 15 to 20 years in bottle a great Banyuls develops a curious but wonderful complexity that falls somewhere between the porty-plummy, dried-fruit spice of a mature vintage port and the coffee-caramel, nutty-raisiny smoothness of a fine old tawny.

🕒 10–40 years

WHITE/ROSÉ/TAWNY Like all VDNs that may be made in red, white, and rosé style, they can all turn tawny with time, particularly "rancio" wines.

Note In the following entries, a wine described as a *vin doux naturel* (or VDN) is made from very ripe grapes and fortified with pure grape spirit after its fermentation has reached 5 or 6 percent. It has the natural sweetness of the grape. To be labeled "Rancio" a VDN must be stored in oak casks "according to local custom," which often means exposing the barrels to direct sunlight for a minimum of two years. This imparts the distinctive *rancio* flavor that is so prized in Roussillon. Depending on the color of the original wine, the wine technique used, and how long it has been aged, the style of the wine produced varies; it can be red, white, rosé, or tawny.

☞ All wines: a minimum of 50% Grenache, plus Grenache Gris, Grenache Blanc, Macabéo, Tourbat, Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, Muscat d'Alexandrie, and a maximum 10% (in total) of Carignan, Cinsault, and Syrah

🕒 10–20 years

✓ *Le Dominican* (Hanicotte) • *C. V. l'Étoile* (Extra Vieux) • *Du Mas Blanc* • *De la Tour Vieille* • *Du Traginer* ☉ (Rimage Mis Tardive)

BANYULS GRAND CRU AOC

The requirements are the same as for Banyuls AOC, but a minimum of 75 percent Grenache is required. The grapes must be destemmed and macerated for a minimum of five days and the wine matured in oak for at least 30 months.

The wines are similar in character to those of the basic, although not at all ordinary, Banyuls appellation, but in terms of classic port styles, they veer more toward the tawny than vintage.

✓ *L'Abbé Rous* (Christian Reynal) • *L'Étoile* (Réserve) • *Cellier des Templiers*

BANYULS GRAND CRU "RANCIO" AOC

See Banyuls Grand Cru AOC

BANYULS "RANCIO" AOC

See Banyuls AOC

BLANQUETTE DE LIMOUX AOC

Although this always has been a surprisingly good traditional method wine for such sunny southern vineyards, the best Blanquette de Limoux have improved by leaps and bounds over the past decade, moving away from a somewhat rustic bubbly to a much finer style, although not to the degree of finesse possible in a Crémant de Limoux. Some may regret its loss of individuality (more so for the Crémant appellation) and this is to a certain extent a true loss, but Limoux must adopt a more refined style if it is to compete in the international premium sparkling-wine market. Although we should not overstate the case, the best of these wines still retain a sufficiently distinctive style to stand out in any blind tasting. This has been assured by the Mauzac component, which rose from optional to a minimum of 90 percent when the Crémant appellation was introduced.

SPARKLING WHITE These wines used to have the distinctive aroma of fresh-cut grass, but are now developing finer, more flowery, autolytic aromas.

☞ Mauzac, Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc

🕒 1–3 years (up to 12 for vintages)

✓ *Antech* (Flascon des Maîtres) • *Robert* (Dame Robert, Maître Blanquetiers) • *Sieur d'Arques* (Aimery Princesse)

BLANQUETTE MÉTHODE ANCESTRALE AOC

Formerly called Vin de Blanquette, but still produced by the ancient *méthode rurale*, this wine was apparently invented by the monks at the abbey of St.-Hilaire in 1531.

SPARKLING WHITE These succulently sweet sparkling wines are a hedonist's dream and should be far more commercially available. The ancient *méthode rurale* should be perfected so that prestige *cuvées* can be sold at a premium,

allowing Limoux to capitalize on its historical value and individual wines' reputation.

☞ Mauzac

✓ *Sieur d'Arques* (Dame d'Arques)

CABARDÈS AOC

An obscure appellation north of Carcassonne, these wines were once sold as Côtes du Cabardès et de l'Orbiel VDQS, but this hardly tripped off the tongue, thus the shortened form was in common usage long before the appellation was promoted to full AOC status in 1999, when the *encépagement* changed.

RED The best wines have elegant fruit and a leaner, more Bordeaux-like balance than most of the warmer, spicy-ripe southern French reds.

☞ At least 40% Grenache and Syrah, plus a minimum of 40% Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Merlot (Aubun and Carignan are no longer allowed)

🕒 3–8 years

ROSÉ A rich, fruity, well-colored rosé.

☞ At least 40% Grenache and Syrah, plus a minimum of 40% Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Merlot (Aubun and Carignan are no longer allowed)

🕒 Between 2–3 years

✓ *Château de La Bastide* (L'Esprit) • *Claude et Michelle Carayol* (Cabrol Vent d'Est) • *Château de Pennautier* (L'Esprit) • *Château Ventenac* (Le Carla)

CLAIRETTE DE BELLEGARDE AOC

When compared with all the best *vins de pays*, this appellation, which is dedicated to the lowly, intrinsically flabby Clairette grape, does not deserve to be a VDQS, let alone an AOC.

WHITE Unimpressive dry white wines.

☞ Clairette

🕒 Before Christmas of the year of production

CLAIRETTE DU LANGUEDOC AOC

The appellation of Clairette du Languedoc covers three basic wine types. These are natural, fortified, and *rancio*. The *rancio* must be aged in sealed casks for at least three years, and can be produced in both natural and fortified styles.

WHITE The natural wine is fuller and richer than Bellegarde, but has more alcohol and less sweetness in its *rancio* form. The fortified version is off-dry to medium-sweet, with a resinous flavor that is stronger in *rancio* character than the natural white.

☞ Clairette

🕒 1–3 years for naturally fermented wines, 8–20 years for fortified wines and *rancio* wines

✓ *Saint Rome* (Moelleux)

CLAIRETTE DU LANGUEDOC "RANCIO" AOC

See Clairette du Languedoc AOC

COLLIOURE AOC

An obscure but exciting appellation for unfortified wines from normally harvested grapes grown in Banyuls, the eponymous wine of which is made from only the ripest, late-picked (but not botrytized) grapes. The *encépagement* changed in 2003.



RED These deep, dark, and powerful wines have a full and concentrated fruit flavor, with a soft, spicy aftertaste.

☞ At least 60% (in total) of Grenache, Mourvèdre, and Syrah (no variety may exceed 90%), plus Cinsault and no more than 30% Carignan (Grenache Gris is no longer allowed)

🕒 2–10 years

WHITE These wines had to be sold as Vin de Pays de la Côte Vermeille until 2002, when white Collioure was first allowed.

☞ Minimum of 70% in total of Grenache Blanc and/or Grenache Gris, plus a maximum of 30% in total (and individually a maximum of 15%) of Malvoisie, Macabéo, Marsanne, Rousanne, and Velmentino

🕒 1–3 years

ROSÉ I have not encountered these wines.

☞ At least 60% (in total) of Grenache, Mourvèdre, and Syrah (no variety may exceed 90%), plus Cinsault and no more than 30% Carignan (Grenache Gris is no longer allowed)

🕒 Upon purchase

✓ *Château des Abelles* • *Du Mas Blanc* (Les Junquets) • *Mas Cornet* • *Celliers des Templiers* (Abbaye de Valbonne) • *De la Tour Vieille* (Puig Oriol) • *Du Traginer* (Octobre)

CORBIÈRES AOC

When this appellation was elevated to full AOC status in December 1985, its area of production was practically halved to its current realm of 57,000 acres (23,000 hectares). The top estates often use *macération carbonique*, followed by 12 months or so in new oak and the results can be stunning. The only problem appears to be the difficulty of projecting any characteristic style, especially as there is such a great diversity of *terroirs* in the appellation.

This has led to the unofficial formation of 11 internal zones: Boutenac (central-north of Corbières, Mourvèdre apparently does well); Durban (wedged between the two hilly halves of Fitou, this zone is cut off from any Mediterranean influence); Fontfroide (extending from the northern tip of Durban to the western outskirts of Narbonne, this zone has a very low rainfall and is well suited to Mourvèdre); Lagrasse (protected limestone valley vineyards immediately west of Boutenac); Lézignan (a low plateau of gravelly vineyards in the most northerly zone of Corbières); Montagne d'Alaric (northerly zone just west of Lézignan, with vines growing on well-drained slopes of gravel over limestone); Quéribus (most southerly zone, with vineyards on high, stony slopes); St.-Victor (the very heart of Corbières); Serviès (the northwestern perimeter, the wettest zone, with calcareous-clay soils particularly well suited to Syrah); Sigean (the coastal strip of Corbières,

where Syrah performs best); Termenès (the western perimeter, between Serviès and Quéribus, with the highest vineyards in the appellation). The *encépagement* changed in 2003.

RED These wines have an excellent color, a full, spicy-fruity nose, and a creamy-clean, soft palate that often hints of cherries, raspberries, and vanilla.

☞ A minimum of 50% of Grenache, Lladoner Pelut, Mourvèdre, and Syrah, plus Carignan, Picpoul Noir, Terret, and a maximum of 20% Cinsault (Macabéo and Bourboulenc are no longer allowed)

🕒 2–5 years (3–8 years in exceptional cases)

WHITE Soft, almost clinically clean, dry wines that have acquired a more aromatic character in recent vintages—Château Meunier St.-Louis is probably the best example—but many of the wines should be more expressive. There have been some successful experiments with oak fermentation. These wines may be sold from December 1 following the harvest without any mention of *primeur* or *nouveau*.

☞ Bourboulenc, Grenache Blanc, Macabéo, Marsanne, Roussanne, and Vermentino, plus a maximum of 10% Clairette, Muscat Blanc à Petit Grains, Picpoul, and Terret

🕒 1–3 years

ROSÉ The best of these dry wines have an attractive color and a pleasant, floral aroma, but are nothing special.

☞ A minimum of 50% of Grenache, Lladoner Pelut, Mourvèdre, and Syrah, plus Carignan, Picpoul Noir, Terret Noir, a maximum of 20% Cinsault, and no more than 10% Bourboulenc, Grenache Blanc, Macabéo, Marsanne, Roussanne, and Vermentino, plus a maximum of 10% Clairette, Muscat Blanc à Petit Grains, Picpoul, and Terret

🕒 1–3 years

✓ *Clos de L'Anbel* • *Des Chandelles* • *Clos Canos* (Les Cocobirous) • *Desmoisses* (Blanc de Blancs) • *C. V. de Gruissan* (Elevé en Fûts de Chêne) • *Château de Mansenoble* (Marie-Annick, Réserve) • *C. V. du Mont Ténarel d'Octaviana* (Sextant) • *Château de Romilbac* (Privilage) • *Rouire-Séjour* (Vieilles Vignes) • *Château la Voultre-Gaspars* (Romain Pauc)

COSTIÈRES DE NÎMES AOC



Formerly a VDQS called Costières du Gard, these wines have never been special, but most have been better than many a lackluster wine from far more famous appellations, and in this respect Costières de Nîmes well deserved its promotion to AOC status in 1986. But since then the grape varieties permitted for all three styles—red, white, and rosé—have altered so radically that you have to wonder why they bother to have any controls whatsoever.

RED Simple, light, fruity wines are the norm, yet the best are round, aromatic, and spicy.

☞ A maximum of 40% (each) Carignan and

Cinsault, a minimum of 25% Grenache, and at least 20% (in total or each) of Mourvèdre and Syrah

🕒 2–3 years (average wines), 3–8 years (better *cuvées*)

WHITE Fresh, soft, but uninspiring. These wines may be sold from December 1 following the harvest without any mention of *primeur* or *nouveau*.

☞ Bourboulenc, Clairette, Grenache Blanc (maximum 30%), Ugni Blanc, plus Macabéo, Marsanne, Roussanne, and Vermentino

🕒 1–2 years

ROSÉ Good-value dry wine with a delightful color and ripe fruit. These wines may be sold from December 1 following the harvest without any mention of *primeur* or *nouveau*.

☞ A maximum of 40% (each) of Carignan and Cinsault, a minimum of 25% Grenache, at least 20% (in total or each) of Mourvèdre and Syrah, plus up to 10% (in total) of Clairette, Grenache Blanc, Bourboulenc, Ugni Blanc, Marsanne, Roussanne, Macabéo, and Rolle

🕒 Within 1–2 years

✓ *Château Amphoux* (Les Galion des Crêtes Elevé en Fûts de Chêne) • *Barbe-Caillette* (Haut Jovis) • *Château Grande Cassagne* • *Château Lamargue* (Aegidiane) • *Château La Tour de Beraud* • *Château Tuilerie* (Carte Blanche) • *Château de Valcombe* (Garence)

COTEAUX DU LANGUEDOC AOC

This appellation consists of a collection of areas strung out across three *départements*, which gives rise to a variation in style, but the quality is remarkably consistent. After a decade of exciting red wine developments, it is now the time for white wines to buzz.

RED Full and honest red wines that make excellent everyday drinking. These wines may be sold as *primeur* or *nouveau* from the third Thursday of November following the harvest.

☞ A minimum of 50% Grenache (itself limited to maximum of 40%), Lladoner Pelut, Mourvèdre, and Syrah (these last two must represent at least 10% of the entire blend), no more than 40% of either Carignan or Cinsault, plus a maximum of 10% (in total) Counoise, Grenache Gris, Terret, and Picpoul Noir

🕒 1–4 years

WHITE Getting better by the day, some wonderfully fresh, aromatic, dry white wines are being made by the appellation's younger *vignerons*, often with a little new oak and not infrequently from very old vines. These wines may be sold from December 1 of the vintage indicated without any mention of *primeur* or *nouveau*.

☞ Bourboulenc, Clairette, Grenache Blanc, Picpoul, Marsanne, Roussanne, Vermentino, plus a maximum of 30% Macabéo, Terret Blanc, Carignan Blanc, and Ugni Blanc (growers may no longer plant Carignan Blanc, Macabéo, or Ugni Blanc)

ROSÉ These dry wines have good fruit and are far more enjoyable than many a pricey Provence rosé. These wines may be sold as *primeur* or *nouveau* from the third Thursday of November following the harvest.

☞ A minimum of 50% Grenache (itself limited to maximum of 40%), Lladoner Pelut, Mourvèdre, and Syrah (these last two must

represent at least 10% of the entire blend), no more than 40% of either Carignan or Cinsault, plus a maximum of 10% (in total) Bourboulenc, Carignan Blanc, Clairette, Counoise, Grenache Blanc, Grenache Gris, Macabéo, Picpoul, Picpoul Noir, Marsanne, Roussanne, Terret Blanc, Terret Noir, Ugni Blanc, and Vermentino

🕒 1–2 years

✓ *De l'Aiguelière* • *Mas de Bayle* (Grande Cuvée) • *Château Chenaie* (Le Douves Blanches) • *Château La Clotte-Fontaine* (Mouton) • *Château des Crès Ricards* (Les Hauts de Milési) • *Dupéré-Barrera* (Chien de Prairie) • *Château Daurion* (Prestige Elevé en Fûts de Chêne) • *C. V. La Fontesole* (Prieuré Saint-Hippolyte) • *De Ganoupiac* (Les Cresses) • *Château Gres Saint Paul* (Antonin) • *Mas Haut-Buis* (Costa Caoude) • *Virgile Joly* (Virgile) • *Château de Lascaux* (Les Secrets) • *Mas Lumen* (La Sylve) • *Paul Mas* • *Château de Montpezat* (La Pharaonne) • *Château de la Négly* (L'Ancey) • *Peyre Rose* • *Prieuré St.-Jean de Bébian* • *De Roquemale* • *C. V. de Saint-Saturnin* • *Mas de la Seranne* (Les Griottiers) • *Le Clos du Serres* (Le Florilège) • *De Serres Cabanis* (Bos de Cana) • *Les Souls* • *Château Le Thou* (Georges et Clem)

COTEAUX DU LANGUEDOC (VILLAGE NAME) AOC

Except where stated, the wines bearing the names of the following villages conform to the requirements of Coteaux du Languedoc AOC.

LES ASPRES AOC

New red-wine-only appellation as from the 2004 vintage, Les Aspres must be produced from at least three varieties, with a minimum of 50 percent Grenache, Mourvèdre, and Syrah (the last two varieties must represent at least 20 percent of the entire blend), plus a maximum of 20 percent Carignan. Too early to provide a critique.

CABRIÈRES AOC

This is a single commune of steep schistous slopes in the center of the Clairette du Languedoc subappellation. Cabrières's production is dominated by the local *coopérative*. This village produces mostly rosé: a fine, firm, and racy wine that contains more Cinsault than other Languedoc rosés. A little red is also produced, and its *vin vermeil*, so-called because of its vivid vermilion color, is best known.

✓ *Du Temple* (Jacques de Molay)

LA CLAPE AOC

These red, white, and rosé wines come from vineyards on a limestone outcrop extending across five communes of the Aude *département* where the appellations of Coteaux du Languedoc and Corbières overlap. One of only two whites allowed under the Coteaux du Languedoc Villages appellation, it must be made from at least 60 percent Bourboulenc and Grenache Blanc. White La Clape can be full, fine, and golden or firm, with an attractive Mediterranean spice, and is generally more expensive than the red. But the latter is easily best, with its full, rich flavor and *vin de garde* style. The rosé is refreshing, light, and well worth seeking out.

✓ *Ferri Arnaud* (Romain Elevé en Fûts de Chêne) • *Château de la Négly* (La Falaise) •

Château Pech Redon • *Château Rouquette-sur-Mer* (Henry Lapiere)

COTEAUX DE LA MÉJANELLE AOC

See La Méjanelle AOC

COTEAUX DE ST.-CHRISTOL AOC

See St.-Christol AOC

COTEAUX DE VÉRARGUES AOC

See Vérargues AOC

GRÈS DE MONTPELLIER AOC

New red-wine-only appellation as from the 2002 vintage, Grès de Montpellier effectively encompasses the Coteaux du Languedoc Villages designations of St.-Christol, St.-Drézéry, St.-Georges-d'Orques, and Vérargues. It must be produced from at least 70 percent in total of Grenache (itself a minimum of 20 percent), Mourvèdre, Syrah, and up to 30 percent Carignan. Too early to provide a critique.

LA MÉJANELLE AOC

This appellation, which may also be sold as Coteaux de la Méjanelle, covers four communes in an area once part of the Rhône delta—river-smoothed boulders litter the vineyards.

Rosé is permitted, but La Méjanelle produces mostly red wines of a dark, rich, and well-structured *vin de garde* style. Château de Flaugergues consistently ranks as the best.

✓ *Château de Flaugergues* (Sommelière)

MONTPEYROUX AOC

This village is located on schistous hills next to St.-Saturnin, just north of the Clairette du Languedoc subappellation. The style of all but the best of these red and rosé wines is firm and somewhat rustic, but they are honest and pleasing, and those recommended below rank among the finest in Languedoc.

✓ *D'Aupilbac* • *Des Grecaux* (Héméra) • *Château de Lancyre* (Vieilles Vignes)

PICPOUL-DE-PINET AOC

Covering six communes, this white-wine-only appellation must be made, as the name suggests, from 100 percent Picpoul, which in Pinet produces a lively young wine that quickly tires, and thus must be drunk as young as possible. Gaujal is undoubtedly the best.

✓ *Château Font-Mars* • *C. V. de Florensac* (Ressac Prestige) • *Des Lauriers*

PIC-ST.-LOUP AOC

Red and rosé wines from 12 communes in Héralut and one in Gard, all in the vicinity of the *pic*, or peak, of Pic St.-Loup, including some high-altitude locations that must rank among the coolest vineyards in southern France. Permitted grape varieties for Pic-St.-Loup break from the norm—red wines must be made from a blend of at least two of the following: Grenache, Mourvèdre, and Syrah (no minimum or maximum restrictions), plus up to 10 percent Carignan and Cinsault (Counoise, Grenache Gris, Terret Noir, Picpoul Noir, and Lladoner Pelut are not allowed). The grapes for rosé are the same, except that Carignan is excluded and as much as 30 percent Cinsault may be used.

✓ *Devois du Claus* (Elevé en Fûts de Chêne) • *Foulaquier* (Les Chalades) • *Mas Gourdou* (Les Roches Blanches) • *De l'Hortus* •

Clos Marie • *Morties* (Que Sera Sera) • *Château Taurus-Montel* (Prestige Elevé en Fûts de Chêne)

QUATOURZE AOC

These sandy-soil vineyards just south of Narbonne overlap the Corbières appellation, but the wines, mostly red with some rosé, are rather stern and four-square, although the best can fill out and soften up with a few years in bottle. I have tasted nothing recommendable from this village since the last edition.

ST.-CHRISTOL AOC

Just north of Lunel, the calcareous-clay soil of St.-Christol produces ripe, spicy, well-balanced red and rosé wines that may also be sold as Coteaux de St.-Christol AOC. The local *coopérative* dominates production.

✓ *De la Coste* (Sélectionné) • *Guinand* (Elevé en Fûts de Chêne) • *Gabriel Martin* • *C. V. de St.-Christol*

ST.-DRÉZÉRY AOC

Both red and rosé wines are allowed under this village appellation north of Montpellier, but I have encountered only reds, and those have been of a very modest quality.

ST.-GEORGES-D'ORQUES AOC

Just west of Montpellier, the St.-Georges-d'Orques appellation extends over five communes and produces mostly red wines of very good color, plenty of fruit, and no little finesse for this unpretentious Languedoc appellation. A small quantity of rosé is also made, the best having a bouquet of dried flowers and some summer fruits on the palate.

✓ *Château de l'Engarran* (Quetton Saint-Georges) • *Château Icard* (Elevé en Fûts de Chêne) • *Les Quatre Pilas*

ST.-SATURNIN AOC

Named after the first bishop of Toulouse, these red and rosé wines come from three communes in the foothills of the Cévennes Mountains, just west of Montpeyroux, where deep-colored, fine, and full-flavored red wines are possible, if not always evident. Production is dominated by the *coopératives* of St.-Félix-de-Lodez and St.-Saturnin, the former specializing in a pleasant, slightly *pétillant* rosé, while the latter makes a *vin d'une nuit*, a light-bodied red that has been macerated for only one night.

✓ *Lucian* • *C. V. de St.-Saturnin*

VÉRARGUES AOC

Vérargues produces large quantities of quaffing, but otherwise unexceptional, red and rosé wines from nine communes, four of which also constitute the Muscat de Lunel appellation. They are also sold as Coteaux de Vérargues AOC.

✓ *Château du Grès-St.-Paul*

CÔTES DE LA MALEPÈRE VDQS

Between the Razès *coopérative* and Domaines Virginie (Des Bruyère), this is becoming one of the fastest-rising, value-for-money, superb-quality appellations in Languedoc-Roussillon. Should be made an AOC.

RED Well-colored wines of medium to full body, with elegant, deliciously spicy fruit.

☼ A minimum of 50% Merlot, at least 20% Cabernet Franc and Malbec, plus optional

Cabernet Sauvignon, Cinsault, Grenache, and Lladoner Pelut (Syrah is no longer allowed)

☞ 3–7 years

ROSÉ These attractive dry wines are totally different from the reds, due to the greater use and mellow effect of Grenache.

☼ A minimum of 70% Cabernet Franc, Cinsault, and Grenache, plus optional Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, Merlot, and Syrah (Lladoner Pelut is no longer allowed, and growers must not plant any more Syrah)

☞ 1–3 years

✓ *Château de Barthe* • *Girard* (Neri) • *Château Guilhem* (Prestige) • *Château Guiraud*

CÔTES DU CABARDÈS ET DE L'ORBIEL VDQS

See Cabardès AOC

CÔTES DU ROUSSILLON AOC

Situated south of Corbières, this large appellation began to shrug off the sort of reputation that typified the wines of the Midi long before Languedoc. Although the latter region tends to grab most of the headlines these days, Roussillon still offers a tremendous choice of richly flavored wines of exciting value and quality.

RED The best of these wines have a good color and a generosity of southern fruit, with the tiniest hint of vanilla and spice. They may be sold as *primeur* or *nouveau* from the third Thursday of November following the harvest.

☼ A blend of at least three of the following varieties, no two of which may exceed 90% of the total: Carignan (60% maximum), Cinsault, Grenache, Lladoner Pelut, Macabéo (10% maximum), Mourvèdre, and Syrah (there must be at least 20% of Syrah and/or Mourvèdre)

☞ 3–8 years

WHITE The best of these floral wines were fat, and all too often lacked acidity, prior to the change of *encépagement* in 2002. (So was 2003, but that was the vintage, rather than the varietal mix.) They may be sold as *primeur* or *nouveau* from the third Thursday of November following the harvest.

☼ At least 50% of Grenache, Macabéo, and Tourbat, plus a minimum of 20% Marsanne, Roussanne, and Vermentino (all varieties obligatory)

☞ 1–2 years

ROSÉ Fresh and attractive dry wines, these rosés may be sold as *primeur* or *nouveau* from the third Thursday of November following the harvest.

☼ A blend of at least three of the following varieties, no two of which may exceed 90% of the total: Carignan (60% maximum), Cinsault, Grenache, Lladoner Pelut, Macabéo (10% maximum), Mourvèdre, and Syrah (furthermore, there must be at least 20% of Syrah and/or Mourvèdre)

☞ 1–2 years

✓ *Alquier* (Des Filles) • *Mas Amiel* • *Mas des Baux* (Soleil) • *De Casenove* • *C. V. Catalans* • *Mas Crémat* (Dédicace, La Llose) • *Cazes Frères* ☉ • *Jaubert-Noury* (Château Planères) • *Joliette* ☉ (André Mercier) • *Lafage* (Le Vignon) • *Du Mas Rous* (Elevé en Fûts de Chêne) • *Mosse* (Tradition) •

C. V. de Passa (Mas d'en Badie) • *Piquemal* • *Primo Palatum* • *Pujols* (La Montadella) • *Château de Rey* (Les Galets Roulés) • *Sarda-Malet* • *Sol-Payre* (Scelerata Ame Noire)

CÔTES DU ROUSSILLON VILLAGES AOC

This appellation encompasses exclusively red wines from 25 villages along the Agly River and its hinterland, in the best area of the Côtes du Roussillon. The *encépagement* changed in 2003.

RED Just as good value as basic Côtes du Roussillon, the best can have even more character and finesse.

As a blend of at least three of the following varieties, no two of which may exceed 90% of the total: Carignan (60% maximum), Cinsault, Grenache, Lladoner Pelut, Macabéo (10% maximum), Mourvèdre, and Syrah (furthermore, there must be at least 30% of Syrah and/or Mourvèdre)

3–10 years

✓ *Château Aymerich* (Général Joseph Aymerich) • *Château de Caladroy* (La Juliane) • *Clot de L'Oum* (Saint Bart Vieilles Vignes) • *Clos des Fées* • *Força Real* (Hauts de Força) • *Gardiés* • *Haute Coutume* (Schistes de Trémoine) • *Mas de Lavaill* (Tradition) • *Château Planezes* (Elevé en Fûts de Chêne) • *Des Schistes* (Tradition)

CÔTES DU ROUSSILLON VILLAGES CARAMANY AOC

This supervalued red wine conforms to the requirements of Côtes du Roussillon Villages, except for a minimum Syrah content and the stipulation that the Carignan must be vinified by *macération carbonique*. (This strange criterion stems from the fact that, in 1964, the local *coopérative* claimed to be the first in France to use this technique.)

RED Simply the fullest, richest, and longest-living wines of Roussillon, despite the *macération carbonique*, which just goes to prove how useful that process can be when used to lift the natural fruit of a wine instead of dominating it with pear-drop aromas.

As for Côtes du Roussillon Villages except that there must be at least 25% Syrah

3–15 years

✓ *C. V. Catalans*

CÔTES DU ROUSSILLON VILLAGES LESQUERDE AOC

This relatively recent (1996) red wine district is restricted to vines growing in the villages of Lansac, Lesquerde, and Rasiguères. It conforms to the requirements of Côtes du Roussillon Villages, except for some of the *encépagement* and the stipulation that the Carignan must be vinified by *macération carbonique* (see Côtes du Roussillon Caramany for explanation).

RED Rich, well-colored wines that deserve their own village designation.

As for Côtes du Roussillon Villages except that Macabéo is not allowed, and there must be at least 30% Syrah and Mourvèdre

3–15 years

✓ *Semper* (Voluptas) • *C. V. de Tautavel* (Tradition)

CÔTES DU ROUSSILLON VILLAGES TAUTAVEL AOC

This relatively recent (1997) red wine district is restricted to vines growing in the villages of Tautavel and Vingrau. It conforms to the requirements of Côtes du Roussillon Villages, except for some of the *encépagement*, the stipulation that at least 50 percent of the Carignan content must be vinified by *macération carbonique* (see Côtes du Roussillon Caramany for explanation), and the fact that the wines may not be released for sale prior to October 1 following the year of harvest.

RED Rich, well-colored wines that deserve their own village designation.

As for Côtes du Roussillon Villages except that Macabéo is not allowed, and there must be at least 20% Grenache and Lladoner Pelut, and no more than 50% Carignan

3–15 years

✓ *Des Chênes* (La Carissa) • *Fontanel* (Prieuré Elevé en Fûts de Chêne)

CÔTES DU ROUSSILLON VILLAGES LATOUR-DE-FRANCE AOC

This is a fine-value red wine that conforms to the requirements of Côtes du Roussillon Villages. Virtually the entire production of Latour-de-France used to be sold to, and through, the national French wine-shop group Nicolas, which was a great advantage when this village obtained its own appellation, as its seemingly cheeky name was already known the length and breadth of the country.

RED Full in color and body, these fine-value wines have a fruity flavor.

3–15 years

✓ *De L'Ausseil* (La Capitelle)

CRÉMANT DE LIMOUX AOC

This provisional sparkling wine was introduced in 1989 to allow producers to decide the future name of their appellation: Blanquette de Limoux or Crémant de Limoux. The former relied primarily on the Mauzac grape and, upon introducing the Crémant appellation, at least 90 percent content of this local variety became compulsory. In contrast, the newly created Crémant de Limoux had a minimum content of Chenin Blanc, albeit a more modest percentage. The choice was not merely about a name, but what direction and style the wine should follow. It was thought that Mauzac-based Blanquette de Limoux would take the slow lane while Chardonnay-influenced Crémant would be in the fast lane. By law, they should have made this decision by the end of 1994, but Crémant de Limoux did not take off as anticipated. Just a year before the deadline, only one-twentieth of Limoux's sparkling-wine harvest had adopted the Crémant appellation. The lawmakers face a dilemma, since two names are being used for one wine and there is much less support for the new appellation than expected. However, both styles deserve to exist.

SPARKLING WHITE Chardonnay tends to be the main base, with just enough Mauzac retained to assure a certain style, and Chenin Blanc is used as a natural form of acid adjustment. The wines are generally more refined than Blanquette de Limoux, and the best have a finesse that the more traditional products cannot match.

A maximum of 90% in total of Chardonnay

and Chenin Blanc, including at least 20% of the latter, plus a maximum of 20% in total of Mauzac and Pinot Noir, with the latter restricted to no more than 10%

✓ *De l'Aigle* • *Sieur d'Arques* • *Veuve Tailban*

FAUGÈRES AOC

Although fair-sized, Faugères is an obscure and overlooked appellation, probably due to the fact that it was formerly known for *eau-de-vie* and fortified Muscat, with red wine a postwar development. Despite the similarity between the schistous, hillside vineyards and grape varieties here and in neighboring St.-Chinian, the two appellations make distinctly different wines.

RED These rustic wines have a deep color and are heavy with the spicy, warm flavors of Cinsault and Carignan.

3–10 years

ROSÉ Small production of attractively colored, ripe, and fruity dry rosés. These wines may be sold as from December 1 following the harvest without any mention of *primeur* or *nouveau*.

A maximum of 40% Carignan, and no more than 20% Cinsault, plus at least 20% Grenache and/or Lladoner Pelut, a minimum of 15% Syrah, and at least 5% Mourvèdre (furthermore, Grenache, Lladoner Pelut, Mourvèdre, and Syrah represent at least 50% of the entire blend)

3–10 years

✓ *Alquier* • *Château des Estanilles* • *Abbaye de Sylva Plana*

FITOU AOC

When it was made an AOC in 1948, Fitou was fast asleep, but wine buyers beat a path to its desolate door in the early 1980s, making it the fastest-rising star in the Mediterranean firmament. It seems to have returned to its dozing state. The *encépagement* changed in 2001.

RED Even at the lowest level, these wines have a fine color and a spicy warmth of Grenache that curbs and softens the concentrated fruit and tannin of low-yielding Carignan.

A minimum of 30% Carignan, plus Mourvèdre, Syrah, and at least 30% Grenache and Lladoner Pelut; within this Carignan, Grenache, and Lladoner Pelut must account for at least 70% of the entire blend; and until 2007 there must be at least 10% Cinsault, while as from 2008 there must be at least 10% Mourvèdre (Macabéo and Terret Noir are no longer allowed)

3–6 years (4–10 years in exceptional cases)

✓ *Bertrand Bergé* • *Château des Erles* • *C. V. de Mont Tauch* (Seigneur de Don Neuve) • *Château de Nouvelles* • *De la Rochelière* (Noblesse du Temps) • *De Roland*

FRONTIGNAN AOC

See Muscat de Frontignan AOC

GRAND ROUSSILLON AOC

The largest appellation producing the least amount of wine, Grand Roussillon is a VDN that encompasses 100 communes, yet produces as little as 330 cases (30 hectoliters) of wine per year. This has nothing to do with low yields or a strict selection process—the appellation is apparently used as a sort of *sous marque* or dumping ground for the inferior wines produced by the better VDNs within its boundaries.

☞ Muscat d'Alexandrie, Muscat Petits Grains, Grenache (Gris, Blanc, and Noir), Macabéo, Tourbat, plus up to 10% (in total) of Carignan, Cinsault, Syrah, and Listan

GRAND ROUSSILLON "RANCIO" AOC

See Grand Roussillon AOC

LIMOUX AOC

Until 1993, Mauzac was the only grape allowed for the still-wine version of Blanquette de Limoux, but new regulations reduced this to a minimum of 15 percent and allowed the inclusion of Chardonnay and Chenin Blanc. At the same time, Limoux became the first French AOC to insist upon barrel fermentation and some fabulous successes quickly established an enviable reputation for the Chardonnay-dominated wines of this appellation. The only question now is will Limoux have equal success with Chenin Blanc? A new red Limoux was introduced in 2004.

RED Newly introduced in 2004.

☞ Minimum of 50% Merlot, plus Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Carignan, Grenache, malbec and Syrah. The Carignan must not exceed 10% and is due to be phased out by 2010. There must be at least three varieties, no two of which may exceed 90% of the total blend.

☞ 3–6 years

WHITE Although every wine must contain at least 15 percent Mauzac, you will encounter supposedly pure Chardonnay and Chenin Blanc varietal wines (and Mauzac, of course). This is explained by the European Union law that requires that a pure varietal wine must contain at least 85 percent of the grape named. Chardonnay varietals are sherbetty-fresh with a zesty style at minimum; the best are beautifully rich, with succulent, lemony-oaky fruit and mouth-watering acidity. The pure Mauzac from Rives-Blanques makes me wonder whether it would not be better for producers to focus on this, their local grape, rather than resign themselves to making yet another Chardonnay in a world awash with that variety. This was not initially my view. Tasted when first released, the Chardonnay clearly outshines the Mauzac, thus it is little wonder that the Cuvée Occitania vacuums up so many medals for Rives-Blanques. However, follow them in bottle for just 12 months, and the Mauzac evolves into the more expressive wine.

☞ A minimum of 15% Mauzac, plus Chardonnay and Chenin Blanc

☞ 1–2 years

☑ *D'Antugnac* (Gravas) • *Rives-Blanques* (Dédicace) • *Sieur d'Arques* (Toques et Clochers)

MAURY AOC

Despite the long list of possibilities, these fortified wines are mostly pure Grenache, a fact that is recognized by the gradual increase in the compulsory percentage of this grape—the minimum was just 50 percent 10 years ago.

RED/WHITE/ROSÉ/TAWNY Pale and intricate wines, they have a combination of tangy, toasty, berry flavors and nutty-raisiny richness.

☞ At least 75% Grenache (a minimum of 70% for pre-2000 vintages), a maximum of 10% Macabéo (15% for pre-2000 vintages), plus Grenache Gris, Grenache Blanc, Muscat à

Petits Grains, Muscat d'Alexandrie, Tourbat, and a combined maximum of 10% of Carignan, Cinsault, Syrah, and Listan Negra

☞ 10–30 years

☑ *Mas Amiel* • *Jean-Louis Lafage* (Prestige Vieilli en Fûts de Chêne) • *Pouderoux*

MAURY "RANCIO" AOC

See Maury AOC

MINERVOIS AOC

North of Corbières and adjoining the western extremity of the Coteaux du Languedoc, the rocky Minervois area has the typically hot and arid air of southern France. Elevated to full AOC status in February 1985, its vineyards are divided into zones. As in Corbières, these are not official, but one day they may in part or whole join La Livinière, which was recognized as a *cru* in its own right in 1999. The zones are: L'Argent Double (rough, rugged vineyards amid rocky outcrops in the arid heart of Minervois); La Clamoux (a cooler western area with a touch more rainfall than most Minervois zones, with Grenache and Syrah doing well, particularly on the higher-altitude vineyards); La Clause (rugged, mountain climate and stony, *terra rosa* soil combine to produce rather rustic *vins de garde* in the north of Minervois); Les Côtes Noires (under a harsh mountain climate, these high-altitude vineyards situated in the northwestern corner of Minervois are better suited to the production of white wine rather than of red); Le Petit Causse (when it can get enough moisture, Mourvèdre does well on these baking-hot, sheltered, limestone slopes in the arid heart of Minervois—La Livinière is located at the heart of Le Petit Causse); Les Serres (very dry, stony vineyards over limestone subsoil, mostly planted with Carignan). The *encépagement* for red and rosé changed in 2003.

RED At worst, these wines are rough and ready for an AOC, but some of the best domaines also produce *vins de pays* that are better than the Minervois of other properties, thus their Minervois can be very good indeed.

☞ A minimum of 40% Grenache, Lladoner Pelut, Mourvèdre, and Syrah (these last two must represent at least 10% of the entire blend, and at least 20% as from 2006), plus optional Aspiran Noir, Carignan, Cinsault, Picpoul Noir, and Terret Noir

☞ 1–5 years

WHITE Less than one percent of Minervois is white. A simple, dry, and fruity wine fermented at cooler temperatures than was once standard, it is now fresher and more aromatic.

☞ Bourboulenc, Grenache Blanc, Macabéo, Marsanne, Roussanne, Vermentino, plus not more than 20% Clairette, Muscat à Petits Grains (itself limited to a maximum of 10%), Picpoul, and Terret Blanc

☞ Within 1 year

ROSÉ Most of these are good-value wines with a pretty pink color and a dry, fruity flavor.

☞ A minimum of 40% Grenache, Lladoner Pelut, Mourvèdre, and Syrah (these last two must represent at least 10% of the entire blend, and at least 20% as from 2006), plus optional Aspiran Noir, Carignan, Cinsault, Picpoul Noir, and Terret Noir, with no more than 10% Bourboulenc, Clairette, Grenache Blanc, Macabéo, Marsanne, Roussanne,

Muscat à Petits Grains, Picpoul, Terret Blanc, and Vermentino

☞ Within 1 year

☑ *Des Aires Hautes* • *Borie de Maurel* (Sylla) • *Le Cazal* (Le Paps de Zarat) • *Château d'Oupia* (Oppius) • *Primo Palatum* • *Du Roc* (Passion) • *La Tour Buisse*

MINERVOIS LA LIVINIÈRE AOC

Located in Le Petit Causse, the central-northern zone of Minervois, La Livinière was in 1999 the first *cru* in this appellation to be recognized in its own right. The vines grow on the best areas of the Petit Causse, the sheltered, limestone cliffs that skirt the foot of the Montagne Noir at a height of 460 feet (140 meters).

RED Where there is sufficient finesse to match the structure of these wines, they represent some of Minervois's best *vins de garde*.

☞ A minimum of 40% Grenache, Lladoner Pelut, Mourvèdre, and Syrah (these last two must represent at least 10% of the entire blend, and at least 20% as from 2006), plus optional Aspiran Noir, Carignan, Cinsault, Picpoul Noir, and Terret Noir

☞ 2–10 years

☑ *Clos de L'Escandil* • *C. V. des Crus de Haut-Minervois* (Gaïa) • *Château Faiteau*

MUSCAT DE FRONTIGNAN AOC

It is claimed that the Marquis de Lur-Saluces visited Frontignan in 1700 and it inspired him to make sweet wines at Château d'Yquem in Sauternes, but Muscat de Frontignan is no longer botrytized—it is a fortified wine. Muscat de Frontignan may either be a *vin doux naturel* (VDN) or a *vin de liqueur* (VDL). In the latter, the spirit is added to the grape juice before any fermentation whatsoever can take place. If the label does not differentiate between the two, the small green tax mark on the cap should bear the letters VDN or VDL.

WHITE The VDNs are delightful, golden-colored, raisiny-rich, sweet, and delicious wines that have a succulent, honeyed aftertaste with a somewhat fatter style than those of Beaugues, although many lack its finesse. The VDLs are much sweeter.

☞ Muscat Doré de Frontignan

☞ 1–3 years

☑ *Château des Aresquiers* • *Château de la Peyrade*

MUSCAT DE LUNEL AOC



Situated on limestone terraces northeast of Montpellier, this undervalued VDN approaches Frontignan in terms of pure quality.

WHITE/ROSÉ Lighter than Frontignan, these wines nevertheless have fine, fragrant Muscat aromas of great delicacy and length.

☼ Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, Muscat Rosé à Petits Grains

🕒 1–3 years

✓ *Lacoste* (Clos Bellevue, Passerillé) • *C. V. du Muscat de Lunel* (Prestige)

MUSCAT DE MIREVAL AOC

This is a little-seen VDN appellation.

WHITE Light and sweet wines that can have a better balance and (relatively) more acidity than those from neighboring Frontignan. Mireval wines can have more elegance, although they may lack the raisiny-rich concentration.

☼ Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains

🕒 1–3 years

✓ *Château d'Exindre* (Vent d'Ange) • *Du Mas Neuf*

MUSCAT DE RIVESALTES AOC

This appellation should not be confused with the blended Rivesaltes VDNs that bear no mention of the Muscat grape.

WHITE/ROSÉ Rich, ripe, grapey-raisiny wines that are very consistent in quality.

☼ Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, Muscat d'Alexandrie

🕒 1–3 years

✓ *Cazes Frères* • *Des Chênes* • *Cornelianum* • *Jean Estavel* (Prestige) • *Lafage* • *Laporte* • *Château de Nouvelles* • *Sarda-Malet* • *Des Schistes* • *Arnaud de Villeneuve*

MUSCAT DE ST.-JEAN-DE-MINERVOIS AOC

This tiny subappellation of Minervois produces a little *vin doux naturel* that used to be grossly underrated but has gained excellent distribution on export markets over the past seven years.

WHITE/ROSÉ These golden wines have a balanced sweetness and an apricot flavor.

☼ Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, Muscat Rosé à Petits Grains

🕒 1–3 years

✓ *De Barroubio* • *La Muscat* (Petit Grain)

RIVESALTES AOC

This appellation represents half of the *vin doux naturel* produced in France. Optional legally defined terms include *ambré* for an oxidative style of tawny colored Rivesaltes; *tuilé* for an oxidative red; and *grenat* for a reductive-style red that must not be bottled any later than March 1 of the second year. *Hors d'age* requires a minimum of five years' aging.

RED/ROSÉ The warm, brick-red glow of these wines belies their astringent-sweet, chocolate, and cherry-liqueur flavor and drying, tannic finish.

☼ A minimum of 50% (for oxidative style) or 75% (for reductive style) Grenache, plus Grenache Blanc, Grenache Gris, Tourbat, with a maximum of 10% Carignan, Cinsault, Palomino, and Syrah

🕒 10–40 years

WHITE/TAWNY Because much of the red version can be lightened after lengthy maturation in wood, all Rivesaltes eventually

merge into one tawny style with time. The whites do not, of course, have any tannic astringency and are more oxidative and raisiny, with a resinous, candied-peel character.

☼ Grenache Blanc, Grenache Gris, Macabéo, Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, Muscat d'Alexandrie, Muscat Romain, Tourbat (the Muscat varieties must not exceed 20% of the entire blend in total or separately)

🕒 10–20 years

✓ *Du Mas Alart* (Ambré Hors d'Age) • *Des Chênes* • *Cazes Frères* • *Gardies* • *Château de Nouvelles* (Tuilé) • *Sarda-Malet* (La Carbasse) • *Château de Sau* (Ambré Hors d'Age) • *Terrassous* (Ambré Vinifié en Fûts de Chêne) • *Arnaud de Villeneuve* (Ambré Hors d'Age)

RIVESALTES "RANCIO" AOC

See Rivesaltes AOC

ST.-CHINIAN AOC

Upgraded from VDQS in May 1982, the excellent-value appellation of St.-Chinian is the nearest that native southern French grapes come to resembling Bordeaux. Similar grapes from comparable schistous hillsides in neighboring Faugères make an entirely different, far more rustic wine that lacks the finesse of St.-Chinian, let alone Bordeaux. As from 2004, two *crus*

have been awarded their own designation: St.-Berlou and St.-Chinian Roquebrun, but it is too early to make a critique. Moves are under way to introduce a white style of St.-Chinian.

RED Relatively light in color and weight, these wines have an elegance that belies their Mediterranean origin.

☼ At least 50% in total of Grenache, Lladoner Pelut, Mourvèdre, and Syrah, plus a maximum of 40% Carignan and no more than 30% Cinsault

🕒 2–6 years

ROSÉ Dry and delicately fruity rosés with an attractive, fragrant bouquet and flavor. May be sold from December 1 following the harvest without any mention of *primeur* or *nouveau*.

☼ At least 50% in total of Grenache, Lladoner Pelut, Mourvèdre, and Syrah, plus a maximum of 40% Carignan and no more than 30% Cinsault

🕒 1–3 years

✓ *Clos Bagatelle* • *Berlou* (Vignes Royales) • *Mas Canet Vallette* • *De Canimals Le Haut* • *Mas Champart* • *Château La Dournie* • *Fontaine Marcousse* • *Des Jougla* (Vieih Arrasics) • *Navare* (Olivier)

VIN DE FRONTIGNAN AOC

See Muscat de Frontignan AOC

MORE GREEN WINES

In addition to the producers recommended in this directory that are either biodynamic or organic, there are also the following. No negative inference of quality should be taken from the fact that they are not featured among my recommended producers. There are a number that have been recommended in other editions, and still make some fine wines, but have been culled out to make room for others.

Biodynamic

Beau-Thorey (Corconne), *De Bila-Haut* (Latour de France), *De Combe Belle* (Villespassans), *Jean-Claude Daumond* (Vendargues), *De Fontedict* (Caux), *De Malaigue* (Uzés), *Des Perrières* (Manduel), *Le Petit Domaine de Gimios* (St Jean de Minervois), *St Julien* (Azille), *Sylvain Saux* (Lauraguel)

Organic

Cabanis (Beauvoisin), *De Caillan* (Bessan), *De Camplazens* (Combaillaux), *Château de Caraguilhes* (St Laurent de la Cabrerisse), *De Clairac* (Cazouls lès Béziers), *Combes-Giraud* (Valros), *Costeplane* (Cannes et Clairan), *CV les Côteaux de Creissan* (Creissan), *Jean Bigou* (Rouvenac), *Blanquette Beirieu* (Roquetaillade), *Bourguet* (Béziers), *Alain Bousquet* (St Etienne de Gourgas), *Couderc* (Neffies), *Mas Coutelou* (Puimisson), *Du Farlet* (Meze), *La Fon de Lacan* (St Pargoire), *Jacques Frélin Vignobles* (Villeneuve lès Béziers), *Grand Bourry* (Le Cailar), *La Grangette* (Castelnau de Guers), *De Gressac* (Verfeuil), *Mas de Janiny* (St Bauzille de la Sylve), *Mas Jullien* (Jonquières), *CV La Clairette* (Bellegarde), *La Tour* (Beaucaire), *Du Lac* (Montescot), *CV Languedoc Roussillon* (Montpellier), *Bernard Legoy* (Condac-en-Combrailles), *CV Les Gres* (Vendargues), *De Litenis* (St Jean de Fos), *Lou Pas d'Estrech* (St Christol de Rodières), *Loupia* (Pennautier), *Louwet/Cellier du Languedoc Vins Distribution* (Narbonne), *Château Maris* (La Livinière), *Maurel Vedeau* (Servian), *Antoine Maurel* (Conques-sur-Orbiel), *De Mayrac* (Couiza), *De Montabuc*

(St Jean de Minervois), *Croix de Bel-Air* (Marseillan), *De Montjouy* (Florensac), *CV de Montpeyroux* (Montpeyroux), *Ochre Rouge* (Dions), *Château du Parc* (Pezenas), *Pastouret* (Bellegarde), *Château Pech-Latt* (Lagrasse), *De Petit Roubié* (Pinet), *Château des Auzines* (Auzines), *Bannières* (Castries), *Du Mas Barjac* (Montels), *Bassac* (Puissalicon), *De Malavieille* (Merifons), *Peyre-Rose* (St Pargoire), *De Picheral* (Mus), *Château Roubia* (Roubia), *La Solana* (Festes), *Des Soulié* (Assignan), *St Alban* (Neffies), *Château St Auriol* (Lézignan-Corbières), *De St Blaise* (Cessenon), *St Marie des Pins* (Verzeille), *Des Syles* (Béziers) *La Triballe* (Guzargues), *De Valescure* (Aimargues), *Abbaye de Valmagne* (Villevyeyrac), *Château Ventaiolle* (Ventenac-Cabardes), *Château Veredus* (Cruscades), *Zumbaum-Tomasi* (Claret), *De l'Ametlier* (Pézenas), *Anthéa* (Sallès d'Aude), *La Batteuse* (Antugnac), *Château Bel Air La Côte* (Beauvoisin), *Château Belausse* (Lagrasse), *Belles Croix Robin* (Guzargues), *Château Bousquette* (Cessenon-sur-Orb), *De Brau* (Villemoustaussou), *De Buzarens* (Assas), *Arnaudies* (Ceret), *Batle-Jacquet* (Fourques), *Carle-Courty* (Millas), *Henri-Albert Foxonet* (Toulouges), *Joliette* (Espira de l'Agly), *Franck Jorel* (St Paul de Fenouillet), *Château de L'Ou* (Montescot), *Laguerre* (St Martin de Fenouillet), *Le Casot de Mailloles* (Banyuls-sur-Mer), *Lenan* (Trouillas), *Nivet-Galinier* (Toulouges), *Jean-Michel Paraire* (Fourques), *Olivier Pithon* (Calce), *De la Rouède* (Fourques), *Du Soula* (St Martin de Fenouillet), *Clos St Martin* (Bompas)