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Pays d'Oc wines for every festive occasion Tasting notes by Elizabeth Gabay MW

When the Pays d'Oc label was created in 1987, it was the inspiration of California and the freedom of expression its many permitted single varieties offered that inspired many winegrowers at the time throughout the Languedoc and Roussillon regions. This was an outlet for their New World style wines towards export markets – 35 years on, it's one of the region's hugest success stories.

The character of Pays d'Oc IGP varietal wines is closely linked to the sunny, Mediterranean climate. Like an amphitheatre open to the Mediterranean Sea, it extends in an arc along the 200km of coastline formed by the Gulf of Lion, from Nîmes through the Camargue, and the Côte Vermeille to the Spanish border. To the south, the mountain ranges formed by the Pyrenees, to the east the foothills of the Cévennes, delimit its territory. Spread over 120,000 hectares, the vineyard is divided into three zones of influence: the maritime plains in its coastal part, the first slopes and limestone soils, and finally the high-altitude vineyards. The extent of the Pays d'Oc vineyard explains the extraordinary diversity of soils found there: they alternate between sandy soils along the sea, limestones, schists, clays or stony gravel on the plains and hillsides. This mosaic of terroirs is the field of expression of varieties authorized by the label.

The wines of Pays d'Oc IGP are made up of 45% red wines, 25% white and 30% rosé. Currently, fifty-eight varieties are permissible under the Pays d'Oc IGP denomination. Varieties range from old traditional varieties to varieties normally found elsewhere to modern crosses either presented on their own as a single variety or in traditional or unusual blends.



While most emphasis is on the single varieties, it is important not to forget the varied styles of winemaking and enormous range of styles, from fresh, fruit forward wines to fuller bodied wines aged on the lees or in barrel, from dry through lightly moelleux to fuller sweetness, which make so many of these wines exciting choices for a range of festive occasions. Combined with imaginative packaging, these wines can grace any table.

Following a series of press releases focusing on single grape varieties and one on rosé styles, here we look on diverse winemaking styles and a few blends to create a very interesting range of wines for every festive occasion.

Romantic Evening

Les Amours d'Haut Gléon rosé 2020, Vignobles Foncalieu

From the attractive white thermo cherub design on the bottle to the pretty blushing pink - this wine speaks romance. Pretty, cream, peach and floral aromas lead on to crisp white fruit with hints of redcurrants and crunchy red apples. A classic blend of Grenache and Syrah cultivated on clay and limestone, the wine has both freshness and ripeness. An attractive start to an evening with some pink aperitifs; try with smoked salmon or a classic prawn cocktail.

Cellar price in France: 6,50€ / Retailed in the UK (Temple Wine)



Alternatives

- *Le Bois des Roses 2020, Domaine Grand Chemin*: in a pretty frosted bottle is a dry gris with a hint of pink made with Grenache Gris and Viognier.
- *Arabesque 2021, Le Rosé de Bessan*: a tropical fruit and gooseberry Sauvignon Blanc in a pretty iridescent bottle.

“Pure” Petit Verdot 2019, Bruno Andreu

While diamonds are usually the choice of romance - a ruby gem like this is worth indulging in. Sweet blackcurrant jam fruit aromas lead into very ripe, juicy inky fruit with notes of intense cassis and unctuous elderberry curd in a very New World opulent style. But this is not just all fruit. Balanced by gorgeous freshness, slightly leathery, firm tannins and some lovely saline grip. This wine is not just big and bold - it is welcoming, friendly and moreish. A classic red meat accompaniment for either a perfect steak or rich beef stew.

Cellar price in France: 20€ / Retailed in the UK (Burgh Wine Merchants)



Baccalarius 2016, Domaine de Bachellery

If a red wine can be romantic - this is it. Oak aged Grenache with a touch of Syrah starts with gorgeous aromas including notes of roses, strawberries, red apples, cloves and sweet spice. The fruit continues on the palate with velvety red cherry and strawberry fruit - ripe and full bodied but not jammy with a delicate rose, violet and pot-pourri elegance. Silky tannins, fresh acidity, beautiful balance. Romance is in the air. Fireplace sipping wine with tuna carpaccio.
Cellar price in France: 12€ / Not Retailed in the UK



Ode au Muscat, Frontignan Muscat

Historically, elderflower wine in England was described as Frontignan, giving a clue to the typical florality from these coastal sweet Muscats. Peach, pear and quince aromas carry on to the palate in a sweet fruity opulence with elderflower and lemon syllabub. A fresh vibrant acidity with apple pie richness, white chocolate, vanilla, muscat on the palate. Lovely sweet juiciness, very well cut through by chilled acidity. Simple, sweet, elegant, approachable. Will keep young and old happy at any sort of festive occasion. Try with a Pavlova or syllabub.

Cellar price in France: 5,70€ / Not Retailed in the UK



Festive Family Lunch

Les Hirondelles 2020, Domaine Boissezon Guiraud

A sophisticated Sauvignon Blanc with honeyed notes and tropical, papaya, pineapple aromas. The palate continues with honeyed peach, grapefruit zest, ripe limes, elderflower and passion fruit and hints of spice and juniper on the finish. Intriguing, different and zesty with evident intense ripeness and lovely structure. A perfect wine for an aperitif or to match with some exciting exotic flavours such as ceviche.

Cellar price in France: 8,50€ / Retailed in the UK (Cranstons of Cumbria)



Alternatives

- *Harmonie Chardonnay Fût 2018, Domaine de l'Herbe Sainte*: is a classic buttery oaked Chardonnay.
- *V de Novi 2019, Mas du Novi - organic*: a super eco-friendly floral Viognier with herbal notes, made in egg, barrel and amphora in a stylish squat bottle.

Ournac Frères, Mélasse 1^{ère} qualité Pinot Noir 2020, Domaine Coudoulet

While politics is generally avoided at festive meals, this wine allows you to enjoy the political cartoon of the winemaker's great-great grandfather! And every bottle is numbered. This wine also surprises, showing the fine quality of a Burgundian-style Pinot Noir from the Languedoc. Cherry fruit compote with a hint of eucalyptus and menthol aromas. On the palate vibrant sour cherries, crunchy red currants and mineral fruit. Really delicious, silky tannins with fresh mouth-watering acidity. Benchmark Pinot that would partner a roast leg of lamb.

Cellar price in France: 18€ / Not Retailed in the UK



Septem Quercus 2018, Montlobre

With a jewel-like label showing the detail of a stained-glass window in the Chapelle de Montlobre, this oak aged blend of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc is a mouth-watering red. Deep, dark, inky cassis and elderberry aromas which continue on to the palate with fresh damsons, blackberries and spice. Fresh, vibrant leafiness, mineral notes, silky supple tannins and real energy and length. This is a classic and very refined wine that builds up to a crescendo of fruit flavours and which will absolutely please Bordeaux lovers, its power and fruit would also go beautifully with a full-bodied cassoulet.

Cellar price in France: 24€ / Not Retailed in the UK



Cuvée Caroline 2018, Domaine Morin Langaran

An oaked blend of 60% Merlot and 40% Marselan, this wine is traditional 'with a twist' character. From the gorgeous sour cherries, inky elderberry and hints of capsicum on the aromas, you could be forgiven in thinking that this is a classic benchmark typicity. The palate reveals some lovely southern richness with sour cherries, cassis, plum and unctuous black chocolate with a touch of smokiness. Vibrant fresh acidity, smooth silky tannins and sun-ripened rich fruit. Match the elegant dark fruit with magret de canard.

Cellar price in France: 9€ / Retailed in the UK (PM Wine Services)



Dinner Party

Les P'tites Terrasses 2020, Domaine Sibille - organic

This delicately sweet blend of 50% Viognier and 50% Roussanne, gives a lovely opportunity to make a meal festive as aperitif or with dessert. Dried grapes give the sweet intensity with none of the weightiness of added alcohol found in a VDN. Delicate tinned peach aromas. Silky creamy richness with notes of Seville oranges, grapefruit and candied citrus peel and pears. A pleasure to sip with the citrus freshness acidity, and an edgy minerality hidden on the finish, lifting to delicate prettiness. Delicious with blue cheese and dried apricot crostini with pumpkin soup.

Cellar price in France: 12,20€ / Not Retailed in the UK



Petit Marquis de Pennautier, Chardonnay, Sauvignon, Viognier 2020

An intriguing blend of 60% Chardonnay, 20% Sauvignon Blanc and 20% Viognier to create an exciting wine which punches way above its weight. Delicate aromas of tropical fruit and almost a whisper of sweet coconut develops into an elegant, silky wine. While opulent ripe white peaches, spice and nuts fill out the palate, balanced by grapefruit pith and fresh citrus acidity, the fruit takes a backseat allowing the vibrancy and complex richness take the podium. This wine offers a charming gastronomic accompaniment for seafood or white meats.

Cellar price in France: 9€ / Not Retailed in the UK



Alternative

- *Impetus 2016, Domaine de Figières: a buttery saline mature oaked Roussanne.*

Pinot Noir Le Village 2019, Domaine de la Metairie d'Alon - organic

Metairie d'Alon's 2019 high altitude and northern exposure create an energy and vibrancy in this southern Pinot Noir. Ethereal notes of Christmas spice and rich cherries on the nose open

up to restrained, ripe black cherries and bitter almonds. Still youthful right now but showing elegant discretion with smooth supple tannins and a concentrated body which slightly hides the acidity... and then just as you think you have discovered the wine... the long vibrant, red berry acidity just keeps on giving. A classic Pinot Noir that will age well making it good for a gift or serve with game. Crystal ware and candlelight beckon!
Cellar price in France: 23€ / Not Retailed in the UK



Oh la la! 2020, Domaine de Paraza

While the name might suggest just a simple fun wine, this is a wine to satisfy the palate. A blend of 60% Syrah, 20% Marselan, 10% Merlot and 10% Cabernet Franc create a complex wine with more than a passing nod to Southern Rhone character. Floral, perfumed aromas with hints of cherry jam and vanilla may shout easy drinking, but the wine develops in the glass. Blackcurrants, elderberry, herbal and gamey fruit with a hint of leather. Fresh mineral acidity with tight grippy tannins and powerful oomph. Beautifully silky and perfumed, with the guts behind it. Big but refined. Try with venison or haggis.

Cellar price in France: 7,50€ / Not Retailed in the UK



Alternative

- *GSM2 2018, Le Grand Balthazar Pierrick Harang Wine: a classic southern blend with Grenache, Syrah, Mourvedre and Merlot.*

Gastronomic festive meal

Elixir 2020, Bruno Andreu

A truly exotic elixir blend of Roussanne and Viognier. Perfumed orange blossom, apricots and golden plums beguile from the first whiff. On the palate, complex layers of creamy salted butter, fragrant orange blossom and intense dried apricots. Gorgeously ripe with incredibly vibrant acidity. Serve this at any festive gathering and guests will be wowed by the elegant perfume, creamy richness and structural, crisp, clean, almost marble coolness. A wonderful challenge for some gastronomic matching, or enjoy on its own with a splendid cheese board.
Cellar price in France: 12€ / Not Retailed in the UK



Alternatives

- *Lieu dit La Verité Cessenon 2019, Laurent Miquel*: a floral and citrus perfumed Viognier.
- *La Marquise 2019, Calmel & Joseph - organic*: a classy oaked Roussanne with a touch of Grenache Gris.

Nielluccio 2020, Domaine la Cendrillon - organic

Nielluccio, the Corsican name for Sangiovese, is relatively new to the region and is loved for its freshness even in the hottest of years. Juicy perfumed compote with a touch of violets on the nose. On the palate, rich bitter chocolate, black cherries, coffee and violets (think Chianti). Velvety, rich black fruit with smooth supple ripe tannins - enough to give structure and weight but ready to drink, with long, fresh crisp acidity. Inspired by the Italianate origins of this variety, try with some homemade pasta, ragù and wild mushrooms.

Cellar price in France: 10€ / Not Retailed in the UK



Arômes Sauvages 2019, Domaine de Viranel

It is hard to believe this variety was scorned in favour of the international superstars, but this old vine Alicante Bouschet is quite entrancing, as well as a conversation piece! Traditionally made with some extended maceration and fermentation in cement tanks partially buried in the ground. The aromas start with generous, jammy red fruit with a hint of sweet spice and develops into a deliciously complex wine with full-bodied raspberry, wild berry fruit, sweet spice and black pepper with a hint of gamey leatheriness on the finish. The tannins are silky smooth and supple giving a fine inky depth. The acidity is long, fresh and full of energy, leading to a mouth-watering finish. Fine, elegant and quite lovely. Can imagine with game, cranberry or red currant relish.

Cellar price in France: 11,10€ / Retailed in the UK (Bancroft Wines)



Amy 2020, Aubert & Mathieu - organic

This Grenache and Syrah blend spontaneously fermented in cement has a sexy intensity which made the producer think of Amy Winehouse! Ripe black fruit concentration on the nose continues on the palate, but instead of going down the fruit bomb path, the fruit has an intense wild raspberry edge with sour berry acidity with hints of wild garrigue and savoury notes. Bass notes of textural, grippy tannins with a vibrant crunchy freshness. Somehow manages to be intense with a sense of wild youthfulness and passion and retain elegance. A really delicious wine that can play with the big boys. Balance with risotto, with a touch of sage and thyme.
Cellar price in France: 12,90€ / Retailed in the UK (Enotria)



Casual Entertaining

Solas rosé 2020, Laurent Miquel

A classic rosé blend of 70% Cinsault and 30% Syrah in a pretty frosted bottle which emphasises the shell like pink. Floral notes with perfumed pears on the nose leads on to an elegantly creamy wine with floral white fruit, Comice pears and spice. Long, fresh delicately citrus acidity, balanced weight of ripe fruit and a hint of minerality in the structural finish make for a stylish and silky wine with cheesy pastry nibbles.

Cellar price in France: 10€ / Retailed in the UK (Dunnes, Morgenrot)



Alternative

- *Entre Nous selon Valensac (white) 2020, Valensac le Domaine: an intriguing blend of Albarino and Petit Manseng with fresh perfumed and white almond notes, perfect for a kedgeree brunch.*

N116 2021, Domaine Guilhem - organic

This sulphur free, fermented in cement 100% Merlot is pure fruit and charm. Buttery black fruit with leafy hints on the nose leads straight to a glass full of fruit! Ripe and juicy blackberries, sloes and cranberries which start vibrantly crunchy and develop more intense notes, with a firm mineral edge, fresh vibrant acidity, and well integrated ripe tannins. An absolute joy to drink - a game changer for those who are more used to soft jammy Merlots. Perfect with roast turkey and cranberry sauce.

Cellar price in France: 9,50€ / Not Retailed in the UK



Syrah Grenache 2020, Marius by Michel Chapoutier

This range of red and white wines always impresses with its screw cap and braille labels. The Syrah Grenache red blend has a fun youthful edge, reflecting its component parts: the wild brambles and raspberry fruit of Grenache with the floral perfumes and hints of spice of Syrah. Crisp tannins, juicy fruit, fresh acidity, this wine is fresh and lively, a crowd-pleasing Southern red that scores great points for value-for-money wine to go with a really nice pizza. The freshness of this wine makes it a red perfect with more robust fish such as salmon.

Cellar price in France: 6,16€ / Retailed in the UK (Hoults Wine Merchants, Loki Wines, Define Food and Wine, Dunells. Imported by Hatch-Mansfield, Matthew Clark)



Cuvée JMF 2019, Domaine Grand Chemin

An unusual blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir reflecting the spirit of innovation within the IGP Pays d'Oc. Fermented in cement, aged in barrels, creating an appealing wine. Rich ripe red fruit aromas lead on to an opulent, fruit driven wine with wild raspberries, blackcurrants, a hint of fresh figs and black coffee. Fresh leafy acidity, soft supple, textural tannins with some fine mineral grip but primarily ripe fruit driven. Opulent and great for parties, barbecue or steakhouse wine.

Cellar price in France: 10,90€ / Not Retailed in the UK



Alternatives

- *Syrah Les Epices 2019, Domaine les Yeuses: A classic benchmark Syrah.*

To call in samples and for further details, please contact Sarah Hargreaves:

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