



The Chronicle Recommends: Red Languedoc

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Sunday, April 19, 2009

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The Languedoc region of France - which has included the Roussillon appellation since 2007 - is home to a large variety of red wine grapes. Indigenous ones include Grenache, Carignane and Cinsault, though varieties like Syrah, Mourvedre, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon have also joined the list.

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These grape varieties fare well in the Mediterranean climate, one of the warmest in France. Many terroirs exist within Languedoc's specific regional appellations, which include Corbieres and Pic Saint-Loup.

Wine made from Languedoc and its subregions' native grapes can be labeled with the name of the specific appellation. However, until 1973, blended wine produced with grapes from more than one appellation or with nontraditional grape varieties could only be labeled vin de table or table wine.

The blended wines, better than the very basic table wines, received approval for labeling to indicate better quality - Vin de Pays d'Oc.

Red Languedoc ranges in style from straightforward, fruit-forward quaffers to bottlings with more barnyard than Old MacDonald's farm, which has its fans. The less expensive ones we recommend are fine, though they have serious bargain shelf competition from wines like Spanish Garnacha and Chilean Cabernet Sauvignon. Languedoc deserves a look too.

2006 Chateau d' Aussieres Corbieres Rouge (\$30) This chateau - a collaboration between Domaines Barons de Rothschild (Lafite) and Domaines Listel since 1999 - is considered by some to have been one of the great Roman-era estates. Its vineyards are now planted to Syrah, Mourvedre, Grenache and Carignane. Elegant with well-fruited aromas of red cherry-berry and subtle oak; bolder, moderately full-bodied palate and smooth tannins. Syrah-based 2005 Blason d'Aussieres (\$18) - also from Corbieres - is nicely finessed. (Importer: Pasternak Wine Imports)

2006 Chateau La Roque Pic Saint-Loup Coteaux du Languedoc Mourvedre (\$17.50) Founded in 1269, this chateau was an important stop to travelers during the 18th century. Current producer Jack Boutin uses no chemical fertilizers or pesticides in the estate vineyards. Enticing, layered aromas of fresh berry, lively spice and dried brush, which the palate also reflects. 100 percent Mourvedre. (Importer: Kermit Lynch Wine Merchant)

2006 Domaine de l'Hortus Bergerie Classique de l'Hortus Pic Saint-Loup

(Coteaux du Languedoc) (\$16) This bottling contains fruit from a vineyard surrounded by wild herbs and pine trees and located at the foot of Hortus mountain, which inspired the name. With the estate's purchase in 1970, producer Jean Orliac began the replanting his 50 acres. Light red fruit and clean, sweet black cherry nose with a tart palate that will take on a medium-rare burger. 60 percent Syrah, 30 Grenache and 10 Mourvedre. (Importer: Beaune Imports)

2005 Domaine Sainte-Eugenie Corbieres Rouge (\$11.50) This domaine's wine region - the Fontfroide district - has an 800-year history of viticulture. This wine is made from free-run juice, which is vinified by varietal, blended, then aged for up to 15 months in small oak casks. Initial red raspberry and loam aromas open up to include red cherry and touch of leather; bright palate follows nose; soft tannins. Forty percent old-vine Carignane with 30 percent each Grenache and Syrah. The 2006 Reserve bottling (\$16.50), with a bit more oak, will be appreciated by those who prefer more subtle fruit. (Importer: Robert Kacher Selections)

2007 French Maid Vin de Pays d'Oc Pinot Noir (\$13) Large production allows the export of this White Rocket Wine Co. brand, which is a Jackson Family Wines project, to more than 20 countries. American winemaker Melissa Bates blends 12 percent Grenache into this New World-style cuvee, which is fermented in stainless steel. Attractive cherry with hints of smoky meat and darker ripe berry nose; medium weight with adequate juice plus tannins and tart cherry finish. (Importer: French Maid)

2007 Montpezat Vin de Pays d'Oc Merlot (\$12) Montpezat's almost 100-acre estate is planted to 10 acres of Merlot, which is now produced by owner Christophe Blanc - the third generation of winemakers in his family. Slight earth and musk in this bottling are appealing when moderated by dark red plum. Moderate tannins on the finish. (Importer: Robert Kacher Selections)