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Learning to love the Languedoc

By David Williams



Mas de Daumas Gassac Rosé Frizant 2015 (£18.50, dbmwines.co.uk; lescaves.co.uk) As a glove manufacturer turned wine estate proprietor, the late Aimé Guibert, who died aged 91 in May, cut an unlikely figure as a radical. And yet in the genteel world of wine he was indeed something of a revolutionary. His estate, Mas de Daumas Gassac, helped transform the reputation of wines made in the previously unheralded Languedoc. In his many provocative utterances about ‘industrial’ wine, and the role he played in the Jean de Florette-style machinations that kept Californian giant Mondavi from establishing itself on his patch in the early

2000s, he was a key opponent of the standardising forces of globalisation. A glass of his family’s delicate sparkling rosé would make a fine toast to a life well lived.

Mas de Daumas Gassac Rouge, IGP Pays d’Hérault, France 2014 (£26, bbr.com) As good as its rosé (and white) can be, it was the red wines that earned the estate its reputation as a southern Château Lafite. The original influence was Bordeaux – and there’s no little irony, given his later views, that Guibert relied on a consultant from that region, Émile Peynaud, for advice. But it was soon apparent that there was something special about the soils and mild climate of the Gassac valley, where the Guiberts’ vines mingle with ancient forest. And the main red wine, based, like Lafite, on cabernet sauvignon, blended with other varieties, has always been its own thing: elegant, light in alcohol, mixing cassis with aniseed and garrigue herb, and built to last for many years.

Taste the Difference Languedoc Rouge, France 2015 (£7, Sainsbury’s) Guibert handed the running of Mas de Daumas Gassac to his sons years ago, and it remains a standout French wine. But there is more competition in the Languedoc now. Competing in terrain (and prices) not far from Gassac, but in a more Rhône-like spicy, meaty style, is the wonderfully poised Domaine de Montcalmès Terrasses du Larzac 2011 (£21.95, leaandsandeman.co.uk), while Domaine de l’Hortus Grande Cuvée Rouge, Pic St-Loup 2012 (£21.95, bbr.com) is silky-succulent and herby. The region’s winemakers also excel at lower prices, none more so than Jean-Claude Mas, the man behind the warm-hearted TTD red.