



Daumas Gassac

- a Grand Cru of Languedoc

More and more Nimbus owners are finding that the French Riviera is becoming too crowded and over-exploited, so they are looking further west, to Languedoc.

With its pleasant central city of Montpellier, population approx. 750,000, this is an easy area in which to explore such harbours as La Grande Motte, Palavas-les-Flots, Sète and Cap d'Agde.

And a trip a few kilometres inland to investigate the wine, such as the "country wine" of Mas de Daumas Gassac that, starting off from a dream in 1970, has now grown into one of the finest wines in the world.

As a wine growing district Languedoc-Roussillon has had to struggle somewhat. However, the area's reputation as a mass producer of simple bulk wines is beginning to wash off and the district seems to be producing one brilliant wine after the next. Wine enthusiasts have a real Eldora do to explore among the thousands of vineyards in this, the largest wine-growing district in France.

The history of Mas de Daumas Gassac is quite extraordinary: In Millau, a little way up in the Cevennes, there is a more than 300 year old family company producing gloves and other leather goods. In 1970, the boss, Aimé Guibert and his wife Veronique, acquired what was then a very run down vineyard – a mas – between the town of Gignac and Aniane,

just west of Montpellier. They had a dream of growing good quality wine and knew that the soil at the foot of the Gassac hills would be suitable for this purpose.



"Crazy fools with money"

An old man by the name of Daumas lived on the farm with his two sisters. Daumas had never married and so the sisters chose to remain on the farm and live with their brother. Over the years their little farm had deteriorated and the house was in terrible condition. However, the Guiberts finished building a house in

the town of Aniane, that the father had started once upon a time, and the three siblings were able to move there instead.

After this the farm was renovated and the old mill on the hillside was converted into a hypermodern wine production plant. Aimé Guibert now usually says to prospective wine growers that you have to be a crazy fool with unlimited funds to succeed. He himself is more of a dedicated wine

lover than a fool, but he was obviously not short of cash. Nevertheless he needed a mortgage, and after reading a couple of survey reports conducted by two professors, the bank decided to invest in his future...



Soil just made for wine

Aimé Guibert knew nothing about wine growing and he needed help in deciding what kind of vines to plant on the land he planned to clear in the forest – garrigue

– that covered most of the property. He had met with geography professor Henri Enjalbert in Bordeaux, considered to be the world's leading expert in wine geology – the relationship between soil, grapes and wine.

Professor Enjalbert visited Daumas Gassac and quickly concluded that the Guiberts had acquired a gold mine. The soil of their steep incline down towards Gassac is unique, comprising a red soil containing quantities of lime and minerals left over from the last ice age. This "terroir" exists nowhere else in Languedoc, but is reminiscent of the very best soils of Bourgogne.

The amazed professor informed them that the conditions here were right for the creation of a Grand Cru, comparable with the best chateaux wines from Bordeaux and Bourgogne.



Perfect micro-climate

Aimé Guibert started clearing the ground for the first planting – "Peyra Fioc", which in the local language of Oc (langue d'oc) means "stones to make fire with". He found

stone-age remains on the site, so the name was well chosen. On the other hand he refrained from planting the Bourgogne grape, Pinot Noir and opted for the classic Bordeaux grape Cabernet Sauvignon – a very rare grape in Languedoc. In 1972 the Guiberts planted 17,500 cuttings on American rootstocks in the red earth slopes. The first vintage is dated 1978.

After some intensive persuasion, Aimé Guibert succeeded in getting the world's leading oenologist (wine expert), professor Emile Peynard of Bordeaux, to visit Daumas Gassac.

The result of this investigation was yet another pleasant surprise. The micro-climate in the Gassac valley turned out to be unique, where an extremely cool night breeze runs down through the valley from the mountains in the north and cools down the district after the day of hot summer sun. Clearing smaller areas in the garrigue would provide the rootstocks with excellent chances of developing the very best grapes.

Many kinds of grape



Samuel Guibert, one of the two sons now supervising the work at the vineyard, says that at the end of July Aniane, five kilometres to the west, might have 20 degrees at night while at the same time in Daumas Gassac the temperature is ten degrees.

"This is one of the main reasons for the quality of our wines. Another is our great respect for the soil which means that the soil respects us and provides us with such amazing grapes," he says proudly and invites us on a bumpy ride around his property.

Half the 270 acres on the farm are now covered with rootstocks. There are a large number of different grapes. The Guiberts have travelled a lot, collecting unusual grapes from unusual countries and in their now famous red wine there are always small quantities of grapes that hardly anyone has ever heard of. The vineyard now produces a white wine of the same class as the red, that is to say, one of the world's leading white wines, and several other kinds of wine are produced.

Professional

When visiting the vineyard one is impressed by the modern plant and the professional reception. A bottle in a beautiful wooden box costs almost 40 euros, but you can join the "club" and order for collection next year. Then you can buy a box of six bottles for less than 17 euros a bottle. For more information visit www.daumas-gassac.com

Patience is required naturally, because a Daumas Gassac should not be drunk until it has been laid down for at least seven, preferably twelve years...but then a wonderful experience is assured!