



## *“The French have landed....”*

*In September, Ronnie and Ross spent an enlightening and wholly enjoyable three weeks in the regions of Provence and the Languedoc with our local connection and expat British wine trade trooper, Alex Francis, visiting producers and tasting the fascinating wines of these regions.*

We were excited to check out the Provence Rosé's and experience the region generally but were a little apprehensive about what we find in Languedoc as we both have been nonplussed by previous tastings of these wines, albeit not recently.

The Languedoc was a much more open book as there is a greater variety of micro climates and appellations to consider as well as a wider range of varieties and styles. Roussillon is oft said in the same breath as the adjoining Languedoc but there was more than enough to see and we will leave Roussillon for another trip.

The sun soaked area of France bordering the Mediterranean between Carcassonne in the west and Nice on the eastern side contains some of the oldest Roman ruins known to man and that the agreeable climate in this region brought many raiders to the area. Most of these raiders have been ancient civilisations or staking claim to this agriculturally productive area but also modern “raiders” – these being expat mainly UK professionals and change of lifers.

Both regions are happy to host the significant numbers of southern hemisphere “Flying Winemakers” who provide ready winemaking talent and qualifications to these traditional wine regions but more importantly, offer an exchange of new ideas and skills to the local young winemakers who were previously steeped in the tradition of handing knowledge and skills from father to son or daughter.

A highlight of both regions was that most of the properties boast modern winery buildings and new or near new equipment. Most properties utilise the traditional goblet or bush vine vineyards with a few, usually non-traditional varieties utilising trellising.



## PROVENCE

It is not known with any certainty the period when viticulture commenced in these regions but it is likely Provence is the oldest vineyard area in France. The Phocaens - Greeks from Asia minor, found vines when they founded Massilia (Marseilles) around 600 BC. Influence in the area then came under the Saracens and later in the dark ages, the Carolingians, the Holy Roman Empire and then the Counts of Toulouse, the Catalans, René of Anjou, the House of Savoy and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the area, especially Provence, belonged to Sardinia.

The Phylloxera blight started in 1863 in Roquemaure in the Rhone valley and soon swept through France. Being adjacent to this area, the blight swept through Provence and the vineyard regions of southern France first. There are very few patches of vines that escaped phylloxera and those vines are highly prized.

The famous “Mistral”, a cold wind from the north, is the only climatic danger to vines here and most vineyards are sited with a southern aspect for protection from this but otherwise the average 3000 hours of sunshine and 700ml of mostly spring and autumn rain provides the perfect conditions for warm climate grape varieties.

Those varieties, namely Mourvedre then Grenache, Cinsault and Carignan make up the lion’s share of production. These varieties make up both the famous Rosé’s and the reds of the region. Tibouren is an interesting ancient variety making quality Rosé and light red. Very little white wine is produced but Rolle (Vermentino), Semillon, Bourboulenc and Grenache Blanc make up the best of them.

Prior to the 1970’s the wines of Provence (and the Languedoc / Roussillon) had a poor reputation for quality and large quantities of cheap wine was the wine producer’s driver. In 1988 the EU brought in a vine pull scheme that saw growers mainly in southern France and southern Italy paid to destroy 320,000 hectares of vines. Much of these were low quality and unprofitable and for that reason the scheme was successful in drying up the low quality wine lake. Many growers today say that unfortunately some excellent vineyards and some low production pre phylloxera vines were sacrificed.

Since then many factors have contributed to the rise in the reputation of Provençal wines - Rosé in particular. Improved viticulture methods, upgrading of wineries and winery equipment, the undisputed input of new world “flying winemakers” to these regions and a ready market in the concentrated tourist centres of Cannes, Antibes, Nice and Monte Carlo and the Provence region generally.

Provence – is a name that evokes many feelings and unique experiences – sunshine, sparkling blue Mediterranean sea, unending fields of perfumed lavender, quaint hillside villages, the art of Cezanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Matisse and Picasso, outdoor markets with aromas of freshly baked bread, garlic, and preserved meats, tourist shops full of trinkets and not forgetting an ancient Roman ruin around every corner.



## Chateau les Crostes – Cotes de Provence

[www.chateau-les-crostes.eu](http://www.chateau-les-crostes.eu)

CHATEAU  
LES  
CROSTES



We were pleasantly surprised to arrive at a substantial “L” shape limestone cellars and winery where we met Count Felix de Luxembourg and Commercial Director, Linda Schaller-Gallet who showed us around the cellars. The winery is modern and the storage cellar and tasting cellar are spotless.

We tasted the majority of wines but we were most interested in Rosé and settled on the “la Cuvee Traditionnelle in both 750ml and 1.5lt magnums. Varieties are traditional Provence with cabernet Sauvignon as the ring in. The reds use all the Cabernet and Syrah grown and the Rosé’s a mixture of Grenache and Cinsault.

### **2014 la Cuveé Traditionnelle**

50% Cinsault and 50% Grenache

A very pale Rosé with a delicate bouquet of raspberries and citrus. A fresh and delicate palate with a pale red fruit flavours and a lively finish. Serve chilled with all summer dishes, grilled fish and vegetables.

*91 Points – By Josh Raynolds*

## Domaine des Peirecèdes – Cotes de Provence

[www.peirecedes.com](http://www.peirecedes.com)

DOMAINE  
DES PEIRECÈDES  
VIGNERONS DE PÈRE EN FILLE



The cellars and winery buildings were a mixture of 60’s commercial shed and rustic stone and the equipment was much the same but with a modern touch. The vineyards surround the property

Audrey is in charge of the *organically farmed* vineyards and winemaking with the wines showing a delicate but intellectual touch.

### **2014 Fil d’Ariane Rosé**

A blend of Grenache, Cinsault and Syrah.

Delicate pale pink colour, this is a bright fruit flavoured wine, dry with good length.



# Chateau la Tulipe Noire – Cotes de Provence

[www.chateaulatulipenoire.com](http://www.chateaulatulipenoire.com)

This property is quite small but unique as a Roman built fresh water underground canal runs beneath the property and indeed, the inspection vault with steps is located right in the centre of the property. When Audrey purchased this vineyard it came with only one key, and that was the key to the trapdoor into the vault.

The other unique feature of this property is the significant planting of the ancient and rare Tibouren variety. Wines made from Tibouren are often described as earthy and with the herb and scrubby character of the Garrigue, the low scrublands occurring in Provence and through the Languedoc and Roussillon.



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## **2014 Rosé la Tulipe Noire**

80% Tibouren & 20% Grenache

Pale pink with herbal and red fruit aromas with a fresh mineral and strawberry flavours. Long and dry finish.



## LANGUEDOC

Vines were planted as early 125 BC in Narbonne, at the time an important Roman port, which is on the western side of the Languedoc region. The river system of the area allowed boats to travel long distances up river thereby confirming that wine was traded and much finished its journey in ancient Rome.

Cargo could then be taken up river as far as Carcassonne and from then transported the Roman legions in the Aquitaine area. The area produced so much wine its importation into Rome had to be stopped by the "Edict of the Domitian".

In the middle ages, the area was a hotbed of religion with the catholic Monks and monasteries and under their auspices, viticulture thrived again. This was also a significant area for the Cathars, - which was a Christian religion that predated Roman Catholicism and was denounced by the Roman Catholic Church as "The Church of Satan" but by all accounts was a humble and tolerant faith. Later the region was under control of the Counts of Toulouse who were connected to the all the royal families – the English, French, Spanish and the region was fought over many times.

The development of greatest significance was the construction of the "Canal du Midi" in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century which connected the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. Unfortunately this development could have given the southern French region an advantage in the trade with England but the spoiler were the Bordelaise, who had the distribution network so stitched up that the winemakers further south could not get a look in. The completion of railway lines in the 1850s from Paris through Lyon and then through Bordeaux assisted the wine industry in these regions greatly. Then phylloxera hit and every wine region suffered.

As the regions geography is so varied from the low lying alluvial plain to several hundred metres ASL on the foothills of the Pyrenees. The climate is Mediterranean closer to the sea and the continental towards the mountains. The greatest climatic threat here is drought and the drying "Tramontine" wind which flows down the mountain range.

The vine pull of 1988 saw a large quantity of predominantly Carignan vineyards on the low lying country grubbed out and the better vineyards on the hillsides were saved from destruction. From first in area planted to now third, Carignan is surpassed in by Syrah and Grenache Noir. Mourvedre is popular now with plantings on the increase. Merlot is an important variety and Cabernet sauvignon less so and although they not approved for the region, make very good IGP appellation wines.

This region is predominantly red wine country with generally lighter, fresh fruit driven style of reds. Some very good Rosé is produced but little white and Chardonnay makes up the bulk of it – even though it is not a permitted variety.



## Clos Bagatelle – St Chinian

[www.closbagatelle.com](http://www.closbagatelle.com)



CLOS BAGATELLE

St Chinian is on the hillsides inland from Beziers and this important family property has several vineyard sites within the appellation and in Minervois. The Clos Bagatelle was created in 1623 but the recent history is that five generations of winemakers has been passed from mother to daughter and Christine is the current winemaker with brother Luc managing the vineyard.

### **2014 Cuvee Tradition**

30% Syrah, 30% Grenache, 25% Carignan, 15% Mourvedre

Mediterranean nose, this is a reliable classic wine. It expresses terroir (liquorice stick, a hint of bay leaf). After ageing, it shows pepper and tobacco. It is perfectly well-made and one will enjoy its nice soft tannins, coming up after a series of aromas. This is an attractive wine with lacy elegance.

## Bergerie du Capucin – Pic St Loup

[www.bergerieducapucin.fr](http://www.bergerieducapucin.fr)



Pic St Loup is a mountain on the northern reach of Languedoc above Montpellier. To qualify as a Pic St Loup, the wine must contain 90% of Syrah, Grenache and Mourvedre. Some commentators consider this area the premier Languedoc appellation although I am sure the Minervois, Cabardes, Fitou, Corbieres and St Chinian producers will dispute. Bergerie du Capucin lies 660 metres ASL and is 30k from the sea. In 2008, Guilhem Viau decided the future lay in producing and bottling the family estate wine rather than sell grapes to the cooperative, a move that have borne great benefit.

### **2013 Dame Jeanne Rouge**

Syrah, Grenache & Mourvedre.

Woodland berries and spice aromas lead into a rich full flavoured palate.

*Silver – Concours General Agricole*

### **2012 Larmanela Rouge**

Syrah and Grenache.

Vines have an average age of 35 years and this wine displays the bright ripe fruit aromas and full bodied palate of the Syrah and Grenache varieties.

*Silver – International Wine Competition of Bordeaux*



## Hegarty Chamans – Minervois

[www.hegartychamans.com](http://www.hegartychamans.com)



Established by advertising executive – John Hegarty, this property is isolated from other producers by a large area of woodland by design. The property can be and is farmed **biodynamically** and is fully certified as such. John and his delightful regisseur and winemaker, Jessica Servet believe in a non-interventionist farming philosophy on all aspects, - from the vineyard to the black sheep herd, olive grove and lavender crop. “You don’t just drink the wine, you drink the place”.



### **2013 Open Now Rouge**

60% Syrah and 40% Mourvedre

Fermented without crushing the berries, the wine is fermented in concrete tanks and spends 11 months on fine lees in tank before bottling. Fruity aromas with a sweet berry fruit palate and tight finish.

*16/20 Points – By Jancis Robinson*

### **2012 Cuvee No 1**

60% Syrah 40% Carignan

A long six week fermentation in tank then aged in two to four year barrels for 18 months. Raspberry and spicy oak on the nose with complex flavours of raspberry, coffee and mint with toasty oak nuances.

## Chateau Saint-Jacques d’Albas - Minervois

Another property owned by British ex pat, Graham Nutter since 2001, this large property of 90 hectares has been completely renovated – vineyard restructured, winery built and an underground cellar installed and small concert hall built. Farmed by the organic “Cousinie” method, all varieties are traditional for the region.



### **2013 Domaine d’Albas**

60% Syrah, 20% Mourvedre, 20% Grenache.

100% destemmed then traditionally fermented with 20 days maceration. A complex bouquet of red fruits and smooth and generous on the palate with soft tannins.

*16/20 Points – By Jancis Robinson*

### **2012 Chateau d’Albas**

Syrah 60%, Grenache 40%.

Cold maceration for 48 hours then 25 days in tank followed by 12 months in barrel. A rich and complex array of deep red fruits on both the bouquet and palate with good length and long, dry finish.

*16.5/20 Points – By Jancis Robinson*



# Domaine Pierre Cros – Minervois

[www.pierrecros.fr](http://www.pierrecros.fr)



Pierre is extremely down to earth and his vineyard and winemaking philosophies match his personality. His grandfather and father were the bakers in his home town of Badens where they had a few plots of vines. Young Pierre was interested in the vines and the skill to nurture vines and make wine was taught from father to son. The domaine covers 50 hectares but only half is planted to vines. "Garrigue" scrubland, truffle oaks, almond and olive groves take up the balance. Pierre is very much about his hometown and carrying on traditions within the community. Strangely enough, some tradition has gone out the window and his rebellious streak is showing through as he has planted the non-permitted varieties of Nebbiolo and Touriga Nacional, but I suspect they are there just to rile the viticulture authorities.

## **2014 Les Costes Minervois Blanc**

A multiple blend of Grenache Blanc, Vermentino, Muscat Petit a Grains, Piquepoul Blanc and Grenache Gris. A fresh floral nose leads into exotic fruits palate with a mineral overlay. Dry and crisp, serve with white meats.

## **2014 Tradition Rosé**

A blend of Cinsault, Syrah, Grenache and Mourvedre, this wine displays crushed strawberries and raspberries on the nose and a fruity but dry palate and fresh crisp finish.

## **2014 Tradition Rouge**

Carignan, Grenache, Syrah Mourvedre and Cinsault make up Pierre's stock wine. A medium bodied red with mouthfilling fruit flavours and long finish.

## **2014 les Mal Aimes**

The "unwanted ones" – a blend of Alicante, Aramon, Piquepoul Noir and Carignan. Varieties that traditionally have not been in favour in this appellation have been used to make this interesting full flavoured red.

## **2014 Vielle Vigne**

The "Old Vine" Rouge uses century old Carignan vines to produce this delightful and complex wine. Hints of fresh black berries, candied plum, nutmeg, vanilla and cinnamon assimilate into the whole of this wine. Consume with rich meat dishes, casseroles and cheese.

## **2014 Touriga Nacional**

This variety has fitted in well in Pierre's vineyard. It makes a flavoursome, complex wine redolent of spice, coffee laurel and thyme with the black fruits always underlying these other characters.



Cabardes is in the extreme north west of the Languedoc region and the only region in the Languedoc where both the local and Bordeaux varieties are prescribed to be used together. The Domaine Ventenac was created by Alain Maurel to join Domaine Maurel in the nearby town of Moussoulens. Alain pioneered close planting here (6500 vines per hectare against the norm of 4000) and have signed up to the "Terra Vitis" sustainable agriculture program. The combined production of both estates total 115 hectares which makes it the leading producer in Cabardes. Daughter Stephanie and son in law, Olivier have now joined the business and the intention is to both vineyard and winery at the cutting edge in the region. We have chosen the la Cuvee range of wines to import as they are a point of difference to the other brands and that the wines are very well made, well priced and eminently drinkable.

## **2014 La Cuveé de Carole Chardonnay**

95% Chardonnay, 5% Petit Manseng

A fresh crisp style of Chardonnay with some Peach and hazelnut richness.

*Gold – Gilbert & Gaillard Concour International*

## **2014 La Cuveé d'Eve Syrah**

100% Syrah

A mono varietal which is unusual for the region. Black berry and spice dominate the nose with mouthfilling berry and spice flavours and fine tannins on the finish.

## **2014 La Cuveé de Pierre Cabernet Sauvignon**

100% Cabernet Sauvignon

Another mono varietal but because the climate is Mediterranean, the fruit tends to be richer than the northern regions. Cassis and spice on the nose and palate, a rich ripe berry flavoured palate and firm finish.

## **2014 La Cuveé de Diane Rosé**

50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Grenache, 15% Syrah, 10% Merlot and 5% Cinsault

Brilliant pink colour with fresh strawberry and raspberry aromas and a flavoursome crisp palate with a long finish.

## **2012 La Cuveé Grande Reserve de Georges**

Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah and Grenache

Cassis and blackberry dominate the nose and the palate is sumptuous with rich ripe plummy fruit and hints of black pepper. Soft round tannins and a long finish.

# Le Prieuré Saint Sever – Faugeres

[www.prieuresaintsever.com](http://www.prieuresaintsever.com)



Thierry Rodriquez cut his teeth working for large wine houses before acquiring Prieuré Saint Sever in 1993. He created the brand with the view of working in concert with up to 20 vigneron to produce wines that are region typical and blended to ensure quality and quantity. The Prieuré (Priory) is a Roman chapel that now serves as the tasting room on the property.

## **2013 La Gabinele Rouge**

50% Syrah, 30% Grenache, 15% Carignan and 5% Mourvedre

A bright ruby colour and an aromatic bouquet of blackberries, liquorice and cloves. The palate is rich and full bodied with a refreshing finish.

## **2013 Mas Gabinele Faugeres Rouge**

40% Syrah, 30% Grenache and 30% Carignan

This wine undergoes a long maceration of 25 days and is then matured in one and two year old barrels for 12 months. A deep red colour with black fruits, cigar box and cocoa on the nose. The palate is full bodied with a firm mouthfeel and integrated fine tannins.

*93+ Points – By Robert Parker*

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**Phone:** 9314 7133

**Fax:** 9314 7134

**Web:** [www.fww.com.au](http://www.fww.com.au) (trade login password = shiraz) **Email:** [sales@fww.com.au](mailto:sales@fww.com.au)

**Managing Director** Ronnie Lawrence 0419 917 756

**Key Account Manager** Rob Crawford 0419 044 032

**Area Managers** Adam Sharpe 0419 044 567 Caroline McCutcheon 0428 836 707

Michael Kruit 0408 394 637 Ellana Hawthorne 0410 607 723

