

Languedoc-Roussillon, fizz and whites 2020

JancisRobinson.com by Tamlyn Currin 16 July 2020



The first part of a massive report on current wines from the Languedoc and Roussillon: over 180 white and sparkling wines. Reds will follow and rosés will be included in a special tasting article devoted to pink wines from around the world.

The gorgeous sketch above is by David Hawson, who did the illustrations for Prue Leith's cookbook, *Prue: My All-time Favourite Recipes*, and her range of greeting cards. Inspired by a tasting note for their [2016 Rives-Blanques Occitania Mauzac from Limoux](#), in which Jancis provocatively described the wine as 'local but civilised', Caryl Panman asked David to turn the tasting note into a picture. This, therefore, is Mauzac, local but thankfully quite civilised.

What struck me more than anything else about these wines is how many of them were organic-certified, Haute Valeur Environnementale-certified, or grown using organic practices in the vineyard. A total of 91 in the whites and fizz alone. Not only that, but out of more than 150 boxes of samples delivered to me (for reds, whites and pinks), less than 20 came in polystyrene or plastic sleeves. Every other box contained nothing but completely recyclable cardboard – and there were only two breakages.

The other encouraging thing was seeing how few unnecessarily heavy bottles there were, just over 10%. The red wines performed less well in the bottle-weight department and to be fair this is a sustainability marker that could easily be reduced to 0% without risk to wine quality or sales, but if I'd done a Spanish tasting of this scale, it would be a much weightier issue (excuse the pun).

Overall, Languedoc-Roussillon as a region must be one of the global leaders in sustainability and commitment to looking after the environment, light years ahead of most other wine regions in the world. Sure, the weather might be on its side, but the producers here still have to deal with their share of mildew and rot, pests and disease. The region just seems to have a notable concentration of producers with an eye on the future health of the planet.

It's also a place of innovation and close collaboration. I've been struck by the team spirit and outstanding quality I see coming from groups such as [Vinifilles](#) and [Outsiders](#) (I got to meet up with them in my [first live Zoom tasting](#) in early May, which was a little terrifying – I'm not one for the camera).

The other exciting thing is to see how more and more producers are moving away from international varieties, especially in their whites, and making beautiful wines from Marsanne, Roussanne, Bourboulenc, Clairette, Grenache Blanc, Maccabeu, Picquepoul Blanc and Vermentino/Rolle. Even Terret Blanc is being made as a varietal wine. It's encouraging to see fewer boring, placeless Sauvignon Blancs and Chardonnays. The natural wines I tasted, just a couple, were excellent.

On the topics of grape varieties and sustainability, there is one particular indigenous grape variety that is in danger. It is the 'local but civilised' Mauzac, illustrated in human form at the top of this article. Françoise Antech wrote to me about her brand-new range, M le Mauzac (reviewed below), which she describes as 'my fight to save the Mauzac!!', adding that 'If we do nothing I'm afraid Mauzac will disappear from Limoux within 20 years'. Caryl Panman of Rives-Blanques adds that 'we actually spent much of lock-down planting 4,000 new vines cloned from the Mauzac Conservatory's original, authentic stock ... partly for climate-change reasons, partly to preserve a true 'liquid link' (as Brigitte of Cébène so memorably put it in the Outsider Zoom) to the true origins of people and place. If we don't defend it, it will surely disappear.' This would be one more biodiversity loss on the planet, thanks to human action. Mauzac needs you! Look below for some delicious ways to be a superhero with Blanquettes from Antech and Ch Rives-Blanques.

The 184 wines below are grouped by style/colour and then in alphabetical order by producer (sur)name, but you can re-order them by score, appellation or vintage if you wish. Many of them are available from [Languedoc Wineshop](#), which ships all over Europe, including the UK, and will ship cases of 12 free if you spend more than €10 per bottle.

Outsiders Tasting Zoom Video w Tamlyn Currin
<https://youtu.be/Tr2qpbKtZvs>

Clos du Gravillas, À Fleur de Peau 2018 Vin de France

Certified organic but the Bojanowskis also use some biodynamic preparations. 100% Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains. Destemmed, 15 days of skin contact, spontaneous fermentation. Fermented in stainless steel but 20% goes into barrel after a week on skins. Eight months in steel, 50-litre barrel and 10-hl ceramic egg. Went through malolactic. Total SO₂ 39 mg/l – just after malo and at bottling. Free SO₂ 10 mg/l. TA 3 g/l, pH 3.52.

Golden colour. It is very difficult (impossible ?!) to *not* say 'wow!' out loud when first smelling this wine. It smells of saffron and crema catalana, baked pear in spiced syrup, golden sultanas and sage. An extraordinarily complex and hugely exciting nose. And then, just as stunning on the palate. One of those wines I find myself reeling off a list of adjectives and then try to stop myself because no one can really take that all in. It is everything that it is on the nose, but more. Bone dry, but with this reverberating sweetness of character and fruit so that you could – *almost* – have it with some desserts or perhaps triple-cream cheese drizzled with honey. It doesn't have the heaviness and tannins of some skin-contact wines, but it has these taffeta-and-spice layers that interleaf pure, singing, golden fruit. This is a thrilling wine. Sommeliers, take note. (TC)

13.5% Drink 2020–2025 €20.60 Languedoc Wineshop (Europe-wide delivery including the UK)
17.5

Clos du Gravillas, Jour de Teuf 2019 Vin de France

Pet-nat from 100% Muscat. Certified organic. Limestone soils. RS 20 g/l. 1,200 bottles produced.

Cloudy gold. If you could cross fresh-pressed apple juice and manzanilla sherry, this would be it! A wine so delightful, so gorgeous, that I laughed out loud when I first tasted it. I was expecting dry, but this is delicately off-dry, dressed in lacy bubbles. Everything about it is gentle – like soft spring sunlight. And yet it is remarkably complex. Pears poached in apple juice with a sprinkle of ground cloves. Sushi ginger and sea salt and fresh white bread. Cinnamon bun. Yes, there is Muscat grapiness, but there is so much more to it than that. I adore this! (TC)

10% Drink 2020–2021 €14 RRP
17

Clos du Gravillas, L'Inattendu 2018 Minervois

Certified organic. Grenache Blanc and Gris plus a bit of Maccabeu, fermented and aged for 12 months on lees in 500-litre barrels.

Smells like clotted cream and grapefruit and the spice of tobacco leaves when they are halfway through curing and they're still soft and limp with a trace of green through the gold. Chewy and on the palate the fruit is the same green-gold of the nose, and there is also a sense of a something not quite finished yet. The oak is still edging out over the fruit rather than into it. Wait for a year. Lots here but it needs more time. (TC)

13.5% Drink 2021–2026
16.5 ++

Clos du Gravillas, Emmenez-moi au Bout du Terret 2017 IGP Pays d'Hérault Côtes du Brian

Certified organic. 100% Terret from vines over 50 years old.

Hay and raw honey and chamomile. And the smell of a dense, not-quite-properly-cooked-through wholemeal sourdough loaf. Dry and dense and herbal and not just a little wild. Salty and eerily fino-like. Real grip. Needs a bowl of green olives and salted marcona almonds! (TC)

13% Drink 2021–2026

16

Clos du Gravillas, Le Languedocien Cépages d'Origine 2018 Languedoc

Certified organic. Blend of Terret and Piquepoul Blanc.

Hazelnuts and hawthorn. Crimped tightly into itself with a fist of sherbet-dabbed-grapefruit acidity. Slightly smoky, with the hazy pistachio-green flavours of fuzzy sage and dried bay leaves. Lemon talc on the finish, along with a slightly bitter nuttiness, like chewing on apricot kernels. Unusual, distinctive, full of story. (TC)

13.5% Drink 2020–2022

16.5

Clos du Gravillas, Retour aux Origines Cépages d'Ici 2019 Vin de France

Certified organic. Terret, Piquepoul Gris, Carignan Blanc.

Wow, this has a very pungent nose! Salt and smoke and limes. Very dramatic. Very structural. It tastes as if it is a sculpture carved from salt and smoke and lime and green stone. Has a mane-tossing fierceness that is like Poseidon's horses riding cold sea-green waves. (TC)

13.5% Drink 2020–2025

17

Clos du Gravillas, Douce Providence 2018 Muscat de St-Jean-de-Minervois

Certified organic vin doux naturel. RS 125 g/l. 50 cl bottle.

What a delight! Tastes like slow-roasted Cotton Candy grapes with a bit of lychee and rose water and then this wonderful sweet-fennel herbiness and sweet, warm spices. Silky texture with just enough weight to make it move with a sensuousness around the mouth, but shot through with freshness and life and energy. I couldn't imagine anything more delicious than a bowl of ripe papaya, fresh chopped mint, a sprinkling of cinnamon, nutmeg and sweet paprika, and a glass of this. Lockdown breakfast? Lunch? Mid-afternoon snack? Who cares. Ravishingly drinkable. (TC)

15% Drink 2020–2023

17