

# WINE News

*Out here, the rules are different. Join K&L's Rhône and French regional buyer and team as we explore wines from France's southwest and beyond.*



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## France's Regions on the Rise

By Keith Mabry

**Let me take a moment to introduce myself.** My name is Keith Mabry and I am K&L's new Rhône and French Regional buyer. I have been with K&L for seven years and have worked as the import director for our Los Angeles store. It is my absolute pleasure to take the reins of these categories and I look forward to exploring these regions with you. For my first newsletter, we'll bypass the Rhône and take a look at some other, more far-flung wine regions. These are the wines you may have had in bistros and cafés all around France—fondly remembered wines, even if you have

soon forgotten their names. These are the regions that make France tick, with their diverse terroirs and obscure varietals—all special. So let's start our journey. San Francisco's John Majeski takes us down the spine of the Jura. Redwood City's Angie An gives us some history on the sparkling wines of Limoux, Los Angeles' Olivia Ragni waxes poetic about some of Provence's best rosés, Alex Pross gives us a tour of the Languedoc-Roussillon, and finally, check out my spread on our new wines from France's *Sudouest*, a.k.a. the Southwest.

## SCRATCHING THE SURFACE *My Favorite New Finds*

**2011 Château Viranel "Le V de Viranel" Saint Chinian\* (\$19.99)** This blend of 60% Syrah and 40% Grenache, from vines on limestone and clay soils, is a wine of great impact. With deep black fruit, it has an air of rusticity and intrigue to it that belies its humble price. A nice, spicy finish brings the wine into focus. 95 points *DC*.

**Hubert Clavelin "Brut-Comté" Crémant du Jura (\$18.99)** Made *méthode traditionnelle* from 100% Chardonnay, this bubbly shows qualities of baked apples, chalky minerality and aged cheese rind. A terrific non-Champagne alternative sparkling wine for a very reasonable price.

**2011 Domaine de la Bastide Blanche Bandol (\$26.99)** A top Bandol producer, for sure, Bastide Blanche farms organically. The wine is 76% Mourvèdre with the rest Grenache, Syrah, Cinsault and Carignan. It is powerful, with inky

dark fruit, plush tannins and a wild game note that reminds you of what Bandol is all about. 93 points *RP* and *WE*.

**2010 Louis Magnin Gamay Vin de Savoie (\$36.99)** From one of Savoie's greatest producers, this is one of the most fascinating and complex Gamays you are likely to drink, holding its own among Beaujolais greats like Foillard and Thévenet. This has a beautiful core of wild strawberry fruit with subtle game and earthy nuances. Don't think of this as a substitute for great Beaujolais, it's entirely its own thing and well worth the price.

**2012 Château La Selve "Palissaire" Coteaux de l'Ardèche (\$13.99)** La Selve is certified organic and may technically be in the Rhône Valley, but really lies just to the west. The blend is decidedly un-Rhône, though, made up of 40% Merlot, 30%

Grenache and 30% Cinsault. It has ripe cherry and berry flavors with notes of freshly tilled earth. This is a terrific value and a great introduction to this little-known region.

**2013 Domaine Pas de l'Escalette "Les Petits Pas" Languedoc (\$18.99)** This certified organic property is located in Terrasses du Larzac, a sub-appellation of Languedoc. Grenache and Carignan with a little Cinsault and Syrah for nice effect, all destemmed and aged in large barrels. The Petits Pas is bright and loaded with raspberry and spice. This is surprisingly complex from mid-palate to finish with layers of intrigue unfolding.

—Keith Mabry



## Languedoc-Roussillon *Rhône Valley's Little Brother Grows Up*

Nicknamed “France’s New World” because it is not harnessed by the regulations that govern vineyard planting and winemaking in many of the country’s other wine regions, the Languedoc-Roussillon is now poised to take the mantle as France’s top producer of wine values. Located to the southwest of the Rhône Valley, the Languedoc-Roussillon’s Mediterranean climate and alluvial soils provide ideal conditions for fantastic Syrah, Grenache and Carignan, as well as Bordeaux varietals and white Rhône grapes.

The Languedoc-Roussillon is better known for its red wines, but it would be a mistake to overlook the amazing whites and rosés that are coming from this region. The **2012 Lafage “Côté Est” Côtes Catalanes Blanc (\$9.99)** is one such stellar value. A blend of Grenache Blanc, Chardonnay and Marsanne, this tasty white has pretty citrus fruit notes with hints of beeswax and honey that make it versatile enough to be a food or entertaining wine. 90 points RP. A slight step up in quality, the **2012 Michel Gassier “Nostre Pais Blanc” Costières de Nîmes Blanc (\$16.99)** is a blend of 53% Grenache Blanc and 38% Roussanne, with Viognier and Bourboulenec. This crazy little wine drinks like a white Châteauneuf-du-Pape but at about a third of the price! 92 points RP. The values don’t stop with whites; there are some spectacular rosés coming from the Languedoc-Roussillon, which should come as no surprise since the better rosés, in my opinion, are made from Syrah and Grenache. The **2013 Puech Haut “Cuvée Prestige” Coteaux du Languedoc Rosé (\$17.99)** is an absolute revelation; this light pink Syrah and Grenache-based wine just oozes summertime fruit flavors! 91 points RP.

The reputation of most wine regions is built around the quality of their red wines, and the Languedoc-Roussillon is no different. The first ridiculous value is the **2012 M. Chapoutier “Les Vignes de Bila-Haut” Côtes-du-Roussillon Villages (\$12.99)**. A blend of Syrah, Grenache and Carignan, this killer value comes from the renowned Chapoutier family, known for making some of Rhône Valley’s finest wines. Chock-full of spice, red fruits, herbs and blackberry, this wine is irresistible and should be your go-to summertime red. 91 points RP. Another ridiculous value is the **2012 Bastide Miraflores “Vieilles Vignes” Côtes Catalanes (\$12.99)**, a blend of 70% Syrah and 30% Grenache. This baby is densely packed with dark berry fruit, intense aromas and a sexy, layered finish, all for less than \$13! 91 points RP. While the Languedoc has built its reputation on its under-\$20 values, the emergence of well-made fine wines above \$20 may be the most exciting current development. A good example is the **2012 M. Chapoutier “Occultum Lapidem” Côtes du Roussillon Villages (\$26.99)**. A blend of primarily Syrah with a little Grenache and Carignan, this wine is a big step up from the entry-level offerings mentioned above. Layers of dark fruit, spice, licorice, herbs and smoke all nicely mingle against a complex, layered wine that feels like a top-notch Côte-Rôtie at a fraction of the price. 94 points RP. Enjoy the Languedoc-Roussillon and the embarrassing abundance of riches it offers!

—Alex Pross

## JURA-SSIC *Sparks*

I have to admit to a very personal and irrational bias toward the wines of Jura. Anything even hinting of “Jura-ssic” will immediately remind me of the powerful dinosaur fixation I had as a child, with my imagination filled with the primeval foghorn bellow of Brontosaurus or shingle-tiled shuffling of slow-witted Stegosaurus. Of course, the only thing connecting these Jurassic behemoths with the Jura plateau might be the somewhat saurian contours of this jumbled terrain, a geological jigsaw puzzle that lends itself to the cultivation of traditional Burgundian grapes as well as utterly distinctive local varieties like Savagnin, Trousseau and Poulsard. Figures from Pliny the Elder to Brillat-Savarin admired the character and quality of the wines of Jura, and Louis Pasteur was born in the historic wine village of Arbois in northern Jura, where his investigations into the effects of fermentation altered the study of wine forever. We offer an excellent selection from this remote, picturesque region at the foothills of the French Alps.

**Caves Jean Bourdy Crémant du Jura Brut (\$24.99)** Few wineries in France can claim a provenance like Caves Jean Bourdy, where the present owner, Jean-François, pours wine in the original hand-carved cellar built by his family in 1450, near the quaint, historic hamlet of Arlay. To add to the fabled nature of the place, the winery includes a museum and labyrinthine collection of library wines dating back to the 1700s! Little has changed except for improvements in the vineyards, which recently were certified organic and biodynamic. This pale yellow Crémant, 100% Chardonnay, expresses lively, captivating aromas of pear, quince and toast, with a clean, crisp mousse and expansive dry palate yielding baked apple and savory tones of ginger, fig and hazelnut. Astonishingly flavorful, this delightful sparkling wine would be excellent with an asparagus and Comté cheese tart. 91 points WS.

**2009 Caves Jean Bourdy Côtes du Jura Rouge (\$24.99)** Pinot Noir contributes raspberry fruit, finesse and velvety sophistication; Poulsard is delicate, fruity and nicely-perfumed; and Trousseau exudes a riper red cherry, leather and dark-skinned aspect to this firmly-structured, complex, full-bodied red. This wine will effortlessly evolve for years.

**2012 Domaine de la Tournelle “Trousseau des Corvées” Arbois (\$36.99)** Another of our favorite producers, dedicated to cultivating and celebrating the indigenous varieties of the Arbois region. Vineyards are planted from *massale* selection under strict organic and biodynamic regimens. This wine spent 12 months in older foudres, with minimal use of sulfites. It exhibits bright, robust flavors of raspberry and morello cherries with some gamy background notes—an appetizing wine that will work like a charm with pizza, charcuterie or grilled sausages.

**2011 Domaine de la Tournelle “Fleur de Savagnin” Arbois (\$34.99)** Savagnin, for its obscure origins and amazing clonal diversity, depending on where it is grown, qualifies as one of the greatest wine geek grapes on earth. This limpid, straw-colored version is an expression of the non-oxidative style, about as far from a Vin Jaune as possible, cultivated on grey marl soils to enhance the stone fruit, apple and orange blossom character. With its nice minerality and clean acidity, this will be a fine partner for white fish or grilled scallops.

—John Majeski

## TOUR DE PROVENCE *A Study in Rosé*

It's that time of year again, when flowers bloom, the sun shines and glasses are filled with pink wines ranging in hue from pale pink to rose petal to salmon. If there is one place that's synonymous with rosé, it must be Provence, where the majority of all wine production is rosé. Provence has been making pale colored wines ever since the ancient Greeks founded Marseille over 2,500 years ago, making Provence the oldest winemaking region in France. The wines were light-colored because the ancient vintners used little to no maceration, simply pressing the grapes for juice and continuing with fermentation.

Our first property, Commanderie de la Bargemone, was founded by the Knights Templar in the 13th century. The property sits in the western region of Provence now known as Coteaux d'Aix, an appellation renowned for its limestone soils. Commanderie is in the process of converting their vineyards to organic and biodynamic farming. The grapes in their **2013 Commanderie de la Bargemone Coteaux d'Aix en Provence Rosé (\$15.99)** are 35% Grenache, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon, with equal parts Syrah and Cinsault. It offers notes of tart strawberry seed, melon rind, fresh fig and an herbaceous, almost bay leaf finish. A rosé that pairs nicely with lighter cuisine such as roasted chicken and rice. 92 points *W&S*, 90 points RP and ST.

Next up, Domaine Colombe is perched high in the mountainous region of Coteaux Varois. Here the climate is more continental than the rest of Provence. Don't let its delicate pale pink color fool you, though, the **2013 Domaine Colombe Coteaux Varois en Provence Rosé\* (\$12.99)** has plenty of aroma and flavor. It's got a floral nose, a creamy, weighty mid-palate of strawberries, cranberries and cherries, and the finish is crisp, dry and mineral driven; a perfect rosé for summer sipping.

Finally, sitting atop a hill in the Maures Mountains is one of our favorite producers here at K&L, the unconventional and yet historic Clos Cibonne. They have been around since the 17th century, making serious rosé that's meant to age. They primarily use the rare local variety Tibouren, along with Grenache and Syrah. Clos Cibonne allows its rosés to age for an additional year under a veil of surface yeast called flor, just the way sherry is made, giving its wines a distinct, bitter almond characteristic. Perhaps their least wacky wine, the **2013 Clos Cibonne "Tentations" Côtes de Provence Rosé (\$17.99)** provides whiffs of lemon balm and pear with a palate showing the terroir of Provence with lavender, sage, vanilla and citrus—this wine is meant to drink now! Made with 90% Tibouren and 10% Grenache, the **2012 Clos Cibonne Tibouren "Tradition" Côtes de Provence Rosé (\$23.99)** is aged for 12-18 months in 100-year-old casks. A lovely layer of flor provides that nutty characteristic of hazelnut, with lemon oil and cranberry.

Similarly the **2012 Clos Cibonne Tibouren "Cuvée Speciale des Vignettes" Côtes de Provence Rosé (\$29.99)** was also aged in 100-year-old foudre on lees and under a veil of flor, but this cuvée is made with Tibouren from 60+ year old vines. The aging process shows in the wine's orange-salmon tinge and notes of dried fruits and nuts, perfect for a bouillabaisse. I hope these wines inspire you to take your own Tour de Provence.

—Olivia Ragni



## LIMOUX *The Real Birthplace of Bubbles*

Limoux, a region that's often overlooked and forgotten at the southwest of France, actually holds some of the oldest records for making traditional method sparkling wines. While most people have heard the story of Dom Pérignon and how he "invented" Champagne, in truth, it was merely an accident and he spent much of his lifetime trying to *get rid* of the bubbles inside those bottles! On the other hand, Limoux has been purposely putting the bubbles *in* the bottles since 1531, in the cellars of the Benedictine Abbey of Saint Hilaire. Maybe it was bad marketing, or it was simply too far from the export ports, but they never gained the international attention to compete with Champagne.

What does that translate to for everyday shoppers? Great quality wines at value prices. And sparkling is not all they do. Common grape cultivars for still wines include Mauzac (also called Blanquette because of the fine white coating that forms on its leaves in spring, making the grape look like it's wearing a "blanket"), Chenin Blanc, Chardonnay, Merlot and other international varieties.

Antech is a family-owned winery in Limoux with roots in the region for more than six generations. They combine modern techniques with ancient traditions to make top-quality wines that are worth a try, especially if you love bubbles.

**NV Antech "Brut Nature" Blanquette de Limoux\* (\$12.99)** This is my favorite Limoux bubbly in the store! Produced with no dosage, this cuvée offers a super crisp, clean and refreshing mouthfeel with delicate yellow apple and hints of rocky minerality. Quite a serious bubbly that makes me crave fried chicken every time (it's one of the few wines that can cut through a fatty, juicy fried chicken with no sweat!). Blend of 90% Mauzac, 5% Chenin Blanc and 5% Chardonnay.

**2011 Antech "Cuvée Eugenie" Crémant de Limoux\* (\$13.99)** This is a more classic affair with 50% Chardonnay that's made in the traditional Champagne method and a guaranteed party favorite. An array of citrus fruit, honeysuckle and a slight nutty component makes this wine incredibly balanced and easy to love. Cuvée Eugenie is named after the grande dame of the estate, Eugenie Limouzy.

**2010 Antech "Emotion" Crémant de Limoux Brut Rosé\* (\$14.99)** What better "emotion" to feel than sipping Champagne-quality pink bubbles for a fraction of the price? Made in the traditional Champagne method and aged for 15 months in bottle before *dégorgement*, this pale pink Crémant offers delicate wild strawberry and cherry aromas and a silky smooth finish. I hope this gives you a few new and fun wines to try out this summer without breaking the bank!

—Angie An

# Exploring the Southwest of France

By Keith Mabry

The southwest is one of the most diverse wine regions in all of France.

Each sub-appellation has indigenous grape varieties and distinctive terroirs. As vast and varied as these regions are, it would not do them justice to say just a few words about each one here. So instead, I wrote a lot of words about just a few that I believe are the most promising.

## Côtes de Gascogne

This region is primarily known for the production of Armagnac; it wasn't until the last 10 years or so that producers began to take fine table wine production seriously. Formerly, much of the wine they made was destined for distillation. Producers found that by fermenting at lower temperatures in stainless steel, they could develop and preserve more powerful aromatics. Though yields are high, costs have stayed low and the wines are consequently some of the best bargain whites in France.



Domaine de Millet is first and foremost an Armagnac producer. Run by the fifth generation of the Millet family, with the reins now in the hands of daughter Laurence. The **2013 Domaine de Millet Côtes de Gascogne Blanc\* (\$8.99)** is an expressive blend of 50% Colombard and 50% Ugni Blanc. This wine is a great alternative white for you Sauvignon Blanc drinkers out there. It is loaded with peach and citrus aromatics and has vibrant acidity and clarity. Even more fun is the **2013 Domaine de Millet Côtes de Gascogne Moelleux\* (\$9.99)**, made from 100% Gros Manseng, a variety famous in Jurançon for making richly textured whites and a small component of their dessert wines. On its own here it provides a mellow sweetness similar to a Kabinett-level Riesling or demi-sec Vouvray. Exotic fruits on the nose and palate offer a lifted and bright character that makes it the perfect foil for Chinese and Thai foods.

## Cahors

We've given a lot of coverage to the Malbecs of Argentina, but how about a little love for the region where the variety originated? Cahors, home to Malbec, is one of the oldest wine-producing regions in France. The grape, locally known as Cot and Auxerrois, produced in its heyday one of Europe's most sought-after wines. After phylloxera devastated the region in the late 1800s it was slow to recover. Finally, with the rise in popularity of Argentine Malbec, a new renaissance is occurring in Cahors. The soil types vary from gravelly river bed to iron-rich limestone terraces to clay-

dominated hillsides. One of our top producers, Château Haut-Monplaisir, is operated by Cathy and Daniel Fournie. Cathy took over the vineyards in 1998 from her father, who had sold the crop to négociants. The **2011 Château Haut-Monplaisir "Tradition" Cahors (\$15.99)**, like all their cuvées, is 100% Malbec. It is made in concrete tanks in order to preserve a pure expression of the grape. Copious black fruit laden with rocky mineral notes lend this wine an immediate accessibility. Saturated blackberry, subtle smoke and fine tannins make this an ideal pairing with grilled meats. 90 points *WE*.

## Madiran

The last few years, Madiran has emerged as a region on the rise—or, not so much the region as the grape variety, Tannat. Nothing like a few television news stories about resveratrol, heart health and the grape that has the most of it to get people's attention! Aside from that, the wines have improved dramatically. A lot of it has to do with aging in oak to mature Tannat's harsh tannins—and a little micro-oxygenation helps soften those tannins, too. Did I mention that the grape is tannic? This is full-bodied wine with a velvety structure; especially with some age on it. The **2010 Domaine Berthoumieu "Charles de Batz" Madiran (\$19.99)** is a great version to cut your teeth on. It is a blend of 90% Tannat and 10% Cabernet Sauvignon from vines aged 50-plus. It has an inky color with black raspberry, licorice root, cardamom and nutmeg aromas and flavors; plush and mouth-filling, it's an instant classic with pâtés, cured meats and cassoulet.

## Fronton

This is possibly the most obscure of the regions in this report. Fronton was given appellation status in 1975 but has largely flown under the radar here in the States. The primary grape is Negrette and all red wines must include at least 50% in the mix. The soils are mostly alluvial with some clay, and are also very iron-rich, which is definitely a component that the wines seem to evoke. The **2010 Château Flotis "Si Noire" Fronton (\$16.99)** has all the gamy meaty components that are the hallmark of this variety. The property, which had been virtually abandoned, was purchased by three women—Katia Garrouste, Cathy Ribes and Myriam Ribes—who released their first vintage in 2004. The vines are in their late 30s, much like the women who run the estate. Katia oversees the vineyards and makes the wines. They were certified organic in 2011 as well. The wine is also made with native yeasts and is unfiltered. These wines are the perfect complement to heavier meat dishes.

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