

WINE News

*Under the veil and over the alps:
wines from far-flung France.*



JANUARY 15, 2018 FEATURES

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A Song for the Unsung: French Regional Wines

By Keith Mabry

If you have vacationed in France, you may have visited the Loire and its picturesque castles while tasting marvelous Chenin and Sauvignon Blancs or made a day trip to Champagne on an excursion to escape the bustle of Paris and sip some bubbles. Perhaps you've taken the train down to Provence for a weekend on the Mediterranean coast, drinking Rhône wines and rosés along the way. And of course, the most famous of regions, Bordeaux and Burgundy have become Meccas for enthusiasts of Cabernet, Merlot, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. But there are still a lot of regions that go unsung, from the far-flung reaches of the Jura, with its esoteric winemaking, the pre-Alpine area of Bugey and its mountainous terrain, or the deep Sud Ouest with its obscure appellations of Jurançon,

Madiran and Cahors. These are historic wine-producing areas that only the locals who live there tend to know much about. Over the last few years, however, the wines from these areas have captured the interest of somms, enthusiasts and critics because of their intriguing flavors, rustic charms and food accessibility. So we dedicate a substantial portion of this newsletter to looking at some of these fun new finds. We also make a quick detour in the Rhône to review the new Northern Rhône options from Michel Chapoutier's Ferraton label, which include great values from Crozes-Hermitage, Saint-Joseph and Hermitage. Below are some of our top new arrivals from around these French regions that you may want to check out.

2016 Yves Duport Altesse de Montagnieu

(\$16.99) Swinging back around to Bugey, our favorite producer, Mr. Duport, has released his new Altesse, a wine that captures the crisp crunch of limestone, Alpine air and beautiful pear fruit all in one sip. This is a winter drinker's white with loads of minerals and a refreshing finish. Classic pairings include fondue, raclette or braised veal in cream sauce. This cuts through it all!



2016 Moulin de la Gardette "Petite Gardette"

Gigondas (\$19.99) You may be familiar with proprietor JB Meunier's spectacular Tradition and Ventabren bottlings, but this is our first time getting the Petite. This is a beautiful rendition of Gigondas, featuring some of his younger vine fruit from one of the great modern vintages. Experience this wine from one of the masters of the craft, and all at a very inviting price.



2015 Domaine de la Reserve d'O "Hissez O"

Terrasses du Larzac (\$29.99) The 2015 vintage continues to deliver goodies galore from all over France, and we are excited to have one of the truly great producers from the south in our Direct Import stable. Marie and Fred Chauffrey are Demeter-certified Biodynamic on this Syrah-dominant blend from rocky limestone soils. Deep and inviting but surely worthy of a short stay in everyone's cellar.



Northern Rhône: Spotlight on Ferraton Père et Fils

By Thomas Smith

Ferraton Père et Fils began with only a one-third acre parcel on the hill of Hermitage in 1946. Over the next five decades, Jean Orens Ferraton and his sons grew the domaine into one of the most respected producers in the Northern Rhône, amassing 15 hectares of vineyards from Côte-Rôtie to Cornas. In 1998, father-and-son team Michel and Samuel Ferraton entered into a joint partnership with longtime friend and renowned Rhône producer Michel Chapoutier, who lent his expertise in transitioning all vineyard holdings to organic and Biodynamic farming.

In 2006, Ferraton was altogether purchased by Chapoutier, who continues to operate the winery as an independent entity. Since 2009, the cellars have been renovated with state-of-the-art equipment, and winemaker Damien Brisset has ushered in a revolution in quality. Today, the domaine produces wine from 27 hectares in nearly every appellation of the Northern Rhône, and a handful in the southern appellations. The wines range from great everyday values to rare, incredibly profound cellar pieces. Red labels indicate blends from within a specific appellation, green for estate wines, while silver is reserved for small parcels in the most elite vineyards. Here are some of my favorites:

One of the best deals in the Northern Rhône is the **2014 Ferraton Père et Fils “Les Calendes” Crozes-Hermitage (\$17.99)**. Historically, Crozes-Hermitage has been eschewed in favor of wines from the world-renowned hill of Hermitage from which its name is derived, yet the appellation has seen light years of development in the last decade and has come into its own as a region worth serious consideration. The Les Calendes is a blend from three sites throughout the appellation: Beaumont-Monteaux, Mercuriol and Larnage. It displays stylish black cherry and blackberry notes with medium weight and fine structure.



Looking at Crozes-Hermitage from the Hill of Hermitage.



Looking from on high down the hill of Hermitage to St-Joseph.

Those looking for a step up from the Crozes-Hermitage should try the **2014 Ferraton Père et Fils “La Source” Saint-Joseph (\$19.99)**. Sourced from a mix of terroirs from the western side of the Northern Rhône Valley, cradled in the foothills of the Massif Central, this Syrah showcases the bright and intriguing character of the Northern Rhône’s largest appellation. This is a textbook St-Joseph, lively and energetic with plenty of complex minerality. Think rich blackberry fruit with crushed stones. It shows added power and depth in a way that is great now, but will certainly improve with a few years in the cellar.

The **2015 Ferraton Père et Fils “L’Eglantine” Côte-Rôtie (\$54.99)** shows off a more elegant style. This Côte-Rôtie is sourced from 50-year-old vines planted on steep terraces looking out over the Rhône river. This particular parcel from the north end of the appellation has schist soils, which give structure and depth to the resulting wines. Aged in older barrels to preserve purity of fruit, it offers a gorgeous perfume of violets, spice, graphite notes and red fruit tones above a dark core of black fruit and refined tannin structure. **94-96 RP**

Be sure to check out other offerings from Ferraton, including the **2015 Ferraton Père et Fils “Les Miaux” Hermitage (\$54.99)** and **2015 Ferraton Père et Fils “Lieu Dit Montmain” Côte-Rôtie (\$59.99)** as well as the **2015 Ferraton Père et Fils “Lieu Dit Saint-Joseph” St-Joseph (\$59.99)** on pre-arrival.



Finding the Southwest

By Keith Mabry

The region known as the Sud Ouest (or Southwest) comes off as the unconquered land. Obscure regions like Irouléguay, Jurançon, Bergerac and Fronton dot the landscape and remain some of the least toured regions for visiting. Obscure varietals like Mansois, Petit Manseng and Négrette have only started to gain any kind of recognition outside their respective areas. Two regions, though, have crossed the threshold and are gaining in quality and respect outside of their appellations: Madiran and Cahors.

Of all things, Madiran gained international recognition a few years ago because of a television report on the health benefits of resveratrol, an antioxidant that helps with heart disease. Tannat, the grape highest in this benefit, has one of the thickest skins and lowest juice-to-skin ratios of any variety. This also makes it one of the most tannic grapes out there. Long before antioxidants became a thing, Madiran (and by extension Tannat) was known for its burly wines that required extensive aging before you could even think of drinking them.

That was the case thirty years ago, when Alain Brumont returned to his home region of Madiran to pick up the reins at his family estate, Château Bouscassé. At the time, Brumont was more salesman than winemaker and was a little stuck with a product that couldn't be drunk for decades upon delivery. Deciding to go deeper into winemaking, he began working with a technique called micro-oxygenation.

He was ahead of the curve. This technique essentially blows very small bubbles through the wine, helping the tannins polymerize, creating long and supple chains. The tannins are still present, but not nearly as rough, and the wines become less chewy and more velvety—a new style was born and Madiran became eminently drinkable. Alain has since become one of the great champions of the region and has procured several smaller estates, each with its own distinct character. But his heart lies with Bouscassé and it is his most traditionally styled.

The **2012 Château Bouscassé Madiran (\$19.99)** is dark fruited with notes of graphite minerality and plump currants. It is polished and has the signature structure that is Brumont's calling card. **94 WE**

A property not far from Bouscassé is Peyros. An old estate that dates back to the seventeenth century, it was acquired in 1999 by Jean-Jacques Lesgourgues. Undergoing a revitalization, the property was modernized and winemaking updated. The **2013 Château Peyros Madiran Vieilles Vignes (\$16.99)** is a deep wine, not shy on the structure but containing sweet blackcurrants, graphite minerality and a touch of bittersweet chocolate. **93 WE**



Vineyards of Cahors.

The other key region, which in its heyday was more important than Bordeaux, is Cahors. Known as the “black wine” due to its deep color and intensity, it was exported all over Europe and often sent to other wine regions to help darken and fortify their wines (looking at you, Bordeaux!). It is one of the greatest regions to barely survive the phylloxera (the infamous root louse) epidemic of the late 1800s. Adding to its troubles, the region's signature grape, Malbec, was difficult to graft with non-indigenous rootstock and economic hard times forced a lot of trade and jobs out of the region. It went from thousands of acres at its height to a few hundred at its bottom. It took nearly 100 years but this historic place has one South American country to thank for its resurgence: Argentina. With the Argentinian Malbec boom of the last decade or so, curiosity has drifted back to the original home of this grape. Historic properties have begun to expand their holdings, but slowly and cautiously. The good news is, quality is at an all-time high and the prices couldn't be better.

One of our favorite producers is Château Haut-Monplaisir. Cathy and Daniel Fournié founded this property with an aim toward quality and sustainability. Certified organic, they primarily produce three tiers of wine, each 100% Malbec. The sweet spot is the middle-tier wine, the **2014 Château Haut-Monplaisir “Prestige” Cahors (\$19.99)**. Finely balanced, it is the epitome of black plum, lead pencil and tobacco spice. Voluptuous and showing real poise, this really lingers on the palate. **93 WE**

The Sud Ouest is an area that is famous for its pâtes, sausage and duck confit. There is little else that pairs so perfectly with these wines than the lusty charcuteries and meats of the region.





In the cellar of Dugois.

Jurassic Spark

By John Majeski

Getting a good grasp on the distinctive, rather eccentric wines of the tiny Jura appellation of France, about an hour's drive east from Burgundy, can be challenging but also deeply satisfying. The vineyards are planted on a fragmentation of slopes and marl and limestone-laden soils that when mapped out best resemble a badly chewed rawhide toy! But within those higgledy-piggledy valleys are to be found some of the most ancient and intriguing grape varieties in France—Trousseau, Poulsard (or Ploussard) and notably to the Jura, Savagnin, a lusty white grape that, through an affair with an obscure and likely extinct paramour variety, managed to produce both Chenin Blanc and Sauvignon Blanc, and can claim the proud grandparentage of Cabernet Sauvignon. Quite an illustrious family tree—er, vine. The Jura of course

lends its name to the Jurassic period as well, but the only “dinosaurs” found there are downsized, i.e., the various flocks of birds that hover over the verdant fields and vines.

Creating fine wines on the steeper slopes of the Jura demands both skill and patience, as soil erosion can be a problem, and the varied microclimates often lend themselves to very late harvests to ensure fully ripe fruit. Philippe Dugois, the current winemaker at Domaine Dugois, oversees the vineyards in Arbois that his parents, Daniel and Monique, planted over forty years ago, and is deeply committed to maintaining biodiversity and eco-sound practices.



Certainly the one wine that evokes the unfettered heart of the region, the **2010 Domaine Dugois Vin Jaune Arbois (620ml \$39.99)** reveals its seductive nature over time, having spent over six years in old barriques under a thin layer of yeast, or voile, a maturing regimen similar to sherry, which allows for generous oxidation, slow evaporation and the development of intense, complex flavors of ginger, walnut, curry powder and apricot, with a salty tang. Often served with the local Comté cheese, this famous “yellow wine” will also pair well with mushroom risottos. And the real beauty of a Vin Jaune? It can age for many decades, if desired.

Less intense but just as enticing, the **2013 Domaine Dugois Savagnin Arbois Blanc Sous Voile (\$24.99)** exhibits lively oxidative aromas and provocative flavors of green walnut, hazelnut, stone fruit and minerals, imbued with a spine of crisp acidity. Pair with a chicken curry or Moroccan dish for an exotic dinner. **92 WE**

Fashioned from the native thin-skinned black grape, the **2016 Domaine Dugois Ploussard Arbois Rouge (\$17.99)** is a charmer of a wine, pretty and ruby-hued with delicately spicy aromas and flavors of cherries and red plums. Delicious with charcuterie and Morbier cheese.

And finally, the **2013 Domaine Dugois Trousseau “En Grevellière” Arbois Rouge (\$19.99)** is a lovely red wine with immense personality that will captivate those who relish Morello cherry and wild strawberry fruit with a touch of earth and game on the rich, expressive finish. Great with a dish of grilled sausages and roasted red potatoes. Jura turn now...



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