

# THE *Languedoc* EARNS RESPECT

*Forward-thinking vintners are revitalizing this sleeping giant*

**By Gillian Sciaretta**



Gregory Hecht (left) and François Bannier excel with bottlings from both Languedoc and Roussillon.

Change is under way in Languedoc, driven by a dedicated group of innovative winemakers focused on distinctive, high quality wines. Long bracketed with Roussillon, its smaller neighbor, and dogged by a history of bulk wine production, France's largest grapegrowing region is retooling its approach and working to establish its own fine wine identity.

Producers such as Hecht & Bannier, S. Delafont, Gérard Bertrand and Château Maris are creating a new energy in the region—

implementing organic and biodynamic practices, creating single-vineyard cuvées, introducing state-of-the-art technology and more. Four newly approved Appellations d'Origine Contrôlée (AOCs), France's highest wine quality designation, testify to the region's increasing focus on *terroir*.

Languedoc winegrowers currently cultivate more than 395,000 acres of vines, and though the majority is still classified in lower-tier regional appellations, nearly 94,000 acres are now designated



AOC. In just the past three years, Picpoul de Pinet, Terrasses du Larzac, Duché d'Uzes and, most recently, La Clape have joined leading Languedoc AOCs such as Corbières, Faugères, Minervois and St.-Chinian.

Over the past 12 months, my colleague Kim Marcus and I have reviewed more than 200 wines from the Languedoc. While many good values can be found in the broader classifications, the top wines—the signposts of the future—are coming from the region's more distinguished appellations. They are the focus of this report.

Peter Close and his wife, Susan, owners of Château Camplazens in the new La Clape AOC, have been making wine in the region since 2001. Like many of the top producers in the Languedoc, they are transplants. Enticed by the affordable vineyards and the Mediterranean climate, the Closes left England after their children had grown to take on the challenge of creating quality wine in southern France.

The Closes were strong proponents of getting La Clape placed on the map as its own appellation. The district lies near the city of Narbonne and occupies a limestone-rich plateau overlooking the Mediterranean. The first wines to be labeled La Clape AOC will be released from this year's harvest.

"We grow some very good vines and make some excellent wine in La Clape, but because it was part of the [larger] appellation of Coteaux du Languedoc, we were lost to the world," explains Peter Close. "But now after a long, seven-year battle, we have been recognized as a [valuable] region."

In terms of shopping for the wines, it should be noted that producers may continue to use Coteaux du Languedoc on the label until 2017, when that designation will be rendered simply as Languedoc AOC.

Among current releases from La Clape and other new AOCs, standouts include Gérard Bertrand's Syrah-Carignan-Mourvèdre Coteaux du Languedoc La Clape Grand Terroir 2013 (91 points on *Wine Spectator's* 100-point scale, \$20), offering a rich concentration of fruit, spice and mineral flavors; Château Crés Ricards Coteaux du Languedoc Oenothera Terrasses du Larzac 2013 (88, \$30), a well-structured red displaying fresh floral and licorice notes; and Nicolas Souchon's Duché d'Uzes Volcae 2012 (89, \$22), layered with dark fruit and savory, smoky details.

Dry red blends such as these make up about 70 percent of wine production in the Languedoc. The varieties Grenache, Syrah, Carignan, Cinsault and Mourvèdre are responsible for the majority of



Peter and Susan Close, proprietors of Château Camplazens in the newly established La Clape AOC, came to Languedoc from England in the early 2000s and have since established a reputation for making top red wines in the region.

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—**Michaël Engelmann,**  
the Modern

the AOC wines; Bordeaux varieties Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon are abundant in the region's Vins de Pays.

Minervois, Limoux and Faugères are other Languedoc AOCs whose flavorful reds encapsulate the diversity of the region. Château Ste.-Eulalie Minervois La Livinière Grand Vin 2011 (92, \$55) earned the highest score in our tastings, showing powerful structure and a rich profile of currant, dark chocolate and toasty elements.

Domaine de la Grange des Pères' Pays d'Hérault is a non-AOC wine, but has become one of the region's cult bottlings for its track record of impressive quality and high price. The 2011 (91, \$120), a blend of Syrah, Mourvèdre, Cabernet Sauvignon and Counoise, delivers a distinctive mix of dried berry and bitter herb flavors with meaty undertones.

Solid values include reds such as Château de Paraza Minervois Cuvée Spéciale 2011 (89, \$13,) packed with dark fruit and savory spice flavors, and the Domaine de Nizas Languedoc 2011 (90, \$20), an elegant blend of Grenache, Mourvèdre and Syrah with mouthwatering acidity and rich, savory details.

White wines are produced in much smaller quantities, representing less than 15 percent of Languedoc's total production, but they include some of the region's most exciting offerings. Most are blends of native varieties such as White Grenache, Marsanne, Roussanne, Vermentino (locally referred to as Rolle), Bourboulenc, Macabeu, Clairette and Picpoul.

Chardonnay and Chenin Blanc are permitted in one AOC, Limoux, and are primarily used for that region's famous sparkling wines. However, oaked Chardonnays are gaining recognition in Limoux. The top white wine of this report, the Gérard Bertrand





Gérard Bertrand, based in La Clape, is one of Languedoc's leading producers, releasing numerous reds and whites from a wide range of sites and grape varieties.

Chardonnay Limoux Aigle Royal 2013 (91, \$80), reflects this emerging trend.

Other notable white wines include the Château d'Anglès Bourboulenc-Grenache-Roussanne La Clape Grand Vin 2013 (89, \$29), featuring fresh, layered notes of almond and exotic fruit, and Domaine de Petit Roubie's Picpoul de Pinet 2014 (87, \$17), whose refreshing seaside and citrus aromas make it a perfect companion



Samuel Delafont, a pioneer in Languedoc, produces whites, reds and rosés from the La Clape and Limoux appellations, as well as the broader Languedoc AOC.

to many seafood dishes. Among white values, the Château de Cordes Minervois White 2013 (89, \$18) is a blend of Marsanne and Roussanne that boasts salted almond and apple flavors, accented by honeyed hints.

Sparkling wines have been produced in Languedoc since the 1530s, long before Dom Pérignon began working in Champagne. Three AOCs—Blanquette de Limoux, Blanquette de Limoux Méthode Ancestrale and Crémant de Limoux—produce sparkling wines from Mauzac, Chenin Blanc, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir grapes. Examples of these approachable and value-driven sparkling wines include the sleek and racy Michèle Capdepon Brut Blanquette de Limoux NV (87, \$16) and the more fruit-forward Château Rives-Blanques Blanquette de Limoux 2011 (84, \$15).

When it comes to French wines, Languedoc bottlings are some of the most affordable on restaurant wine lists. Michaël Engelmann, wine director at the Modern, a *Wine Spectator* Best of Award of Excellence winner located at New York City's Museum of Modern Art, says the Languedoc is one of his go-to regions when recommending wines to diners.

Currently, the Modern's wine list offers more than 30 selections from Languedoc, including an eight-vintage vertical of Domaine de la Grange des Pères back to the 1997. "These [Languedoc] wines offer a lot of freshness, even if the alcohol is high," Engelmann observes. "It's amazing. I want to buy more."

It's becoming rare to find French wines that marry typicity and quality at value price points, but Languedoc is proving that it can deliver. With ambitious producers, old vines and distinctive *terroirs*, this once-overlooked region is coming into its own.

Associate tasting coordinator Gillian Sciaretta is *Wine Spectator's* lead taster on the wines of Languedoc.



## Recommended Wines From Languedoc

More than 200 wines were reviewed for this report. A free alphabetical list is available at [www.winespectator.com/113015](http://www.winespectator.com/113015). WineSpectator.com members can access complete reviews for all wines tasted using the online Wine Ratings search.

### TOP WINES

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
<b>CHÂTEAU STE.-EULALIE</b> Minervois La Livinière Grand Vin 2011	92	\$55
A rich, ripe and powerful red that features plenty of dark chocolate notes to the roasted plum and dark currant core.		
<b>GÉRARD BERTRAND</b> Limoux Aigle Royal 2013	91	\$80
A refined white, exhibiting flavors of pear sauce and apple butter that are long and rich.		
<b>DOMAINE DE LA GRANGE DES PÈRES</b> Pays d'Hérault 2011	91	\$120
A distinctive red, this has dried red berry and meaty notes supported by tangy acidity. Lightly chewy tannins.		
<b>CHÂTEAU MARIS</b> Minervois La Livinière Continuité de Nature 2011	91	\$25
A powerful, concentrated style, with a core of molten chocolate to the effusive dark fruit flavors.		
<b>THIERRY RODRÍGUEZ</b> Faugères Mas Gabinèle Rarissime 2013	91	\$50
Lush and mouthcoating, with flavors of plum reduction, kirsch and blackberry ganache, supported by notes of hot stone and licorice.		
<b>CHÂTEAU STE.-EULALIE</b> Minervois La Livinière La Cantilène 2011	91	\$29
A richly spiced and elegant red, featuring dark plum, cherry tart and Christmas pudding flavors.		
<b>GÉRARD BERTRAND</b> Coteaux du Languedoc Rosé Château La Sauvageonne 2014	90	\$75
A rich and aromatic rosé, with lemon curd, cherry tart and baking spice flavors. Creamy but still fresh, featuring a solid spine.		
<b>GÉRARD BERTRAND</b> Coteaux du Languedoc White La Clape Château L'Hospitalet 2013	90	\$45
Rich and well-crafted, this is redolent of apple cobbler and cream, with a lively acidity and plenty of spiciness.		
<b>GÉRARD BERTRAND</b> Languedoc Cap Insula 2013	90	\$25
This fresh version offers concentrated flavors of blackberry tart, boysenberry and mocha, framed by smooth tannins.		
<b>GÉRARD BERTRAND</b> Minervois La Livinière Le Viala 2012	90	\$50
This shows good power to the black fig, dark plum and macerated cherry flavors, flanked by notes of cocoa powder.		
<b>CHAI DE BLANVILLE</b> Languedoc Grès de Montpellier Château Haut-Blanville Clos des Légendes Les Clos 2011	90	\$115
Juicy acidity matches well to the flavors of pureed raspberry, cherry tart and sweet spices in this plush and full-bodied red.		
<b>JEFF CARREL</b> Coteaux du Languedoc La Clape Côte Ouest 2011	90	\$18
A svelte red, with cherry and licorice flavors supported by supple tannins. Hints of mint mix with chocolate notes on the lip-smacking finish.		
<b>DOMAINE DE GAURE</b> Limoux Oppidum 2012	90	\$35
This full-bodied white exhibits a rich profile of apple pie, vanilla and butterscotch flavors. Well-spiced.		
<b>HECHT &amp; BANNIER</b> Faugères 2012	90	\$40
Concentrated and muscular, this red is packed with ripe black currant, blackberry tart and ganache flavors.		
<b>CHÂTEAU MARIS</b> Minervois La Livinière Las Combes 2012	90	\$25
This medium-bodied red has a juicy but well-balanced profile, sporting raspberry and plum flavors, with an underlying hint of dried herb.		

### TOP WINES (continued)

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
<b>MAS DES DAMES</b> Languedoc La Diva 2011	90	\$30
Fresh and fruity, showing flavors of violet-accented red berry and crushed red plum that reveal hints of white pepper midpalate.		
<b>DOMAINE MAGELLAN</b> Grenache-Roussanne Languedoc 2013	90	\$20
Offers an enticing floral aroma, with flavors of pear tart, ripe red peach and apple cobbler.		
<b>DOMAINE DE NIZAS</b> Languedoc 2011	90	\$20
Elegant, with roasted plum and black cherry fruit flavors, showing savory spice, black olive and mocha accents.		
<b>CHÂTEAU DE CORDES</b> Minervois White 2013	89	\$18
Enveloping citrus and salted almond notes flank the baked apple and dried pear flavors.		
<b>CHÂTEAU DE PARAZA</b> Minervois Cuvée Spéciale 2011	89	\$13
A rich red, with dark chocolate and sandalwood notes to the dark plum and dark currant flavors.		
<b>DOMAINE DE BARON'ARQUES</b> Limoux Red La Capitelle 2011	88	\$19
A firm, seductive red, with savory notes to the dark plum, raspberry and ripe cherry flavors.		
<b>GÉRARD BERTRAND</b> Grenache-Syrah-Mourvèdre Corbières 2013	88	\$19
A muscular, concentrated red, with solid acidity, this features grilled herb, dried cherry and black chocolate flavors. Creamy midpalate.		
<b>S. DELAFONT</b> Languedoc 2013	88	\$18
A juicy, medium-bodied red, with currant, tea, spice and cherry flavors, accented by a dusting of cocoa powder. Crisp acidity.		
<b>DOMAINE DE FONTSAINTE</b> Corbières 2012	88	\$15
Dark plum and macerated cherry flavors are supported by ample acidity in this spicy red.		
<b>CHÂTEAU MARIS</b> Minervois La Livinière La Touge 2011	88	\$17
Dense and ripe, with a brooding character to the dark plum, currant and chocolate mousse flavors.		
<b>CHÂTEAU TRILLOL</b> Grenache-Syrah-Carignan Corbières Famille Sichel 2011	88	\$17
A medium-bodied red, with herb and leather aromas, flanked by plum, black cherry and spice flavors.		
<b>HECHT &amp; BANNIER</b> Languedoc White 2014	87	\$11
Fresh and smooth, with citrus, creamed peach and fennel flavors.		
<b>L'OSTAL CAZES</b> Minervois Estibals 2012	87	\$15
Offers red berry and cherry notes, framed by herb and spice accents.		
<b>DOMAINE DE PETIT ROUBIE</b> Picpoul de Pinet 2014	87	\$17
Plump in texture, this leads off with notes of oyster shell and sea salt.		
<b>PIERRE CHAVIN</b> Languedoc White La Croix Dorée Réserve 2014	85	\$10
A juicy, medium-bodied white, with ripe peach and pear flavors.		