



PAYS D'OC IGP

A potent combination of eclectic varietals, relevant weather and soils and freedom of expression

Like all classic wine regions, Pays d'Oc's character stems from a combination of felicitous climate and soils, and grape varieties attuned to both. But the IGP, which was officially established in 1987, takes all of these ingredients and allows winegrowers to get their creative juices flowing by factoring an astounding 58 permitted grape varieties into the equation. The result is a treasure trove of distinctive, versatile and vibrant wines that can appeal to a vast consumer audience for their flavour, variety and price tags.

The Pays d'Oc IGP region/vineyard spans an extensive area running from the Pyrenees along the Spanish border to the Camargue. It runs parallel with a 200-kilometre stretch of the Mediterranean coastline yet also extends inland over rolling hills and mountain foothills. This 120,000-hectare swathe of vineyards fosters a variety of weather patterns and soil types – from sandy coastal to limestone, schist, clay and gravel further inland – that unleashes huge potential for a selection of classic, native varieties. But when you combine them with an eclectic choice of 58 permitted grapes, the possibilities are endless. Some of the varieties such as Riesling or Gewurztraminer may seem counter-intuitive, whilst others – like Tempranillo and Nielluccio – are a long way from home. All of them, though, have been given the chance to express themselves freely by the region's creative winegrowers, under the watchful eye and stringent palates of the custodians of the Pays d'Oc IGP designation. The traditional southern varieties that are Grenache, Carignan, Syrah, Viognier and Rolle (aka Vermentino), which double up as appellation mainstays, feature both as stand-alone varieties and in red, white and rosé blends, again ramping up the region's diversity. California and its varietally-

themed proposition may have been the inspiration for Pays d'Oc IGP, but there is no denying that the region has earned its stripes, and spawned a whole raft of stars...

We are rolling out a series of press releases detailing the distinctive character traits found in Pays d'Oc IGP's classic, and more offbeat varieties. One hundred wines were tasted and the following is a selection that demonstrates the diversity found across the region, and the ability of each grape variety to express itself differently depending on its vineyard site - *tasting notes credited to Elizabeth Gabay MW.*



Grenache Noir

The workhorse variety of the south, arrived from Spain and Sardinia in the 19th century it stars on its own, as Garnacha in north east Spain, as Cannonau di Sardegna and Alicante in Tuscany.

It also has a rare starring role as a single variety red under Pays d'Oc IGP, although more often found in blends in almost every appellation across southern France, and is a major star of Pays d'Oc IGP rosé (but that will be coming later).

Its naturally high sugar levels allow for the grapes to have abundant fruit and its ability to thrive in hot dry conditions means the fruit retains its acidity and freshness. These qualities allow for flexibility and potential producing wines ranging from fresh and fruity with ripe raspberry jam and fresh, vibrant bramble fruit to more complex wines with intense blackberry fruit, smooth, strong tannins and the ability to age well in wood.

Two examples to highlight the diversity of this grape variety under Pays d'Oc IGP are:

Marius 2019, Chapoutier - early harvest to keep the fresh crunchy fruit and long vibrant acidity balances the intense raspberry fruit jam, floral notes and fresh bramble fruit.

Les Jamelles, Selection parcellaire 2017, Badet Clement - the grapes come from four vineyards, from cooler high altitudes to warmer coastal plains, to give extra complexity. A small proportion is whole bunch press and macerated for several months for greater intensity and the wine is partly aged in oak for 7-9 months before final blending. Complex inky ripe fruit, smooth and silky tannins and abundant 'Summer Pudding' black fruit and long acidity.

Carignan Noir

Carignan was historically planted throughout southern France and Spain, but has only been on the Pays d'Oc IGP list of varieties in the past few years. For almost a century it was regarded as a high-volume, cheap wine, or as a variety to be blended with more 'noble' varieties to provide freshness. Under the Pays d'Oc IGP label it is possible to discover its potential, with rare fine wines coming from old vineyards and some new plantations. While Grenache gave fruit and sugar, Carignan was known for its tannins and acidity. This acidity which was regarded for so long as being a disadvantage is today recognised as offering attractive vibrancy. Carignan even has its own fan club.

Styles can range from vibrant wild berry fruit and a crunchy 'croquante' character to intense spice, blue-black Cassis fruit, rich black chocolate and amazing acidity.

Two examples are:

Old Star, Domaine Montrose 2019, Olivier Coste - very much at the *croquante* end of the spectrum, this wine has full bodied blue berry and dark plum fruit, with vibrant and lively acidity and ripe, well integrated tannins.

Les Jamelles, Selection parcellaire 2018, Badet Clement - is made with old vine Carignan with low yields from different parcels, the hotter alluvial terraces of the Minervois giving structure and fruit from the foothills of Mont Alaric giving roundness. A mix of carbonic maceration and traditional vinification, including ageing in oak produces a wine which has spice, blue-black Cassis fruit, rich black chocolate and amazing acidity.

Syrah

Syrah is a mirror of not just the region, but also the creativity of the winemaker crafting styles ranging from a more restrained northern Rhône Syrah to the more obvious New World Shiraz fruit. This dual personality, with both characters equally well known, illustrates the charm and potential of Syrah to offer varied profiles and Pays d'Oc IGP gives rein to unbridled expression of styles.

The range of wines not only covers the range of styles, but also all budgets. Look out for rich black chocolate to savoury cocoa nibs; the sourness of red fruit and wild brambles to ripe black cassis; notes of garrigue and savoury game; sour salinity, inky minerality and spice; saline sour, black and inky pepper, intensity of ripe fruit to powerful weight and structure; easy supple tannins to firm, full-bodied tannins.

Six examples to highlight the diversity of this grape variety under Pays d'Oc IGP are:

“Finally - a French wine that doesn't start with château:” Shiraz 2019, Les Domaines Barsalou - has classic perfumed aromas, followed by rich black chocolate, meaty body and fine smooth tannins. The fun label and easy screwcap make this wine even more approachable.

Secrets de Lunès 2019, Vignobles Jeanjean - blue fruit and inky aromas with a hint of cloves. Slightly chalky, textured tannins, restrained blue black mineral fruit with a fine northern Rhone style freshness. Hints of violets, blueberries, wild berry sourness and a touch of blood orange finishing with rich chocolate, cocoa nibs and pepper.

Syrah 2019, Les Collines du Bourdic - from a cooperative with a sustainable approach to viticulture and winemaking, the grapes for this wine come from cooler clay and limestone

soils. Inky blueberry fruit with incense and garrigue savoury notes. Soft supple dry tannins and fresh acidity make this a classic fresh Syrah. Not rich and complex but very easy drinking and very typical.

Eve 2019, Maison Ventenac - from the slightly cooler north west of the region, this Syrah has clear nods to northern Rhone-style wines with spice and game aromas. On the palate the game and inky mineral notes continue with perfumed blue floral notes, blue-black berries and stone fruit and bitter black chocolate and rounded out with ripe creamy acidity.

Cuvée Balthazar 2019, Pierrick Harang Wine - although ready to drink, and with an easy opening screwcap, this wine is still young with potential to grow. Inky gamey aromas developing on the palate with saline and mineral notes. Ripe black fruit with firm, dry and chewy structured powdery tannins. Lovely structure.

Jeanne & Andre 2018, Domaine de Sauzet - no sulphur, fermented in cement. Very classic incense and white pepper aromas. Lots of pepper, wild bramble fruit with that tell-tale sour garrigue finish. Firm dry tannins give a supporting structure without dominating and long fresh acidity. Lovely classy Syrah.

Viognier

Viognier is the 3rd most produced white grape variety in Pays d'Oc IGP, but this southern French variety almost disappeared before its revival after the Second World War in the northern Rhone where it can be quite closed and tight when young, opening out with time to reveal rich floral wines. The variety has successfully spread west, and today the range of quality and styles found in Pays d'Oc IGP, from fresh and fruity to more complex gastronomic styles, illustrate both the quality and the liberty of expression which typifies the label.

Cooler, more northerly Rhone styles can be found combined with the warmth of southern fruit. Fresh young examples have fresh leafy, violets and blue floral notes. Warmer sites add layers of honey and lemon perfumed fruit. Playing around with cooler sites and longer maturation can add fragrant ginger, honeycomb and scented honeysuckle. Lees ageing, and sometimes partial malolactic fermentation can add rich creamy, nutty notes.

Six examples are:

Domaine de l'Ostal 2019, J-M Cazes - Viognier chosen from the coolest sites gives vibrant citrus acidity and mineral structure to this fragrant ginger, honeysuckle and honey fruit. Mouth filling weight and structure with a lively vibrant edge.

Viognier 2019, Viranel - Viognier, grown on river-rounded rocks with a low yield is aged on the lees with battonage for 3 months to give extra creaminess. Lime and ginger on the nose, Creamy rich weighty. Good acidity. Balanced lime, mineral floral and honey. Juicy and mouth-watering.

Le Versant 2019, Les Vignobles Foncalieu - harvests Viognier from sunny, north-facing chalky slopes to highlight the vibrant lime and mineral freshness. Temperature controlled fermentation retains the fresh leafy, violets and blue floral notes while some ageing on the lees with battonage round off the wine with honeyed riches.

L'Autodidacte 2019, St Jean d'Aumieres - has Viognier from a hot sheltered region with well-drained gravel soils on top of clay and limestone. An elegant delicacy with honey and lemon perfumed fruit, long fresh citrus acidity and stony length.

Ournac 2018 Domaine Coudoulet - Viognier, Lime and honey. Creamy, ginger, perfumed floral beautiful.

L'Instant Rare 2019, Domaine de Luc, Famille Fabre - mixed soils of alluvial gravel, river-rolled stones and limestone hills with fresh north west winds resulting in fresh fruit and lime acidity. Very floral perfumed notes of violets, blue mineral restraint and fresh acidity.

Rolle

Rolle (aka Vermentino), a variety which has spread successfully from Sardinia, Tuscany, Liguria and across Provence, has the possibility to show many diverse styles from austere restraint to full-bodied and powerfully oaked. Provence white wines, much of it 100% Rolle, and the relatively small niche production Ligurian Vermentino, make for rare outside comparisons. This allows for Pays d'Oc IGP Rolle to express a wide range of its own unique styles.

Rolle under the Pays d'Oc IGP label shows a rich variety of expression for the grape, from the fresher zesty lime, white and green fruit freshness and sometimes a saline mineral freshness from cooler sites or at higher altitude through to the rounder fuller bodied richness of wines

from riper fruit and often extended lees ageing which can show ripe apple, honey, nuts and fresh citrus acidity.

Three examples are:

Blanville's 2019 – this Rolle has similarities to the Ligurian style coming from the mineral soils north of Montpellier and the cooling maritime breezes. Sheltered from the influences of the north by the Montagne Noire and the Cévennes. The 2019 has a stony minerality with zesty lime, salt and white stone fruit. And long freshness.

The Rolle in the **Marius Blanc 2019** from **Chapoutier** comes from clay and limestone soils and has had 5 months ageing on the lees, shows richer, rounder fruit. The 2019 has complex kerosene, apple and honey aromas. Honey, beeswax and white almond fruit with hints of orange peel with vibrant lime acidity and leafy freshness.

Rolle 2019, Domaine des Lauriers - on yellow clay, is a full-bodied with voluptuous roundness, floral notes and stony citrus length.

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