

WINE News

*Gathering no moss: 2015
Rhônes are rolling in.*



NOVEMBER 21, 2016 FEATURES

- | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| 1 | Top 2015 Value Picks | 5 | Aubaï Mema in the Gard |
| 2 | Lirac and Tavel | 6 | Sunday Wine; Antech Bubbles |
| 3 | Old School; Rising Star | 7 | Organic in Minervois |
| 4 | Special in Condrieu | 8 | Corsican Beauty |

Traversing the Rhône and South of France

By Keith Mabry

Back in April, I spent just over two weeks traveling from Arbois in the Jura region to Bugey, swinging through the Rhône Valley, then passing through the Languedoc before finishing in Cahors. All told, I covered over 1,200 kilometers on this trip. My primary goal was to check in with each of the producers whose wines we import in the categories we call Rhône and French Regional. Through all these visits, one recurring theme kept coming up: 2015. Whether it was finished wines in bottle or tank samples, everyone was excited about this vintage. You've likely already read about the greatness in 2015

Bordeaux and Burgundy, but trust me, you will not be disappointed by any 2015s coming from the Rhône, the Jura, the Languedoc-Roussillon or anywhere else in France for that matter. In this newsletter we cover our recent visits with our producers in the Rhône, Limoux, Corbières and Minervois, plus a few outlier regions like Gard and Corsica! Some are familiar faces, and we'll look at their new releases (not all 2015 but delicious wines nonetheless). And we'll meet a few new producers along the way. Let's start with some of these must-try wines from the gorgeous 2015 vintage!

The 2015s Rule the Roost

2015 Chante Cigale l'Apostrophe (\$12.99)

Chante Cigale makes this delicious, rich red from a small vineyard just outside the Côtes du Rhône appellation. All the hallmarks of the Rhône are present, with flavors of red raspberries, black cherries and loads of tobacco and Asian spices. This drinks like a baby Châteauneuf, which is no surprise since these guys are one of our favorite Châteauneuf-du-Pape producers.



2015 Domaine Condamine l'Eveque "La Dent" Picpoul de Pinet (\$11.99)

It's rare to find estate-bottled wines in Picpoul de Pinet, so we are fortunate to have this direct relationship with one of the greats in the region. Growers since the seventeenth century, the Bascou family makes this beautiful, crisp white that reflects the limestone terroir and the Mediterranean a mile to the south. This is the perfect aperitif and is equally stunning with oysters.



2015 Caveau de Rasteau "Dame Victoria" Rasteau (\$13.99)

The "Dame" comes from the local co-op in the village of Rasteau. We have been working with this winery for years and it never disappoints, while offering great cost-to-quality value. The wine is loaded with silky black and blue fruit, with flavors of dried blueberry and Chambord liqueur, plus notes of cinnamon and allspice.



Understanding Lirac and Tavel—The Rhône’s Unsung Heroes

While the appellations of Lirac and Tavel lie right next to each other, they couldn’t be more different. Lirac is like the fraternal twin of Châteauneuf-du-Pape, sitting on the western side of the Rhône river just opposite that famous region. As an appellation, it was awarded its status in 1947, but as a region its history goes back two thousand years. It was the primary port where “Côtes du Rhône” wines departed to Rome and then to Paris, Holland, England or whomever was in charge at the time or wherever there was demand. Lirac produces primarily red wines, but there are also some exceptional whites and rosés. Funny thing, most of these wines are not labeled under the “Lirac” appellation name—many did and some still use the generic Côtes du Rhône appellation label because it is more internationally famous. That is, of course, until now...

Tavel is the region known best as the “king of the rosé,” a title that has maybe wavered a little internationally with the rise of Provençal rosés. Though red and white are made in the region, only rosé can carry the appellation name of Tavel. The appellation was awarded in 1936, the same year as Châteauneuf-du-Pape, but historically rosé production dates back centuries. It was one of the favorite wines of King Philippe le Bel as well as many of the Avignon popes. The proximate closeness of these regions and the strictness by which Tavel is produced has led many producers to make wines in both appellations.

Back in Lirac, we continue to work with Château de Montfaucon vigneron Rodolphe de Pins—Rudi for short. Our relationship goes back more than a decade. For most of those years, Rudi labeled the wines as Côtes du Rhône, but a few years ago he changed his most popular cuvée, the Baron Louis, to the Lirac appellation. It seemed the right thing to do, since he had taken a leading role in the appellation’s consortium. We recently received the new wines from Rudi: he has added a new Lirac wine to the portfolio, and for the first time, changed his lovely Comtesse Madeleine Blanc from Côtes du Rhône to Lirac as of the 2015 vintage.

Speaking of which, the **2015 Château de Montfaucon “Comtesse Madeleine” Lirac Blanc (\$16.99)** is exceptional drinking, with its beautiful stone fruit flavors of nectarine and peach. The Madeleine has a succulent weight and mouthfeel that keeps pulling you back for another sip. This is a sultry white that is incredibly engaging and is one of the best Rhône whites in the store right now. 90 points WS. The **2014 Château de Montfaucon Lirac (\$14.99)** is the second vintage of this wine. It is a plush vibrant red loaded with brambly, dark berry fruit, plenty of black pepper spice and a ripe, round finish. It reminds me a little of a baby Pegau.



My benchmark for Lirac has always been the Baron Louis. The **2013 Château de Montfaucon “Baron Louis” Lirac (\$19.99)** is a real rocker from Montfaucon. Though 2013 was a tricky vintage where Grenache yields were incredibly low, Rudi found the



Cave de Tavel.

workaround, adding great spice and complexity to this wine this year with the addition of more Syrah, Cinsault and company. Full of deep, rich, briary red fruit, cinnamon and allspice notes, with an ample finish, this is where I like my Rhône wines to sit. It is fresh, inviting and full of character. 90 points WS.

Moving into Tavel, we visited the cave cooperative, Cave de Tavel. We have been bringing in their low-cost, high-quality Tavel for years now, and the **2015 Cave de Tavel “Lauzeraies” Tavel (\$11.99)** is the best price we have had on this in years, as is the quality. The Cave is the largest producer in the region, but they have stringent guidelines for submitting fruit to the winery. All the producers are sustainable, at the very least, but most are certified organic. There are three prominent soil types in the region: galets roulés (large river stones), sand and lauzes (a special limestone soil in the region). The Lauzeraies is all from the lauzes soil. It is a fleshy, ripe rosé, with aromas that permeate the glass. It is succulent and juicy with ripe red fruit, zesty acidity and a full-bodied texture. This is cold weather rosé, for sure. 90 points RP.



We recently added Domaine des Carabiniers to our lineup. They produce wines from both appellations. A family-run operation, they are Demeter certified Biodynamic. Their holistic approach is conveyed by the shocking **2015 Domaine des Carabiniers “Lunar Apogé” Tavel Rosé (\$19.99)**. It is the pinnacle of Tavel production, with real depth and length. I imagine this is what made the wines of Tavel favorites of popes and kings past. Full-bodied, with rich red fruit, perfectly balanced, this walks the tightrope between rosé and red. Their **2014 Domaine des Carabiniers “Lunar Apogé” Lirac (\$19.99)** is another great entry point into the psyche of this winery. Deep and rich black fruit is followed by pipe tobacco and savory spices. It is long on the finish and a happy new addition to our set.



Domaine de la Jaufrette: An Old-School Classicist

When first tasting the wines of **Domaine de la Jaufrette**, the name **López de Heredia** sprang to mind. That famous Rioja producer is known for its late-release and complex reds that are subtle, old school and long lived. Jaufrette, to my mind, is the Rhône equivalent. Jaufrette is run by Frédéric Chastan, the third generation winemaker to oversee this project.



Vigneron Frédéric Chastan.

The winery sits just outside the Châteauneuf-du-Pape appellation but has holdings in Vacqueyras, Gigondas and Côtes du Rhône. All the grapes are hand harvested and hand sorted, and the reds are fermented in concrete tanks. These are meaty, powerful reds that benefit from cellaring, but the beauty here is the fact that Jaufrette does a lot of the aging for you. Where most producers are releasing

their 2014s and 2015s, we encouraged them to release their '09s and '10s. The **2010 Domaine de la Jaufrette Côtes du Rhône (\$19.99)** is out-of-the-gate great and from a terrific vintage. It is a true southern Rhône but reminiscent of the wines made a couple of decades ago. It has black fruit flavors, earth notes, grilled rosemary, tobacco leaf and peppery spices on the palate. Give it a half hour in a decanter and the wine expands even further. This is serious stuff and it's one of the most serious Côtes du Rhône's right now.

The **2009 Domaine de la Jaufrette Gigondas (\$39.99)** is probably still my favorite wine to drink right now. It has a nose of deep roasted cherry with fresh tilled earth and roasted cocoa nibs. There is a lot to like here, with a supple texture and generous palate. It is still old school in a sense—I refer back to my Lopez/Rioja analogy. This is persistent on the palate and the wine just keeps giving. I spent a few days with a bottle, and even at the end, the wine just kept giving more. My highest recommendation! Both wines are great to drink now but capable of even longer aging. While at the winery, I tasted some of the 1995s and they were as fresh as the day is long, but perfectly integrated.



Nicolas Haeni: The Rising Star of Séguret

Domaine de Cabasse was a highly regarded producer making wines from the Rhône villages of Sablet, Gigondas and Séguret.

The family decided to sell their property in 2012 but there was one lone family member who didn't want to see it go. Scraping together enough money, Nicolas Haeni was able to buy just the Séguret vineyard and make that the focus of his new project, "Malmont." This remarkable site is very difficult to farm—the vineyard itself is named Malmont, meaning "bad mountain."

When it was developed as a site under Cabasse's ownership, they used a very special Spanish method for terracing the vineyard, a practice more common in Priorat. These four hectares are planted to a mix of Grenache and Syrah and a small amount of Roussanne. Under his own label, Nicolas' first vintage was 2013, and we are extremely pleased to exclusively have his wines in California. The **2015 Domaine Viticole "Malmont" Côtes du Rhône Villages Séguret Rosé (\$16.99)** is a blend of 75% Grenache and 25% Syrah with about 70% of the juice direct-pressed and the remaining saignée (free run). It is a richer-styled rosé that is packed with strawberry flavors and subtle minerality. At once crisp with acidity



and full bodied, this is one of the most serious rosés from the Rhône Valley I have tasted. It is unusual to see a Villages-Séguret rosé, but such is the purity that this site offers. Nicolas doesn't want to declassify any of the fruit or supplement it with fruit from other villages. The **2014 Domaine Viticole "Malmont" Côtes du Rhône-Villages Séguret (\$24.99)** is the true rock star. A captivating red made of 58% Grenache and 42% Syrah, it is both deep and polished with its fruit flavors of black raspberries, currants and roasted dates. The savory notes of oolong tea, hibiscus and garrigue round out the flavors. Long on the finish, this is a great new find from one of the region's rising stars! 90 points WS.



Keith Mabry with vigneron Nicolas Haeni.



Clos de la Bonnette overlooking the Rhône River in the distance.

Condrieu: Clos de la Bonnette

When I first saw the breathtaking landscape and vineyards of Clos de la Bonnette, I knew we were going to work with this producer.

I hadn't even tasted the wines, but I could see that something special was going on here, and I had a strong feeling that what was inside the bottle would match what I saw.

In the spring of this year, I visited many of our existing Direct Import producers in the Rhône Valley, while meeting a few new ones along the way. One such new producer is Domaine Clos de la Bonnette in the appellation of

Condrieu. Condrieu is located just to the south of Côte-Rôtie in the northern part of the Rhône Valley. It is a particularly small region that solely produces Viognier. But not just any Viognier. Simply put, these are the best in the world, and Condrieu is the benchmark by which all other Viognier is measured. Located on the west side of the Rhône River, most of the appellation's 160-plus hectares of vineyards are grown

on the steep granite hillsides for which much of the northern Rhône region has become famous. The hillsides are terraced, meaning the earth is held back by stacked stone walls, many of which were built when the Romans occupied the region. Many of these original walls still exist today.



Keith Mabry with Isabelle Guiller and Henri Montabonnet.

Domaine Clos de la Bonnette was purchased in 1992 by wife and husband team, Isabelle Guiller and Henri Montabonnet. Isabelle had her eye on this abandoned vineyard site for many years before they moved forward. The main reason that the site remained unoccupied was because the hillsides were in complete disarray, as many of the stone retaining walls had collapsed over the decades due to neglect. Restoring this property could only be done as a labor of love, not a commercial venture. Henri did most of the restoration himself, rebuilding the walls by hand. This work is usually handled by specialists, but Henri is quite the tinkerer and taught himself how to do it. While he worked on rebuilding the walls, Isabelle took on the task of cultivating the indigenous flora around the property, making it more biodiverse. After years of restoration, the vines were finally replanted in 1999.

Because of the location of the vineyard, Henri and Isabelle have no direct contact with their neighbors. They are surrounded by forest, a creek and another hillside of ruins. This natural barrier allows them to more easily produce organically, a process by which they have farmed since they began replanting. It took another decade, but they finally now have 1.5 hectares under vine. That's just over three acres. The quality of the fruit is so high that Marcel Guigal wanted to purchase their grapes and put them under contract. Thankfully, they politely declined.

When we sat down to taste, we started with the two Condrieus they produce. Both were 2014s put in bottle in the fall of 2015. The **2014 Clos de la Bonnette "Roches d'Arbuel" Condrieu (\$54.99)** is the core wine for the estate. Its élevage is mostly stainless steel, with about one-third in barrel. The wine showed gorgeous white flower, honeysuckle, peach and nectarine notes, with a light dusting of minerality and a fine thread of acidity, and just a touch of the barrel for spice.

The **2014 Clos de la Bonnette "Légende Bonnetta" Condrieu (\$59.99)** is the more limited production. It has a richer texture, a fuller body and the consummate long finish. When Condrieu gets this full-bodied, it often picks up too much alcohol and astringency. Not here. This was supple all the way through. My visit in the vineyards was all too short, but I left knowing that I had met wonderful people who have the drive and desire to produce something truly special and to leave a legacy that will be remembered until the next Henri has to rebuild those stone walls.



Drink, Dance, Live, Repeat: Aubai Mema

Mark Haynes may be many things: entrepreneur, winemaker, tango dancer; but there is one thing that he is not—conventional. I first met Mark in New York at a trade fair and we immediately hit it off. I loved his wines, so this meeting led to a visit to his winery on the April buying trip.

Mark is a spirited man who came to winemaking late in life when he realized that so many producers in the Gard region were turning their backs on winemaking and farming. The region is in the south of France about 30 minutes from Nimes. It was his summer home in his childhood and he always had a fondness for it. Looking for a new challenge in his life, he fled to the village of Aubais and began investigating. After a few years of research—and, he jokes, against his better judgment—he began purchasing vineyard land in what is known as the Liverna Valley.

Aubai Mema is the original name of the village of Aubais where the winery is located. Mark began organic farming when he purchased his first vineyards in 2002. The winery is housed in the defunct cooperative facility that he purchased in 2006 and began renovating. Aubai Mema has 10 hectares of vineyards and produces about 4,000-plus cases of wine annually, but the cooperative actually had the capacity to make upwards of 5,000,000 bottles annually before it closed. Many of the old concrete tanks of the cooperative were so large that Mark cut them open and converted them into barrel and bottle storage for top cuvées. A large chunk of the building was turned into a dance studio where Mark hosts his weekly *milongas* or “Argentine tango dances.” It turns out that Mark is as equally obsessed with tango as he is with winemaking.

The 2014 **Domaine Aubai Mema “Albion” Gard Blanc (\$12.99)** is a blend of 50% Chardonnay and 50% Viognier. A small portion of the Chardonnay is aged in new oak barrels. This is a rocking, concentrated white with apple, roasted pear and citrus notes. A bit of orange peel and a stony finish round it out. The beauty of this wine is the harmonious marriage of these two distinct varieties where neither dominates the other. They become almost something new unto themselves.

The workhorse red is the 2013 **Domaine Aubai Mema “Liverna” Gard Rouge (\$10.99)**, which in most vintages is a blend of Grenache



Proprietor Mark Haynes.

and Cabernet Sauvignon. It's a seemingly unusual blend—but in the Gard, you can kind of do whatever you want. This really works well here, with currant and pipe tobacco notes. The Grenache adds an element of juicy red fruit that rounds out the flavors of the wine. This makes for great everyday drinking.

One of my favorite cuvées from the winery has to be the 2012 **Domaine Aubai Mema Carignan “L’Insoumise” Vin de France (\$13.99)**. The word translates to “rebel” or “indomitable one,” and when one “knows” Carignan as a grape variety it all begins to make sense. This is a tricky grape, often changing its yields dramatically from year to year. The vines don't even really start producing great fruit until they turn 50 years of age. It's a love-hate relationship for many winemakers, but when it's great, it can be really great. The 2012 is full of deep purple fruit, supple tannins and light floral tones making it pure pleasure in a glass.

The flagship wine is the 2013 **Domaine Aubai Mema Grenache Vieilles Vignes “Lunatico” Gard Rouge (\$21.99)**. It is a lush and velvety Grenache made from old-vine fruit from a north-facing vineyard that Mark farms biodynamically. Lunatico in French is a person who is changeable or ruled by the phases of the moon. In Spanish and English we think of someone who is lunatico as crazy. It's almost too on point when you think of Mark's story and his journey into wine. He will admit you have to be lunatico to be in the wine business, both changeable and a little crazy. A great takeaway from my experience with Mark and his outstanding winery is that you may have to be a little crazy to immerse yourself this deeply in the life experience. But with all the joy and pleasure that his hard work brings, from winemaking to dancing to living life to its fullest, you have to be a little Lunatico not to.



Evening milonga at the winery.



Clos de l'Anhel: Sunday Wine

Our dear friend and vigneron **Sophie Guiraudon** is always such a **delight to visit**. Her vineyards are in one of the higher altitude parts of Corbières. She adores Carignan as a grape variety and has become one of its great champions in the region. She also farms delicious Grenache, Syrah and a tiny amount of Mourvèdre. We call her the one-woman wrecking crew, as she farms, performs all of her organic treatments and makes the wines all by herself. She has such spirit and an exceptional eye for quality, she has become a distinctive voice in the region. We work primarily with three of her wines: Lolo de l'Anhel, Les Terrassettes and Les Dimanches. Each wine, in a sense, represents the way one should approach drinking them during a typical work week.

When it's Tuesday and you want a glass of wine to go with the roast chicken you picked up at the market or maybe a little pizza you just ordered in for the evening, the Lolo is that perfect weekday wine. "Lolo" is the expression mothers use when they tell their children to drink their milk. "Drink your Lolo, so that you can grow up big and strong," they say. The **2014 Clos de l'Anhel "Lolo de l'Anhel" Corbières (\$12.99)** is composed of 81% Carignan, 10% Syrah, 7% Grenache and 2% Mourvèdre. This Carignan-based wine is loaded with perfumed blue fruit flavors and purple flower notes. Medium-bodied on the palate and with silky tannins, this is pure deliciousness in a glass, and like milk, everyone should have a little "Lolo" to go with that weeknight meal to help keep up their strength.

Maybe it's a rough Wednesday or winding-down Friday and you need something a little more serious on the table. The Les Terrassettes is your go-to wine to fulfill that need. The **2014 Clos de l'Anhel "Les Terrassettes" Corbières (750ml \$16.99; 1.5L \$34.99)** is a blend of 65% Carignan, 25% Syrah, 6% Grenache and 4% Mourvèdre.



Sophie Guiraudon amid her old-vine Carignan.

The wine is lively with notes of black raspberry, roasted plum, allspice and garrigue. It is medium-full, fresh and expressive. It captures what can be done in the region with a fine hand behind the winemaking. This is a wine built to coast you into the weekend.

Finally, we have your Sunday wine, the Les Dimanches, which literally means "Sundays" in French. Sophie calls this her "occasion" wine and it is a serious wine indeed. The vines for the "Dimanches" are planted on gravelly clay-limestone soils. The cépage for the **2014 Clos de l'Anhel "Les Dimanches" Corbières (750ml \$22.99; 1.5L \$46.99)** is 60% Carignan (80-year-old vines), 30% Syrah and 10% Grenache. It is full-bodied, loaded with black fruit and beautiful minerality. Never heavy-handed with the fruit, there is plenty of nuance and complexity. It is even better with a few years of bottle age. Dimanches is the perfect fit for your Sunday gatherings where you can relax and let the wine envelop you. So whatever day of the week it is, and for pretty much any food occasion, look to Clos de l'Anhel to help you fulfill your week's wine needs.

Antech Bubbles Over

The new Antech bubbly have arrived for the holiday season and the 2014s are some of the best yet.

The Antech "Brut Nature" **Blanquette de Limoux (\$12.99)** doesn't carry a vintage date, but this release is all 2014 fruit. A Mauzac-dominated blend, it is crisp and crunchy with flavors of green apples and lemon curd. With no added dosage after disgorgement it is dry, dry, dry. This is the perfect aperitif sparkling wine.

The **2014 Antech "Cuvée Eugenie" Cremant de Limoux (\$13.99)** is a blend of 50% Chardonnay, 40% Chenin Blanc and 10% Mauzac. It is aged for 15 months on the lees and has wonderful toasted notes of caramelized pear and light brioche. It is so friendly and Champagne-like, you'll be the hit of every party this season.



The **2014 Antech "Emotion" Cremant de Limoux Brut Rosé (\$14.99)** is my own personal workhorse bubbly. I'm a sucker for rosé and this delivers on all fronts. With plenty of cherry and Arkansas black apple flavor, it is more structured and full-bodied. It is easily their best rosé to date.



Minervois: Saint Jacques d'Albas and Domaine La Tour Boisée

Minervois is rapidly becoming one of the more prestigious sub-appellations of the Languedoc. The region sits just to the east of the walled city of Carcassonne and in the shadow of the Montagne Noire (Black Mountains). It is a very warm region where Grenache and Syrah thrive but are forced to dig deep into the soil in their pursuit of water. Both of our producers are based in the village of Laure-Minervois.

Domaine La Tour Boisée is certified organic and their winery is in the heart of the village. Named for the tower at the center of the property, they make incredible values that far surpass their humble price point. The estate dates back to 1826 and is still owned and operated by the same family line. They are all about preserving the heritage of the winery and the surrounding village. The **2015 Tour Boisée Minervois (\$9.99)** is a 50-50 blend of Grenache and Syrah. The wine is highly representative of the great 2015 vintage, having copious fruit flavors and redolent with garrigue and spices. It is pure, ripe and round and utterly delicious. For fans of something a little different, the **2015 Tour Boisée Plantation 1905 (\$11.99)** is an extraordinarily fun find. It is created from one of the oldest vineyards in the village. This small parcel itself is an historic monument made up of 23 different grape varieties. These grapes include some of the classics like Grenache, Carignan, Alicante Bouschet and Cinsault, but there are some heirloom grapes that are barely even cultivated anymore, including the likes of Aspiran, Morrastel Bouschet and Cardinal. Some of the plants can't even be identified. The true epitome of field blending, all grapes are co-harvested and co-fermented together. The wine is classically spicy, with bright red and black fruit flavors of plum, cherry and blackberry. It has lovely sandalwood and violet notes that emerge from the glass. The 1905, in one simple glass, captures the entire history of this producer and village.

In the hills above Laure-Minervois lies Château Saint Jacques d'Albas. In his younger days, vigneron Graham Nutter was obsessed with wines. After a long history in finance he decided to recycle himself into a maker of wines, not just drinking them. When he began the quest for a vineyard he came across a rundown property that had been selling its crop to the local co-op. He saw the potential in the vineyards and purchased it in 2001. Ten years of restoration began, rebuilding the old château on the property turning it into a beautiful residence and boutique hotel. He even restored the ancient chapel in the middle of one of the vineyards, which was a site where many of the crusaders prayed when they were forcing out the Cathars who had once occupied the region. Surrounded by forests, the property is naturally shielded from its neighbors, making it a perfect site for organic cultivation. Graham brought in a team to create some of the most prestigious wines in the region.



Château Saint Jacques d'Albas.



It may be very easy to overlook whites in Minervois, as they only make up about 4% of production, but you should still check out the **2015 Château Saint Jacques d'Albas "Domaine d'Albas" Coteaux de Peyriac Blanc (\$9.99)**. It is a wonderful quaffer composed of 45% Vermentino, 45% Viognier and 10% Roussanne. Loaded with orchard fruit flavors and aromas, it is one of the most inviting and pleasurable whites under \$20 in our stores.

The **2013 Château Saint Jacques d'Albas "Le Château d'Albas" Minervois (\$14.99)** is the true workhorse of the winery. The wine is 60% Syrah and 40% Grenache and sees about 12 months in barrel, a small percentage new. Classic Minervois flavors of roasted plum, blackberry, garrigue and earth are all wrapped up in this generous package with supple tannins and balancing acidity.

The tête de cuvée is the **2010 Château Saint Jacques d'Albas "La Chapelle d'Albas" Minervois (\$24.99)**. Held back at the winery until it is ready to drink, this almost 100% Syrah is one of the best of the region. Denser and richer, this has an almost Hermitage quality with its toasted blackcurrant coulis, smoked meatiness, cigar box aromas and chocolaty finish. It is another long-on-the-palate wine that deserves a short term presence in any cellar.

So there you have it, a brief tour of Minervois with two great new producers that represent the best that this region has to offer.





The town of Bastia, Corsica.

Corsica: The Island of Beauty

Last year I enjoyed the distinct privilege of taking a mini wine tour through Corsica. The island itself is a marvel, rising up out of the Mediterranean with its enormous mountain range, and it is also a haven of incredible food culture and undiscovered winemaking talent. We have been fortunate enough to make contact with two wineries there, and have begun to bring their wines into our stores through our Direct Import program.

The first is Domaine Petroni, an estate that lies on the eastern shore of Corsica near Lake Diane, one of the great sources for oysters and mussels on the island. Run by the Ramazotti brothers, the vineyards are planted on sandy and clay soils overlooking the Mediterranean. Their rosé was one of our great success stories this year, but the white and red have made great strides as well.

The **2015 Domaine Petroni Corse Blanc (\$13.99)** is 100% Vermentinu (aka Vermentino). Our first batch sold out quickly and this is poised to do the same. It is a beautiful wine with aromas of lemon rind, white flowers and a spicy complexity that rises from the glass. It is reminiscent of some of the great Vermentino wines coming from Italy's coastline.

The **2014 Domaine Petroni Corse Rouge (\$13.99)** is a blend of 50% Niellucciu (a descendent or kissing cousin of Sangiovese), 35% Syrah and 15% Grenache. The grapes are fermented in concrete tanks and aged about 12 months in stainless steel to preserve the fresh, fruit-driven aspects of the wine. It's a hypothetical match-up of Chianti meets Côtes du Rhône.

Our newest producer is Domaine Santamaria. Run by Jean-Louis and Thomas Santamaria, this certified organic producer is based in the Patrimonio region, located on the northern end of the island. They specialize in Niellucciu, Vermentinu and Muscat.

The **2015 Domaine Santamaria Patrimonio Blanc (\$21.99)** is another 100% Vermentinu planted on clay-limestone soils. This soil type provides a more unctuous richness and texture in the wine while maintaining great tone and acidity. It is pure, with ripe pear and white flower notes.

The **2015 Domaine Santamaria Patrimonio Rosé (\$24.99)** is wild with ripe strawberry and peach fruit. Made from 100% Niellucciu, this is full-bodied rosé with a supple texture. It is long on the palate and has great minerality. This is a good short-term cellaring rosé, much like the great Bandol rosés or Tavel to the north.

The **2011 Domaine Santamaria Patrimonio Rouge (\$24.99)** goes down as one of my favorite reds under \$50 for the year. At half that price, it is simply a must-buy. Made from 100% Niellucciu, this wine has so much weight, spice and brambly black fruit. It has the fruit of a Brunello but the texture of a Nebbiolo. It is sublime.

Many people ask me to describe Corsican wine in general. I like to say it's "like Italian flavors surrounded by French sensibilities." I think these two great producers are perfect examples proving that point.



K&L REDWOOD CITY

3005 El Camino Real, Redwood City, CA 94061
P (650) 364-8544 **F** (650) 364-4687
HOURS Mon-Fri 10-7, Sat 9-7, Sun 10-6
LOCKERS Mon-Sat 10-6, Sun 11-5

KLWINES.COM

Toll Free (877) KLWINES (877) 559-4637
Email: Wines@KLWines.com

K&L HOLLYWOOD

1400 Vine Street, Hollywood, CA 90028
P (323) 464-WINE (9463) **F** (323) 836-0853
HOURS Mon-Thurs 11-8, Fri-Sat 10-8, Sun 11-6

K&L EVENTS & TASTINGS

We host regular evening and Saturday tastings at each K&L store as well as many special events throughout the year. For the complete calendar go to KLWines.com/Local-Events.

K&L SAN FRANCISCO

855 Harrison Street, San Francisco, CA 94107
P (415) 896-1734 **F** (415) 896-1739
HOURS Mon-Fri 10-7, Sat 9-6, Sun 11-6

We accept American Express, Discover, Visa, Mastercard and PayPal.

For Order Inquiries, Shipping Information, Local Events, Policies and Up-to-the-Minute Inventory, visit KLWines.com

FOLLOW OUR BLOGS UNCORKED AND SPIRITS JOURNAL FOR THE LATEST UPDATES FROM K&L STAFF