

## 8. South of France

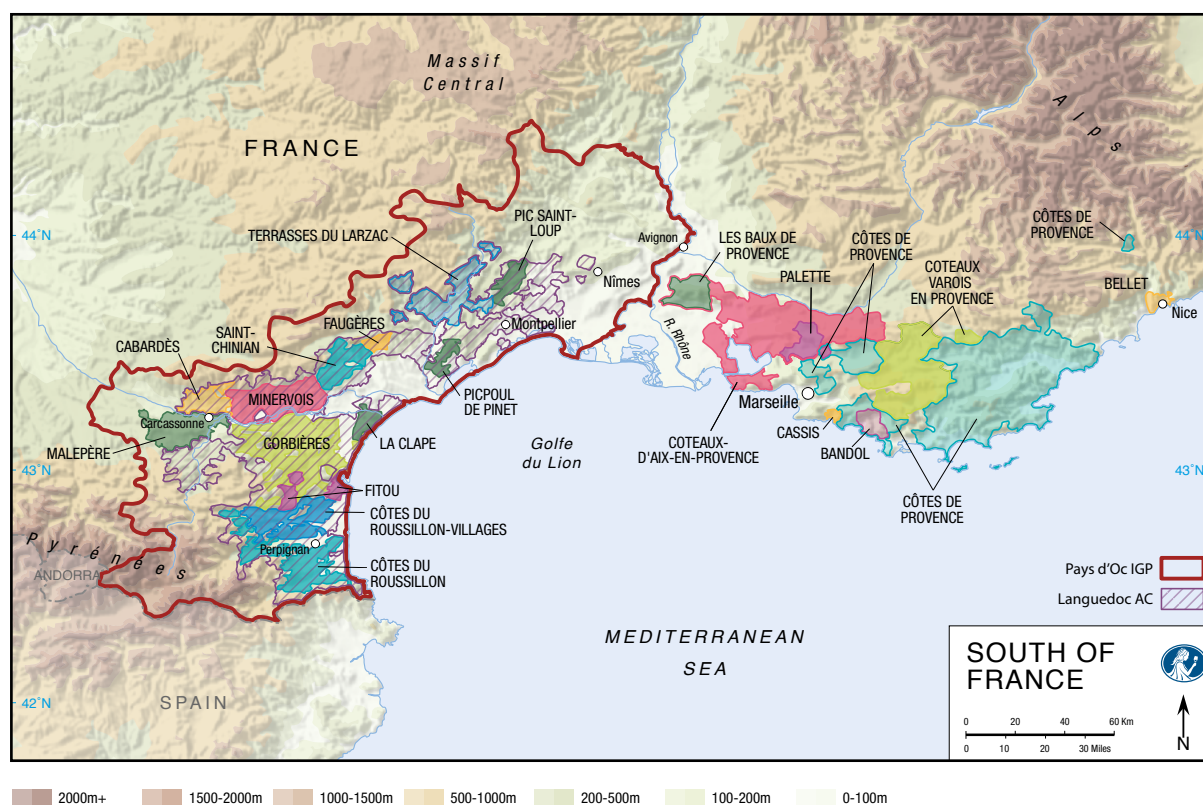
This guide deals with the wines of the Languedoc, Roussillon and Provence, each of which is discussed separately below.

The former administrative region of Languedoc-Roussillon, which has been part of the wider Occitanie administrative region since 2016, is treated in two parts:

- Languedoc: the *départements* of Aude, Hérault and Gard;
- Roussillon: the *département* of Pyrénées-Orientales.

With around 224,000 hectares under vine, Languedoc-Roussillon has more hectares under vine than the individual countries of Argentina, Chile, Australia or South Africa;<sup>1</sup> 205,000 of these hectares are situated in the Languedoc.

One common factor between these three regions is the low yields for AOC wines, due to low rainfall and a warm, windy climate (causing high rates of evapotranspiration). In a survey of yields for AOC wine in the decade 2005–2015, Languedoc-Roussillon had the lowest yields of all French regions, roughly half that of Champagne or Alsace.<sup>2</sup>



### 8.1. Languedoc

The Languedoc is mainly located on a low-lying alluvial plain, although recently its more ambitious growers are reclaiming vineyards on hillside slopes with the intention of creating higher quality wines. The climate is Mediterranean and there is a large range of grape varieties grown, including local varieties (e.g. Piquepoul) and those typical of the south of France in general, such as the Rhône Valley (Syrah, Grenache Noir, Carignan).

The Languedoc of today has a long history of grape growing, having been both a Greek and a Roman colony as well as the site of many monasteries in the Middle Ages. Its fortunes were transformed by the building of the Canal du Midi (connecting it to Bordeaux in the late 17th century) and of the railways (middle of the 19th century), enabling wines to be efficiently transported to export markets and to Paris. As a result, grape growing and winemaking became important drivers of the region's economy.

Large volumes of wine are produced as IGP (especially those produced from, and labelled as, single varieties) and as wine without geographical indication. AOC wines account for only 15 per cent of production. Co-operatives became very important in the region, especially in the 1950s when they accounted for 90 per cent of total production. Even today, they account for 60 per cent of the area's production.<sup>3</sup> Post 1973, once France no longer sourced wine from Algeria, Languedoc, together with Roussillon, became the largest source of everyday wine in France. Over-production in relation to demand led to the eventual removal of many vineyards; the total area under vine is half what it was in 1968. Today the production of inexpensive wine is accompanied by increasing attention to small production, high quality wines.

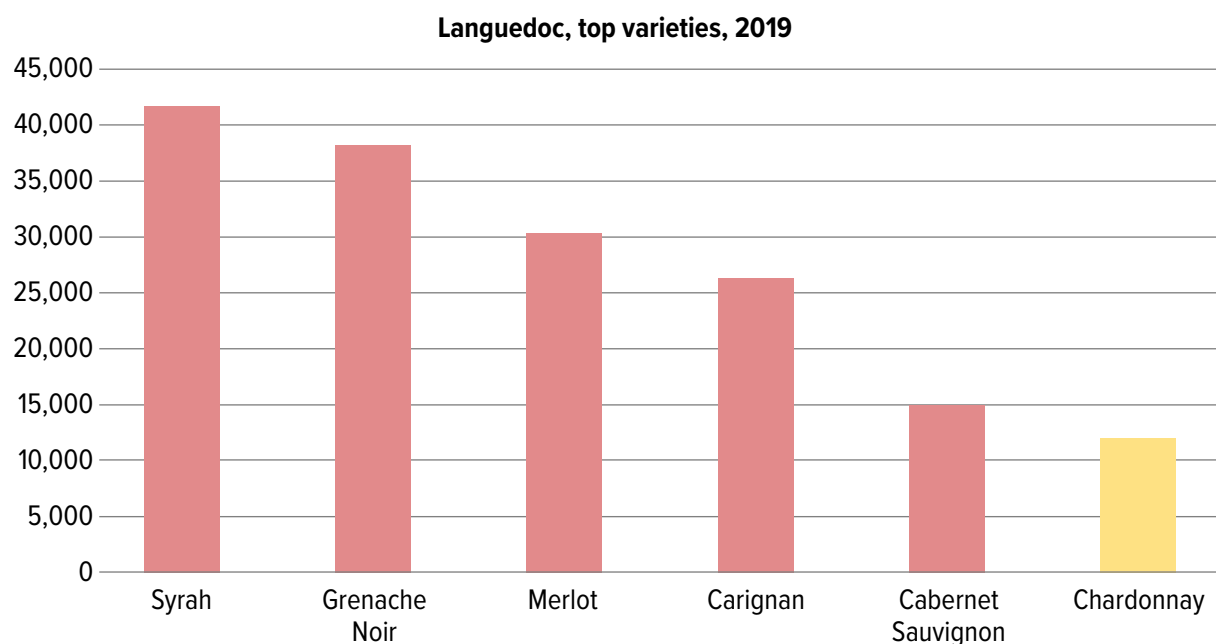
## THE GROWING ENVIRONMENT AND GRAPE GROWING

### Climate

The Languedoc's Mediterranean climate, typically with high levels of sunshine, rainfall below 600 mm a year and very warm summers, is generally very favourable for grape growing. Low moisture levels and the cool, dry Tramontane north-west wind that blows for about 200 days per year mean that there is low disease pressure from fungal diseases, thus reducing the need for spraying and the consequent cost. This has also enabled the growth of certified organic wine production (Languedoc and Roussillon are responsible for one-third of France's organic production).<sup>4</sup> However, in dry years very low rainfall can reduce production levels considerably where irrigation is not installed.

### Grape varieties

The most grown varieties in the Languedoc are as shown in the following chart.



Source: Les AOCs du Languedoc<sup>5</sup>

**Carignan** – This variety, spelled Carignane in American English, buds late (and may thereby avoid spring frosts) and ripens late (and therefore needs to be grown in a warm climate with a long ripening season). It can produce high yields (200 hL/ha and more), which made it popular in the past when the volume of production was the most sought-after characteristic. These wines frequently had low flavour intensity. To produce wines of high concentration, its yield has to be sharply reduced, and this happens naturally when vines become old (e.g. 50 years and more). It is particularly prone powdery mildew and to grape moths. It is not particularly suited to mechanical harvesting as the bunches are firmly attached to the vine. The amount planted reduced significantly due to the EU vine pull scheme and it is being replaced in Languedoc (which had by far the largest plantings) with other varieties.

Its grapes are high in acidity and tannins. Winemakers will often seek to soften these characteristics; for example, by using carbonic maceration or by blending with other varieties. The wines, other than those from very old vines, are typically unoaked, medium ruby in colour with simple blackberry fruit, high acidity and tannins. The great majority of wines are acceptable to good in quality and inexpensive in price. However, very good or outstanding quality examples have intense black fruit with spice and earthy notes and can attract premium and super-premium prices.

### **Vineyard management**

Historically, vines were grown as bush vines and some of these remain. This form of pruning and training is well adapted to the climate (providing some shade to the bunches). However, most work has to be done by hand, which is expensive. In recent decades many new vineyards have been planted with trellises, enabling a high degree of mechanisation and thus reducing costs. (The reduced availability of labour and the improvement in the quality of machine harvesting have contributed to this trend.) IGP wines tend to be machine harvested, but AOC wines may also be machine harvested where the topography allows.

### **WINEMAKING**

For inexpensive wines, winemaking is carried out in large concrete or stainless steel tanks and using cultured yeast to ensure rapid and complete fermentation and a consistency of style. Most inexpensive red wines are made by crushing the grapes and fermenting them on the skins for 5–7 days to limit the extraction of tannins. Mid-range fermentation temperatures are used



**Grapes being delivered**





**Diatomaceous earth filter**

to preserve primary flavours and the wines are stored for a few months in stainless steel or concrete tanks. These wines are made for early drinking but, with medium tannins, they will hold for 2–3 years.

Carbonic maceration is also commonly employed to produce fruity wines with medium to deep colour and low tannins, particularly with tannic varieties such as Carignan. Again, mid-range fermentation temperatures are used to preserve primary flavours and the wines are stored for a few months in stainless steel or concrete tanks. The vast majority of these wines are made for early drinking. However, a number of examples of high quality and ageable wines are also made in this way, particularly with Carignan and Syrah (e.g. at Château La Voulte Gasparets).

For high quality, small volume production, there is more use of sorting tables, fermentation at warm temperatures, more use of ambient yeast and of barriques for the maturation of the wines. The additional equipment required for these wines and the use of barriques or tonneaux for maturing the wines adds to the cost of production. These wines are intended to be capable of maturing in bottle. There is also experimentation with concrete tanks and eggs and large format oak vats.

### **IGP WINES**

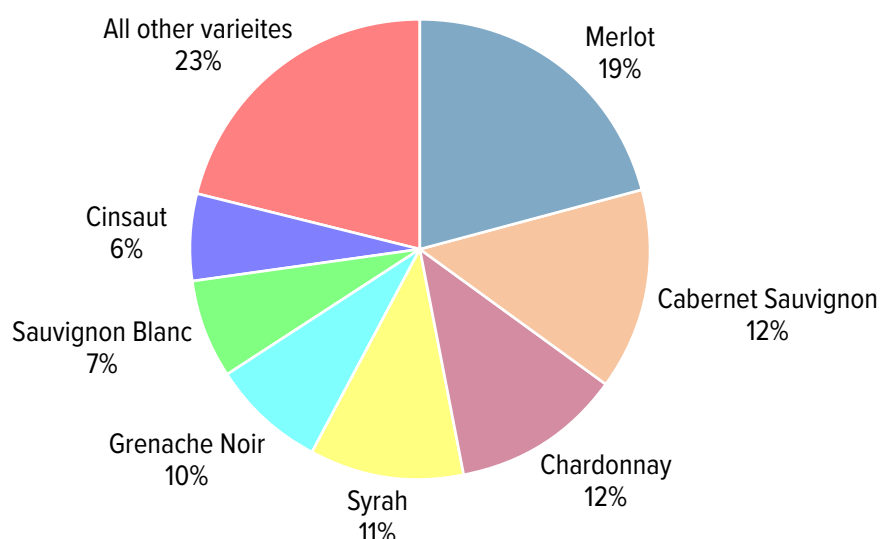
IGP represents nearly 70 per cent of the production in the Languedoc. The regulations are more flexible than for AOC (maximum yields of 90 hL/ha for white and red wines, 100 hL/ha for rosé) and a very wide range of varieties – a total of 58 – may be used. These higher

yields mean that production levels per hectare are higher and costs lower, making the wines attractive in the inexpensive price band. The IGP category, especially the wines labelled with a grape variety, have been at the root of the region's commercial success over the last three decades.

The regional **IGP Pays d'Oc** is by far the biggest producer of IGP wine in France. This single IGP produces between 10–15 per cent of all French wine, depending on the vintage. By colour, just over half of the wines produced are red, a quarter white and just under a quarter rosé. The wines are typically fresh, fruity expressions of the variety being used with little or no use of oak for maturing the wine. They are good to very good in quality and inexpensive to medium-priced.

The top four grape varieties grown and mainly used for single variety wines are Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay and Syrah; the top seven are given in the chart below. Below this top seven, large volumes of Pinot Noir, Viognier, Marselan, Cabernet Franc, Grenache Blanc, Muscat Blanc à Petit Grains, Carignan, Colombard, Rolle and Malbec are also grown. The top varieties by percentage of the total hectolitres produced for red, rosé and white wine are shown in the pie chart.

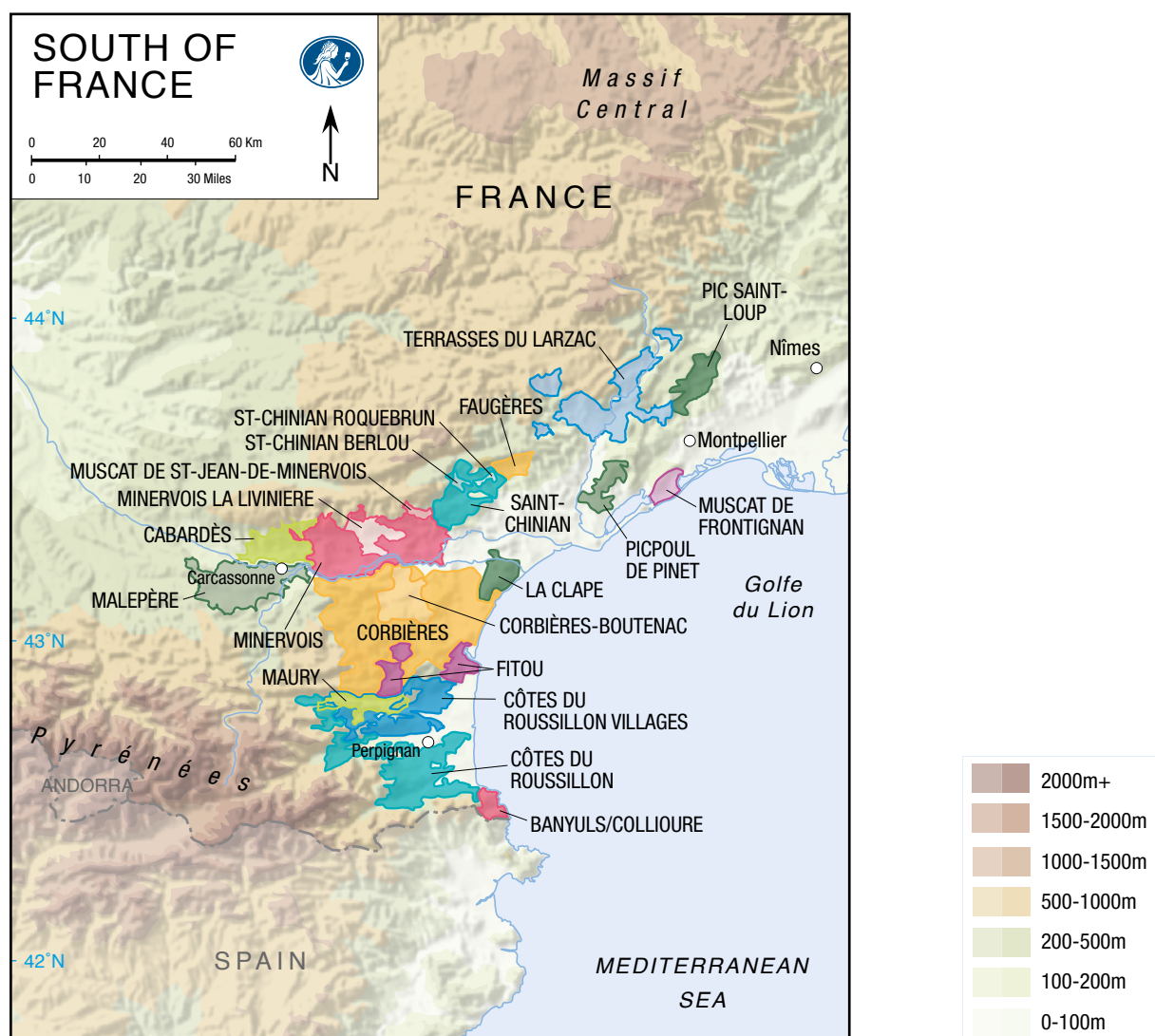
**Volumes of IGP Pays d'Oc wine produced by variety**



Source: Interprofession des Vins Pays d'Oc IGP.<sup>6</sup>

Half of the production of IGP Pays d'Oc is sold in France, mostly in supermarkets, but hospitality sales are also significant. The top three export markets are Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium.

## AOC WINES, WINE LAW AND REGULATIONS



Appellation requirements include detailed rules about the varietal composition for red, rosé and white wines, making a distinction between principal varieties and other varieties. The following explanation focuses on red wine, typically 90 per cent of production in all the appellations (excluding appellations devoted to white wine).

Each appellation lists its principal grape varieties and other allowed grape varieties. In all cases, the Languedoc AOCs for red wine require a minimum of two varieties, including one or more of the principal varieties. Most of them also give an upper limit for any one variety (e.g. maximum 80 per cent), meaning that all AOC wines are genuinely blends. The AOC may also set minimum and maximum amounts for a single variety or combinations of varieties.

With the exception of the particular cases of Cabardès AOC and Malepère AOC, all the Languedoc appellations require the use of Grenache Noir in the blend and most require Syrah and Mourvèdre. In many appellations, these three varieties are the principal grape varieties. In Corbières AOC and Fitou AOC, Carignan is a principal grape variety and in nearly all other appellations it is an option.

The rules for subzones can be different from the parent appellation. Thus, Saint-Chinian-Roquebrun AOC requires a higher total percentage of Grenache Noir, Syrah and Mourvèdre than does Saint-Chinian AOC.

Different percentages can be set for the varieties in the vineyard and in the final wine. Thus, the AOC may require 50 per cent of a variety in the vineyard but only 40 per cent of the same variety in the final wine, allowing producers some flexibility. Unused grapes can be used for other wines; for example, for rosé, IGP wines or wines made as Vin de France. In the rest of this guide the percentages given will be for the final wine.

Each AOC also sets the maximum yields, which are typically 45–50 hL/ha. Some subzones limit the yield (e.g. to 40 hL/ha). The regional appellation, **Languedoc AOC**, allows 50 hL/ha for red wines and 60 hL/ha for white wines, which may lead to slightly less concentration in some of these wines. In many of the individual appellations, the average yield in practice is well below these figures (e.g. around 35 hL/ha) due to low rainfall and soils with low fertility.

To illustrate how this system works, the detailed example of Languedoc AOC, the large regional appellation, is given here:

- The principal varieties here are Grenache Noir, Syrah and Mourvèdre.
- A minimum of two varieties must be used, including at least one of the principal varieties. No variety may be more than 80 per cent of the blend.
- The total combination of the principal varieties must make up a minimum of 40 per cent of the blend.
- The other varieties (in this case Cinsaut, Carignan and other local varieties) may not make up more than 30 per cent of the blend. This last percentage is much higher than in the specific AOCs listed below, reflecting the nature of a regional AOC. More typically the maximum is 10 per cent.

In general, in terms of style, quality and price, the red wines of Languedoc can be grouped as follows:

- **Regional appellation** (Languedoc AOC) – The wines typically have medium intensity in aroma and flavour with simple blackberry and red plum fruit and medium tannins, acidity, alcohol and body. The wines are acceptable to good in quality and range from inexpensive to mid-priced.
- **Named appellations** (e.g. Corbières AOC) – The wines typically have medium to medium (+) intensity in aroma and flavour with blackberry and red plum fruit and herb notes (lavender, rosemary), medium tannins, medium to medium (+) acidity, medium to high alcohol and medium (+) to full body. A minority of wines have oak aromas. The wines are good to very good in quality, with some outstanding examples, and range from inexpensive to premium priced.
- **Sub-appellations** (e.g. Corbières-Boutenac AOC) – The wines of the sub-appellations typically have medium (+) to pronounced aromas and flavours and medium (+) tannins. They are very good in quality with some outstanding examples and are mostly mid-priced with some premium examples.



### Corbières AOC

Corbières is a hilly appellation south-west of Narbonne; at over 10,000 ha, it is the fourth largest in France. Two key mountain ranges (Tauch and D'Alaric) provide sites for vineyards on slopes up to 450 m. The cooling influence of altitude and cold northern winds helps to retain acidity in the grapes. Nearly 90 per cent of production by volume is red wine.<sup>7</sup> At least 40 per cent of the final wine must be any of the principal grape varieties (Carignan, Grenache Noir, Mourvèdre and Syrah), with the remainder from other permitted varieties, including Cinsaut (maximum 20 per cent). The maximum yield for red, rosé and white wine is 50 hL/ha.

The sub-appellation of **Corbières-Boutenac AOC** requires Carignan, Grenache Noir and Mourvèdre to make up 70 per cent of the blend.

The wines of Corbières AOC are predominantly sold in France (70 per cent) and through supermarkets; 30 per cent by volume produced is exported, with China, Germany and Belgium being the leading export markets.<sup>8</sup>

As in many of these Languedoc appellations, rosé wine is also made, as is white wine from varieties such as Bourboulenc, Grenache Blanc, Marsanne, Roussanne or Rolle.



**Corbières-Boutenac**

### Minervois AOC

Minervois is an extensive appellation with a range of climatic zones based on altitude and proximity to the Mediterranean Sea. This allows a range of suitable sites to be found for grape growing for red (the great majority of production), rosé and white wine. Most red and rosé wines are made from the principal varieties, Grenache Noir, Syrah, Mourvèdre and (less commonly) Lledoner Pelut. The wines must be a blend of at least two varieties, including at least one of the principal varieties. Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre, Carignan and Cinsaut must make up at least 50 per cent of the final blend with no one variety exceeding 80 per cent.

**Minervois La Livinière AOC** – This AOC is an AOC for red wine only. It is situated on a limestone terrace of gentle slopes at up to 400 m of altitude, giving very good drainage, exposure to the sun and some cooling influences from altitude. The cooler temperatures can lead to higher acidity levels in these wines than those from the lower, warmer parts of Minervois AOC. The principal varieties are the same as in Minervois AOC and must make up at least 40 per cent of the blend; while Carignan, Cinsaut, Grenache, Mourvèdre and Syrah must make up at least 80 per cent of the blend with no one variety exceeding 80 per cent.

### Saint-Chinian AOC

Saint-Chinian is another large appellation, sited between Minervois and Faugères, producing mainly red and rosé wines from blends principally of Grenache Noir, Syrah and Mourvèdre (minimum 50 per cent in the blend). There are two areas within the appellation:



- The northern zone, with arid fast-draining schist soils resulting in low yields and wines of higher concentration. Within this sector are the two subzones, Saint-Chinian Roquebrun AOC and Saint-Chinian Berlou AOC.
- The southern area, where the soils are clay and limestone with greater water-holding capacity, which produces higher yields of less concentrated wines.

### Fitou AOC

Fitou is made up of two areas with a part of the Corbières AOC between them, adjacent to Roussillon. It was the first AOC in the Languedoc, formed in 1948. The coastal area of Fitou is relatively flat, low-lying plains, with clay and limestone soils that have good water retention. The wines made from this area tend to be less concentrated than those from inland. The inland area is more mountainous and has less fertile and fast-draining schistous soils, resulting in wines of potentially higher flavour concentration. The focus here is on the traditional varieties Carignan (which must be 10–40 per cent of the blend) and Grenache Noir (minimum 20 per cent). The largest producer in Fitou is the Mont Tauch co-operative, responsible for approximately half of the total production of the appellation.<sup>9</sup>

### Faugères AOC

Faugères is situated at 250–400 m of altitude on well-drained and low fertility schistous soils, resulting in wines of very good concentration. While the maximum yields allow a higher production (e.g. 50 hL/ha for red wine), average yields are low (33 hL/ha). There is a high proportion of certified organic grape growing (40 per cent of vineyard land, plus 10 per cent in conversion).<sup>10</sup> The wines have to be aged for a year before release. They are sold almost entirely in France (nearly 90 per cent).<sup>11</sup>

### Pic Saint-Loup AOC

Pic Saint-Loup has a more continental climate than many of the other Languedoc appellations, with cold winters and warm summers and considerable rainfall (1,000 mm per year). In this climate, which is similar to the northern Rhône, Syrah performs well here and must be 50 per cent of the final blend. The appellation is only for red and rosé wines.

For a more in-depth look at Pic Saint-Loup AOC: see [Jefford on Monday: Languedoc's cool kid.](#)

### Terrasses du Larzac AOC

Terrasses du Larzac is a relatively new appellation, gaining AOC status in 2014. The vineyards are at a range of altitudes, some at 120–200 m but with some up to 400 m. High diurnal range (up to 20°C/68°F in summer) gives ripe fruit flavours and fresh acidity. The AOC is for red wines only and they must be a blend with at least three varieties, promoting complexity in the final wine. This area has attracted investment and is seeking to establish a reputation for high quality. Many wines reach premium price points with some super-premium examples (e.g. La Peira).



Terrasses du Larzac

**La Clape AOC**

La Clape is another new appellation. AOC status was gained in 2015 for this coastal area, close to the city of Narbonne. It is warm, sunny, arid and windy. These conditions enable full ripeness, suitable therefore for varieties such as Mourvèdre that needs heat to ripen properly. Red wines are 80 per cent of the wine produced. Although making up a relatively small proportion of the volume, La Clape is well known for its white wines, which must include a minimum of 60 per cent of Grenache Blanc and/or Bourboulenc.

**Picpoul de Pinet AOC**

On low-lying land close to the coast, Picpoul de Pinet is devoted to white wine made entirely from the Piquepoul Blanc grape variety. (The appellation is spelled 'Picpoul', while the grape is spelled 'Piquepoul'.) In a warm climate, it usefully retains acidity as it ripens. The grapes were once used mainly for the base wine for the local Vermouth industry; however, since the arrival of new technology and techniques in the 1970s and 1980s (especially gentle pressing and the ability to avoid oxidation and ferment at low temperatures), fruitier wines have been produced leading to a rapid growth in demand, initially from tourists in the area and then in the export markets. Maximum yield is 55 hL/ha.

The wine is dry and medium bodied with medium (+) to high acidity and medium intensity lemon fruit with light floral notes. The wines are acceptable to good in quality and inexpensive to mid-priced.

The wine is mainly exported (67 per cent, 2020) with tourists in the region also accounting for a considerable part of the domestic consumption. The top export market is the UK, which accounts for nearly 60 per cent of exports, followed by the USA and Germany. The wine is sold in a distinctive bottle (slender with an embossed Languedoc cross). Co-operatives, such as Ormarine in Pinet itself, play an important role in the region, accounting for around 90 per cent of the production of the appellation.<sup>12</sup>



**Picpoul de Pinet**

### Atlantic-influenced appellations

The most westerly part of the Languedoc is home to Malepère AOC and Cabardès AOC in which Bordeaux varieties are grown alongside more typical Languedoc varieties.

- **Malepère AOC** has a climate influenced by the Atlantic as it is protected from Mediterranean influences by mountains. Malepère AOC must be a blend of at least two varieties and a minimum of 40 per cent Merlot.
- **Cabardès AOC** is subject to both Atlantic and Mediterranean influences and must be a blend of 40 per cent each of Bordeaux varieties (the two Cabernets, Merlot) and Grenache Noir and/or Syrah.

In addition, Limoux is an appellation in this region that is mainly devoted to sparkling wine.

### WINE BUSINESS

In terms of volume, the Languedoc continues to be dominated by IGP and the simple 'wine' categories: 15 per cent of wine is AOC and nearly 70 per cent IGP. In response to rising demand, rosé production has increased markedly in recent years (+35 per cent between 2010 and 2017).

In general, exports of AOC wine from Languedoc are growing rapidly (+15 per cent, five years to 2016), with the highest growth in the two biggest markets of the USA and China. The top three markets by volume in 2021 were USA, UK and China.<sup>13</sup>

While the Languedoc has focused historically on the production of inexpensive wines, often made by co-operatives, there has been a recent development of very ambitious wineries seeking to show that wines of the highest quality can be made in the area. Examples of this would include the pioneer Mas de Daumas Gassac, Domaine de Gérard Bertrand's Clos d'Ora and the range of wines with typical Languedoc single varieties and blends from Château Puech-Haut. In between the extremes of inexpensive and super-premium wines, the main development in the current century has been a focus on mid-price wines. These seek to reflect their origin – being made from blends of varieties typical to the region – and are marketed under the specific appellations listed above. This development has been driven by a rise in small private producers, who either have left the co-operatives and are making their own estate wines or are investors from other parts of France or abroad attracted by the stock of old vines, the varied landscape and reasonable land prices.

For the story of Clos d'Ora, see [Jefford on Monday: Monsieur Bertrand's dream](#).

The Languedoc is a partner in the promotional body [Sud de France](#) (covering wine, food, tourism), which organises the ViniSud wine fair and promotions in export markets.

## 8.2. Roussillon

Today Roussillon has around 21,000 hectares of vineyard, having reduced the area planted dramatically in recent decades (it is roughly one-third the size it was in 1980), as seen in other parts of southern Europe. The region is dominated by the Pyrenees, and many of the vineyards are located on the slopes or foothills of these mountains. Around 70 per cent of the vineyard area is classified as AOC – there is no extensive flat, coastal plain here suited to high volume grape growing, as in the Languedoc. Around a quarter of production is Vins Doux Naturels (see D5: Fortified Wines), while roughly equal volumes of AOC and protected

geographical indication (PGI) wines are made. Co-operatives continue to be very strong in the region and account for around 75 per cent of production. The majority of wines produced are red, followed by rosé with a small proportion of white wine.<sup>14</sup>

## THE GROWING ENVIRONMENT AND GRAPE GROWING

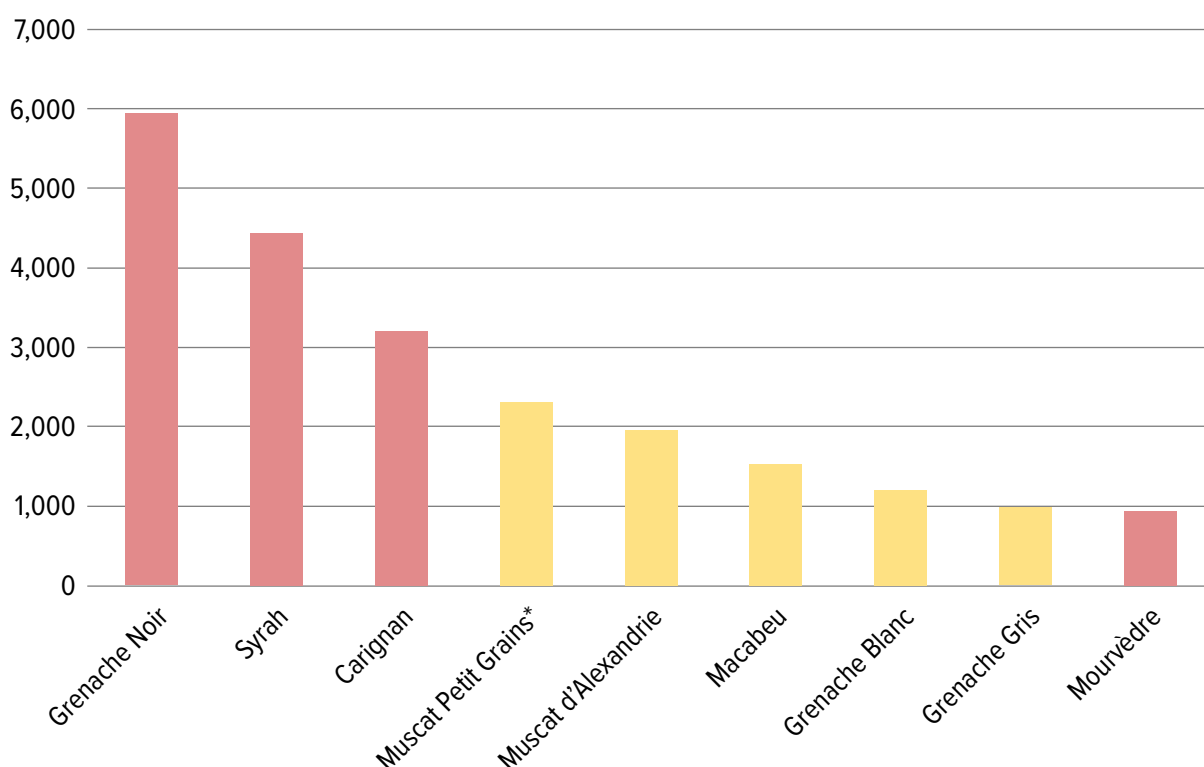
### Climate

Roussillon has a warm, windy, Mediterranean climate with moderate rainfall (500–600 mm annually) and high sunshine hours. Generally, the climate is very favourable for grape growing, although drought can be an issue in dry years. The combination of frequent winds and low rainfall helps to reduce the disease threat from fungal diseases; however, these climatic factors also reduce yield (which in turn raises concentration of fruit) and therefore income. There is a high proportion of certified organic grape growing in the region (15 per cent by hectares planted), enabled by the warm, dry, windy and sunny conditions.

### Grape varieties

The most important varieties are Grenache Noir, Syrah, Carignan and Mourvèdre for red and rosé wines, the Muscats (mainly used for fortified wine) and Macabeu for whites (for an introduction to this variety, see [Macabeu](#) in Spain). In contrast to Languedoc, all the top six varieties have been grown in the region for many decades.

Roussillon, top grape varieties, hectares, 2020



\* Muscat Petit Grains Blanc and Rouge

Source: Chambre d'agriculture des Pyrénées-Orientales<sup>15</sup>



### Vineyard management

As in the Languedoc, vines were historically grown as bush vines. Many of these remain. Well adapted to the climate (providing some shade to the bunches), most work has to be done by hand, which is expensive. In recent decades, vines have been planted on trellises, although the amount of flatter land suitable for trellising is far less than in the Languedoc.

## APPELLATIONS, WINE LAW AND REGULATIONS

### Côtes du Roussillon AOC

Côtes du Roussillon is a large appellation (nearly 5,000 ha) that includes the entire *département* of Pyrénées-Orientales except the Collioure area. It is situated on lower slopes (100–250 m) and is an appellation for red, rosé and white wines. Maximum yield is 48 hL/ha. The principal varieties for red and rosé wines are Carignan, Grenache Noir, Mourvèdre and Syrah. Maximum allowed amount of Carignan in the vineyard is 50 per cent, while Syrah and Mourvèdre separately or together must be a minimum of 25 per cent in the vineyard.

The wines must be made from a minimum of two varieties with a requirement that the variety with the highest percentage is limited to 80 per cent in the final blend. In terms of style, quality and price, the red wines are similar to the Languedoc AOC wines.



**Bush vines in Roussillon**

### Côtes du Roussillon Villages AOC

Côtes du Roussillon Villages is less than half the size of Côtes du Roussillon AOC. It is an appellation for red wines only, and has the same rules about a minimum two varieties and the proportion of the main variety. The vines are grown on slopes from 100–400 m, with the altitude resulting in a cooling influence and so greater acidity in the wines. However, more work has to be done by hand, raising cost. The maximum yield is restricted to 45 hL/ha, although yields are often well below that due to the hot, dry climate, resulting in wines of high concentration.

Five villages may append their names to this appellation; for example, Côtes du Roussillon Villages Tautavel AOC with a lower maximum yield of 42 hL/ha. Some of these villages require the Carignan to be made with carbonic maceration, to promote the primary fruit and reduce the tannins that might be extracted. In terms of style, quality and price, the wines are similar to Languedoc sub-appellations.

### Collioure AOC

This small appellation, extending along the coast to the Spanish border, has the same boundaries as Banyuls AOC (fortified sweet wines). Full-bodied, dry, red and white wines are made from grapes grown on steep terraces above the Mediterranean Sea. The red wines, the great majority, are made predominantly from Grenache Noir, Syrah and Mourvèdre. The

white wines are made predominantly from Grenache Gris, a mutation of Grenache Noir. The maximum yield for red and white wines is 40 hL/ha, which is rarely achieved. The typical yield is 20–25 hL/ha due to the heat, low rainfall and poor soils. In terms of style, quality and price, the red wines are similar to Languedoc sub-appellations with consistently high concentration of fruit due to low yields.

**IGP Côtes Catalanes** covers the Pyrénées-Orientales *département* and is used by producers for red and white wines, including some super-premium white wines (e.g. from Domaine Gauby).

### WINEMAKING

As in the Languedoc, red wines can be made either by pressing the fruit and maceration on the skins or by carbonic maceration, depending on the style of wine desired.



Maturation cellar, Roussillon

### WINE BUSINESS

As noted previously, co-operatives continue to be very important within the region; however, as in Languedoc, there is an increasing trend towards the production of high quality wines by individual wineries. Some of these have been set up by those from outside of the region, for example Thunevin-Calvet from Bordeaux and Domaine de Bila-Haut, owned by Chapoutier, Rhône. Outstanding quality, super-premium wines are made by wineries such as Domaine Gauby, Clos des Fées and Le Soula.

Of the dry wine produced, 80 per cent (i.e. excluding Vin Doux Naturels) by volume is sold in France, with China, Belgium and Germany as the top three export destinations by volume.<sup>16</sup> Roussillon is also a partner in the promotional body Sud de France.





**Terraced vineyards**

### **8.3. Provence**

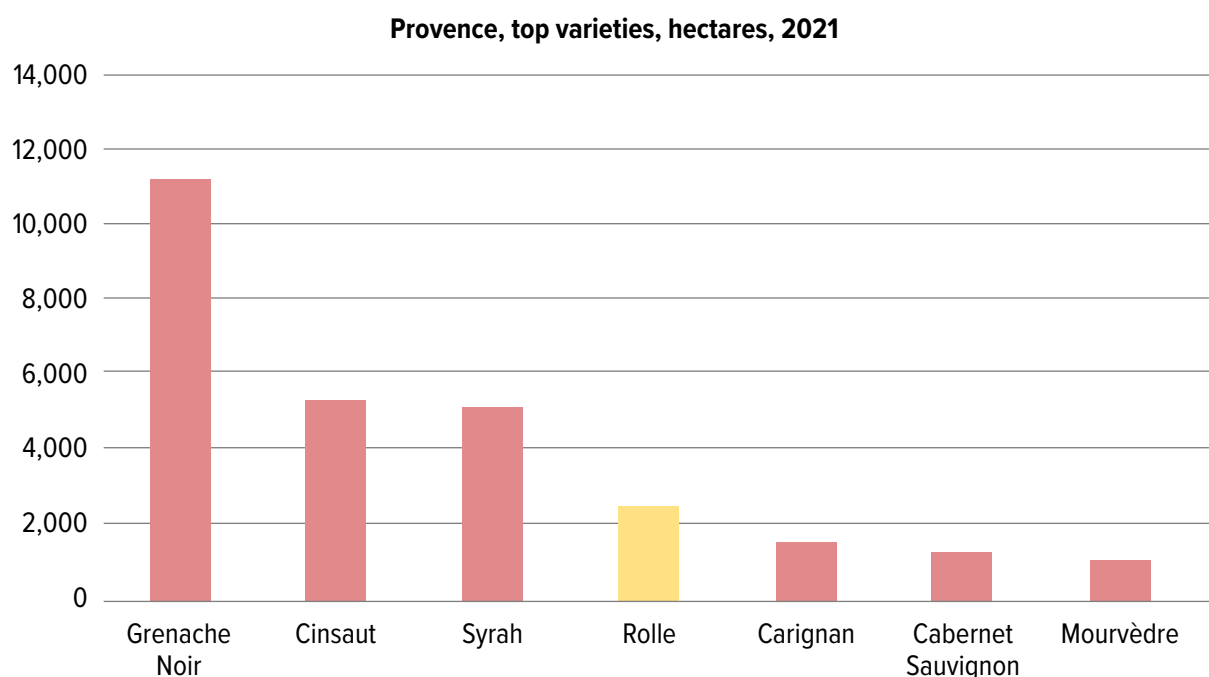
This region has become virtually synonymous with pale pink rosé made principally from Grenache Noir and Cinsaut, a style much copied around the world. Rosé accounts for around 90 per cent of Provence's AOC wine, which in turn represents between 40–45 per cent of France's AOC rosé wine.<sup>17</sup> Alongside this style, red wine from Grenache Noir, Syrah, Cinsaut, Mourvèdre and Carignan has become a new focus and very small volumes of white wines are made from varieties such as Rolle (known elsewhere as Vermentino, see [Sardinia](#)) and Clairette. Vineyard plantings in coastal areas have been reduced in size due to competition for land from housing development and tourism.

#### **THE GROWING ENVIRONMENT AND GRAPE GROWING**

The main varieties grown in Provence are shown in the chart below.

##### **Climate**

Provence has a warm Mediterranean climate with adequate rainfall in most years for grape growing. The cold Mistral wind can provide a cooling influence and helps to reduce fungal disease. 20 per cent of vineyards are certified organic, above the national average,<sup>18</sup> facilitated by the generally favourable climate. However, the cold winds can also interrupt flowering and fruit set, reducing yields. The best sites for consistent yields are those that have shelter from the Mistral. Altitudes up to 400 m in inland sites also provide a moderating influence on warm summer temperatures.



Source: Conseil Interprofessionnel des Vins de Provence<sup>19</sup>

### Vineyard management

The traditional bush vines of the region are being replaced with trellised vines to aid mechanisation and reduce cost. The bush vine offers more shade to the fruit, which can be an advantage. However, trellised vines make it easier to control the size of the canopy and to achieve ripeness in terms of sugar level and ripe skins and seeds at the same time. Inter-row access is easier for workers and machines.

Grapes grown for making rosé are picked earlier than for red wine to retain acidity. However, if the wine is to be made by short maceration, then it is important that the tannins are sufficiently ripe to avoid any bitterness. Choosing an appropriate harvest date is critical in ensuring fruit ripeness while retaining the desired level of acidity.



**Grenache at véraison**

### ROSÉ WINEMAKING

The pale colour of most wines is related to the relatively low level of colour in the skins of the common varieties of the region – Grenache Noir, Cinsaut and the local variety Tibouren. In addition, the AOC regulations allow up to 20 per cent of white varieties in the blend. (If white varieties are used they will typically form less than 10 per cent of the blend. Using white grapes in the blend may be useful to reduce the alcohol level.) Rosé is made either by direct pressing (now the most common option) or by short maceration (a few hours) on the skins (see



chapter on Specific Options for Rosé Winemaking in D1: Wine Production and the table below). Musts are typically acidified to achieve a good balance between fruit and acidity.

For best quality, fruit is handled protectively by chilling it to 4°C (39°F), which reduces the rate of oxidation, and then excluding oxygen, with a view to retaining the fruity aromas and preserving the pale colour. For example, Bucher Vaslin developed a specialised press trademarked Inertys®, to eliminate oxidation in the press.

Harvesting and pressing options for making rosé	
Hand harvesting and pressing whole bunches	Machine harvesting and short maceration or hold in press
<p>Advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less stress on the grapes during harvesting, especially if picked at the coolest time (4am on).</li> <li>• Fruit can be sorted in the vineyard.</li> <li>• Whole bunch pressing is gentler, extracting fewer solids and phenolics.</li> <li>• More juice is produced at lower pressure due to presence of stems, which create channels for the juice.</li> </ul>	<p>Advantages (harvesting):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fast.</li> <li>• Significantly cheaper than hand harvesting.</li> <li>• Does not require large picking teams.</li> <li>• Grapes can be picked at night for cooler temperatures.</li> <li>• Shortest possible delay between picking and refrigeration and/or pressing.</li> </ul>
<p>Disadvantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hand harvesting requires a large, well-trained picking team to harvest and select correctly.</li> <li>• In many countries, it is increasingly difficult to find and retain such labour.</li> <li>• Labour may not be available in the early morning.</li> <li>• Hand harvesting is more expensive and slower.</li> <li>• Whole bunch pressing is more time-consuming as fewer bunches can be loaded into the press.</li> </ul>	<p>Disadvantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Machine harvesting requires an up-to-date, well-maintained machine and a skilful driver.</li> <li>• Grapes are destemmed by the shaking mechanism of the machine and therefore whole bunch pressing is not possible.</li> <li>• Destemmed grapes require a higher pressure to extract the same amount of juice as whole bunch pressing.</li> </ul>

Fermentation typically takes place in stainless steel tanks. Winemakers have a choice of either selecting a cultured yeast for a consistent, fruity style or using ambient yeast. Cultured yeast also helps the fermentation get off to a fast start without any off flavours; it has become the majority option. Fermentation temperature is restricted to between 14°–18°C (57–64°F) in order to preserve delicate primary fruit aromas but avoid the banana aroma associated with very low temperatures. Wines have to be fermented to dry (as set out in the AOC rules), resulting in a consistently dry style for the appellation. Malolactic conversion is routinely blocked to retain acidity and to preserve primary fruit. If the colour of the wine is deeper than desired, this may be reduced by fining the wine.



**Nitrogen generator for Inertys press**

The wines are typically stored for a short period (2–3 months) on the lees in stainless steel containers before being bottled. A few producers choose to keep the wine on the lees for 8–10 months for added texture; some also produce an oak-aged premium rosé; for example, Château d'Esclans.



**Fermentation room**



**Bottling line**

## APPELLATIONS

### Côtes de Provence AOC

This is by far the largest appellation, with 20,000 ha under vine, and 95 per cent of the wine produced is rosé.<sup>20</sup> As with most other Provencal AOCs, there is also provision for red and white wines. The principal grape varieties required by the appellation for rosé are Grenache Noir, Cinsaut, Mourvèdre, Syrah and Tibouren and the wines must be a blend of varieties. The maximum yield is 55 hL/ha, with average yields being close to 45 hL/ha.

Within the appellation, there are some subzones, the largest of which is Côtes de Provence Sainte-Victoire AOC (lower maximum yields 50 hL/ha).

Côtes de Provence rosé is typically pale pink-orange in colour, with light to medium intensity aromas of raspberry and red plum with herbal notes, medium acidity, medium body and medium alcohol. Quality typically ranges from good to very good and there is a wide range of prices with many wines in the mid-priced to premium bands but also some super-premium wines.

### Other appellations for rosé wines in Provence

Similar wines are produced within the enclave in the *Var département*, entitled to the appellation **Coteaux Varois en Provence AOC** and in **Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence AOC** (maximum 60 hL/ha; both these AOCs have Counoise as a principal variety, in addition to the usual varieties).

**Les Baux de Provence AOC** in the far north-west of the region, close to the Rhône River, makes mostly red wines from Grenache Noir, Syrah and Mourvèdre. The three varieties must make up 60 per cent minimum of the blend.

### Bandol AOC

This appellation, unusually for Provence, has produced more red wines than rosé. However, in recent years, rosé has become the most common style by volume. The vineyards are on south-facing slopes protected from the wind. Where the slopes are steep, they have to be



Foudres for maturing wine, Bandol



terraced to reduce erosion. Working on slopes adds greater labour costs. Soils are typically rocky (limestone and clay) with low fertility. Area under vine has reduced from 1,400 ha to fewer than 600 in this century alone, due to a combination of competition for land and the difficulties of working on the slopes.

The wines typically feature Mourvèdre, which generally ripens reliably in the area due to the very warm microclimate. Red wines must be 50–95 per cent Mourvèdre and must be aged in oak for 18 months. Rosés must have between 20–95 per cent Mourvèdre. Maximum yields are restricted to 40 hL/ha. Significant producers include Domaine Tempier. Co-operatives are responsible for 50 per cent of production (e.g. Les Vignerons de La Cadièrenne). The red wines are typically good to very good in quality with some outstanding examples that can be aged for many years. Prices range from mid-price to super-premium.

### Other appellations

Provence also has a number of very small, historic appellations that became AOCs from the 1930s onwards: **Bellet AOC**, **Cassis AOC** mainly for white wine and **Palette AOC** mostly made by Ch. Simone. As these appellations are mostly on the coast, they are much under pressure from building development. Most of the wine is sold to local tourists.

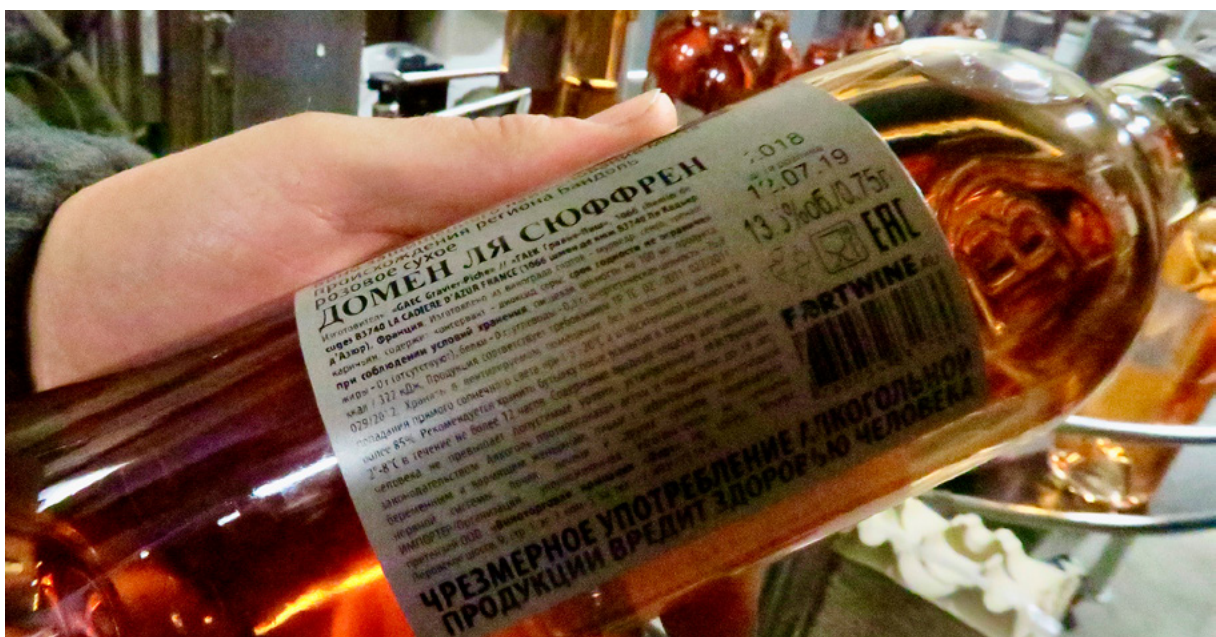
In 1955 cru classé status was granted to 23 estates, of which 18 remain. Examples include Clos Mireille and Domaine Rimaurescq. The list has never been revised.

### WINE LAW AND REGULATIONS

These have been covered in the preceding sections.

### WINE BUSINESS

Of Provence's rosé wine sales by volume, 58 per cent is sold in France, with 25 per cent being sold in supermarkets and 33 per cent in other channels. 42 per cent is exported, with US, UK and the Netherlands being the top export markets.<sup>21</sup> At 36 per cent of total world consumption, France is the number one consumer of rosé in the world, not only drinking French rosés but also being the largest importer of rosé from other countries, especially Spain.<sup>22</sup>



Bottling Bandol rosé for the Russian market



The top export market is the USA (which takes nearly a half of all Provence wine exports) followed at some distance by the UK at 13 per cent. Exports have grown rapidly since the turn of the century: 500 per cent in volume and 1,000 per cent in value.<sup>23</sup>

Wines are marketed with strong reference to the lifestyle of Provence and the Riviera, boosted still further in recent years by the purchase of wine estates, such as Château Miraval, by well-known celebrities.

In addition to privately-owned wineries, co-operatives and *négociants* continue to be important in Provence. Nearly 50 per cent of production in Provence is by co-operatives, while privately-owned wineries account for more than 40 per cent of the production.<sup>24</sup>

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