

French Wine Languedoc: New Bordeaux Or Burgundy?

Wines from the southernmost French appellation are trending again, thanks to daring young winemakers and characterful wines made to fall in love with.

By Sylvia Tan



Is it the new Bordeaux or Burgundy? A couple decades ago, the world's biggest wine-producing region of Languedoc-Roussillon might have been happy to claim so, but today it is proud to be Languedoc, the new world of French wines that's slowly forsaking its vin de table reputation. "It used to be the 'wine factory' of France, but the situation has changed dramatically," notes Boon Heng from Wein & Vin. "Top French producers such as Michel Cases of Lynch Bages (Bordeaux) and Anne Gros (Burgundy) have recognised that there are good terroirs there. Languedoc's producers are more relaxed and warm hearted. It's quite common to be welcomed to dine with the family or stay in the estate. As a region, it's a charming but rugged outback with garrigues (scrublands) and low-lying hills."

Freedom came with the introduction of the Vins de Pays category in the 1980s, which allowed producers more control over grape varietals and where to plant, outside of the French Appellation d'Origine Protégée (AOP) —formerly Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC)—rules. To gain more perspective, we turned to Basile Guibert, the youngest son of Veronique and Aime Guibert of Mas de Daumas Gassac, one of the pioneering families of the "grower" style Languedoc which started in 1972. While based in Singapore as the company's ambassador to Asia, he and his three brothers remain firm stewards of their fully organically farmed vineyards, some 52 small plots among 3,000 hectares of protected forest.



The introduction of the Vins de Pays category in the 1980s opened the doors to more unique, quality expressions of the varietals that thrive in the Languedoc region (Photo courtesy of Mas De Daumas Gassac).

“French regulations exist to protect the consumers and enhance a vision of a specific terroir with a specific set of rules. But what if you’re a French winemaker who wishes to create something unique, that has a story or a style that goes beyond what an AOP label allows? Then you have to look at what has happened in Languedoc across 30 years where the greatest wines (Roc d’Anglade, Granges des Pères, Mas de Daumas Gassac) haven’t gone the appellations path,” enthuses Guibert. “This bold decision allowed us freedom and creativity: to create grands vins with 25 grape varieties; to create a style so unique that taking Mas de Daumas Gassac to a blind tasting is the wine lover’s favourite trump card!”



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Nouri’s sommelier Matthew Heng champions Languedoc wines, especially as they are aligned with the direction of Nouri’s beverage programme, which comprises 90 per cent organic, biodynamic and natural wines. “Most people come in expecting to try something different or new and are thus a bit more open-minded. There is engagement on our part to portray these wines in their best light,” he says, adding that Languedoc’s ancient history has safeguarded a number of interesting grape types not used elsewhere.

Anthony Charmetant (Photo courtesy of Ma Cuisine)

“Languedoc is a region I love introducing to our customers,” echoes Anthony Charmetant, sommelier-owner at gastro winebar Ma Cuisine Singapore, an offshoot of the legendary Beaune original. “It is a good next step for wine lovers who typically start with Burgundy or Bordeaux, and perhaps move on to Rhone.” To him, Irishman Gavin Crisfield is the future of wine in this region. He practices controlled wine production, each varietal passing separately through concrete egg-shaped tanks, ‘tronconique’ French oak vats and oval foudre vats, resulting in a unique bottling that perfectly encapsulates the makeup of the newly created appellation of Terrasses de Larzac.

As Charmetant notes, “Winemakers have to master the Mediterranean climate of warm and dry environments, sun exposure, hot long summers and rainy winters to achieve wines with character.” However, cautions Boon Heng, Languedoc is still in the early days to be recognised as a high- quality region because it’s just so vast. “Hence, I wouldn’t call it “the new Bordeaux or Burgundy” but rather a unique region with exciting potential and good terroirs that are capable of age- worthy fine wines such as those made by Mas Daumas Gassac or Granges de Peres. Super price-quality ratio is what typifies Languedoc wines for me,” he concludes.

As for Guibert, he hopes to see more top Languedoc estates in this part of the world. “One of my dreams is to gather the best family producers of the Languedoc and organise a prestigious tasting in Asia,” he says. “It’s a question of time before you see more but meanwhile, we’re relying on ‘rebellious’ sommeliers, wine importers or advocates to promote the gems of the region.”

DELICIOUSLY DIVERSE

Here are five of our favourite wines from the Languedoc region:

[...]

Mas De Daumas Gassac Red Grand Vin 2016

Considered one of the greatest vintages, this Cabernet Sauvignon- dominant blend explodes now with freshness and intensity of cassis and delicate spices but will cellar well another 40 years. From [Vintage Wine Club](#).