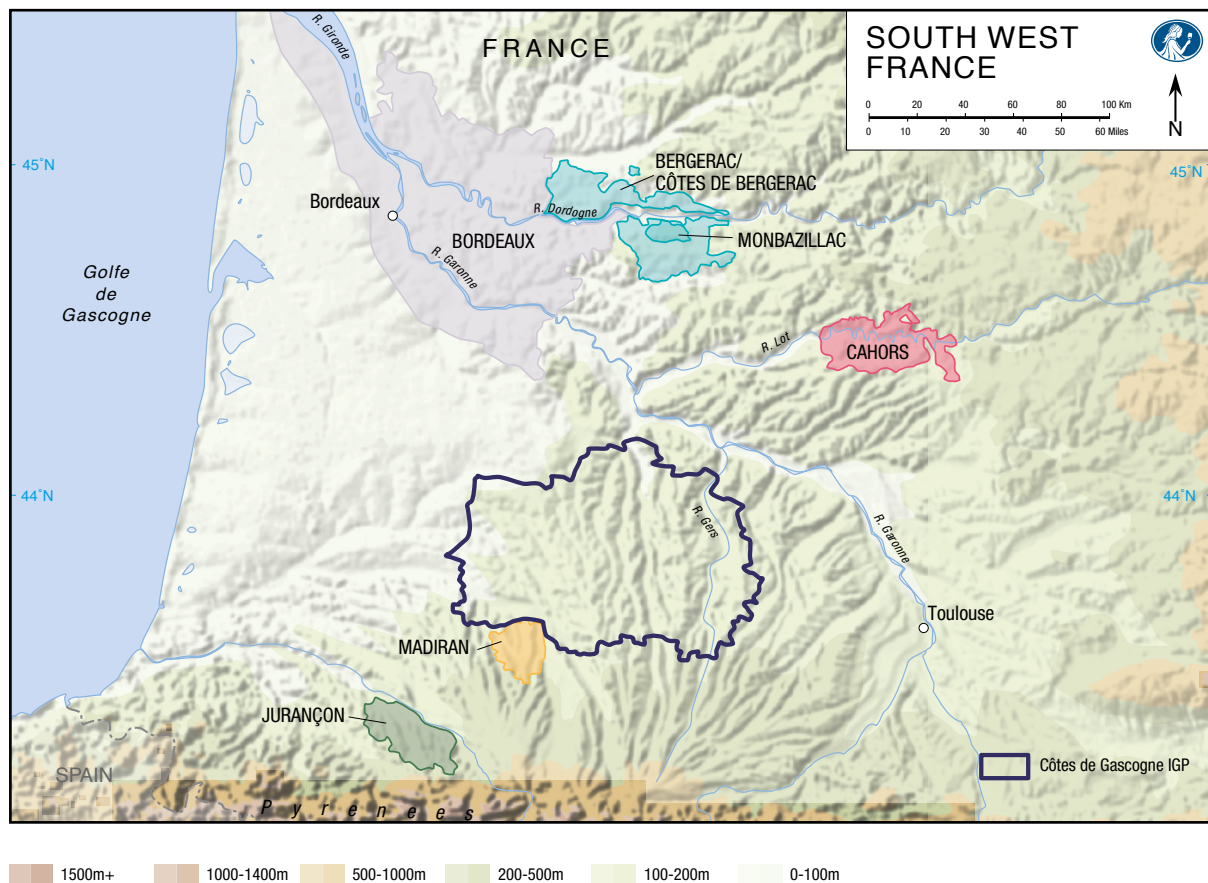


9. South West France

South West France as a wine region covers a number of appellations, with the exception of Bordeaux, even though Bordeaux is geographically in the south-west of France. The climate is broadly similar to Bordeaux, in that the whole region is influenced by the Atlantic. South of Bordeaux (Madiran, Jurançon), the Atlantic influence extends inland for more than 100 kilometres (60 miles) owing to the largely flat, gently undulating territory. Elsewhere, the Atlantic influence diminishes with greater distance from the ocean (Bergerac, Monbazillac and Cahors), resulting in slightly less rainfall and warmer summers; for example, per year Cahors has about 200 mm less rainfall than in Bordeaux. Large volumes of wine are made at both PDO and PGI levels. The wines are described in the regional sections below.



9.1. The Dordogne – Bergerac and Monbazillac

The Dordogne, immediately to the east of Entre-Deux-Mers, is home to a number of appellations that make wines with the same varieties and in similar styles to the wines of Bordeaux. **Bergerac AOC** and **Monbazillac AOC** are the two largest producing appellations.



Vineyard in Bergerac

BERGERAC AOC

The appellation includes dry and sweet white, rosé and red wines; in 2020, together with Côtes de Bergerac (see below), 50 per cent was red wine, 33 per cent white and 17 per cent rosé.¹ With a climate slightly warmer and drier than Bordeaux, and clay and limestone soils with some gravel, the Bordeaux varieties, white and black, can be grown here and ripen well. The wines must be made from a blend of the allowed principal grape varieties. For example, the red wine must be made from a minimum of 50 percent of at least two of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Malbec and Merlot. Less internationally recognised local varieties are allowed as a small part of the blends. The maximum yields are similar to Bordeaux AOC (67 hL/ha for whites, 60 hL/ha for red wines), resulting in some wines of low flavour intensity. These wines are typically aged in large stainless steel or older oak casks, producing wines in an easy-drinking style that can be released earlier on the market and that reduce cost in comparison to ageing wine in new barriques. For higher quality red wines, **Côtes de Bergerac AOC** is restricted to the main Bordeaux varieties (no local varieties permitted), the maximum yield is lower at 50 hL/ha and ageing in oak is used by some producers. Most wines are predominantly Merlot. Bergerac AOC and Côtes de Bergerac AOC wines are typically good to very good in quality and are inexpensive to mid-price.

Over 90 per cent of Bergerac AOC is sold in France. Within the domestic market, supermarkets are the largest outlet (just under 50 per cent), then direct sales (under 30 per cent) with around 10 per cent each going via hospitality and specialist wine shops. The largest export markets are Belgium (32 per cent), China and the UK.²

MONBAZILLAC AOC

This is an appellation for sweet white wines only. The grapes may be affected by botrytis or simply late harvested. The region lies between the River Dordogne and one of its tributaries. This location, plus the funnelling of moist air (mists and dew) along the rivers, creates high levels of humidity. In warm late summer and early autumn, the humidity is burnt off by the sun creating good conditions for noble rot.

The grapes must be picked by hand in a number of passes through the vineyard. The wine must be at least 80 per cent of the principal varieties, Sauvignon Blanc, Sauvignon Gris, Sémillon and Muscadelle. Maximum yield is 30 hL/ha. Fermentation in barrel with new oak is much less common than in Sauternes, thus reducing costs and making the wine available at a lower price. The wines are similar in style to sweet wines from Bordeaux's less prestigious appellations, good to very good in quality and inexpensive to mid-priced.

For the Bergerac region as a whole, the wines are mainly sold in France (more than 50 per cent in supermarkets and deep discounters) with less than 10 per cent being exported. The main export markets are in north-west Europe.



Selecting botrytised grapes by hand

9.2. Cahors

In the Middle Ages and down to the 19th century, Cahors produced a great deal of wine that was transported via the River Lot that runs into the River Garonne and hence to Bordeaux. The wine was then exported from Bordeaux. It came to be known as the 'black wine of Cahors' because of its deep colour. However, the combination of competition with the Bordeaux region (which imposed taxes on exports of Cahors wine and only allowed it to be exported after its own wines had been released), phylloxera and a devastating frost in 1956, meant that the area under vine was reduced to only a tenth of the size that it had been. Today the appellation has 3,300 ha planted with Malbec, which accounts for 85 per cent of hectares planted.³ Cahors is the only appellation in France in which Malbec is the principal grape variety.

THE GROWING ENVIRONMENT AND GRAPE GROWING

Despite being 250 kilometres (155 miles) inland, Cahors receives some influence from the Atlantic. However, the climate is warmer and slightly drier (less than 800 mm of rainfall per year) than Bordeaux. As a result, Malbec ripens more regularly in Cahors. Tannat is also authorised, although it is usually less than 10 per cent of the blend and many wineries do not use it all. In general, lower rainfall means that there is less need for spraying against fungal

diseases than in Bordeaux. At 17 per cent, the proportion of organic grape growing is well above the average for France as a whole.⁴

The vineyards, next to the River Lot, range from being on rich, alluvial soils (resulting in higher yields and lower fruit concentration), via the mid slope (poorer soils and hence



Valley floor, Cahors



Plateau, Cahors

lower yields and higher concentration) to the highest plateau at just below 350 metres (low nutrient limestone soils, resulting typically in lower yields and higher concentration). The single Guyot training system is the most common, but others are also used (especially cordon-trained). Machine harvesting is widely practised for the vineyards that are easier to access. Otherwise, hand harvesting takes place, depending on the market prices of the wines, machine accessibility, weather conditions and the availability of labour. Return on investment is often the decisive factor. As elsewhere, hand harvesting can raise quality, allowing more careful sorting, but also raises the cost of production.

Malbec

This variety, also known as Cot, is vigorous and hence needs careful canopy and yield management, depending on the style of wine to be made. It is susceptible to coulure, which reduces yields.

Traditional style Cahors wines, often made with a high percentage of Malbec, are typically deep ruby in colour, with medium to pronounced levels (depending on quality level) of violet, red and black plum fruit, medium to medium (+) acidity and medium (+) to high tannin. Very good and outstanding examples may be aged in French oak barriques (adding to cost) and so have vanilla and sweet spice notes. Some producers today favour foudres for ageing their wines, allowing slow oxidative development but not adding oak aromas. The wines range in quality from good to outstanding (the latter can be aged in bottle for many years) and are mid- to premium priced. Some lighter coloured, high quality wines are also made (see next paragraph).



Machine harvesting

WINEMAKING, WINE LAW AND REGULATIONS

Cahors AOC must be a minimum of 70 per cent Malbec with rest of the blend being Merlot and/or Tannat. The top quality wines are increasingly 90–100 per cent Malbec. Destemming is required by the appellation (to eliminate underripe stems that could add aggressive tannins). In the past, a lack of maturity was most likely to be due to cool seasons, but today it is as likely to be due to a lack of water preventing full ripeness. Styles vary from early drinking (using Merlot in the blend; typically 7–10 days on the skins for limited extraction of tannins) to wines intended to bottle age (typically 15–25 days on the skins for greater extraction of flavour and tannins). As noted, the higher quality wines are often matured in oak, although many top producers are now also producing non-oaked premium wines.



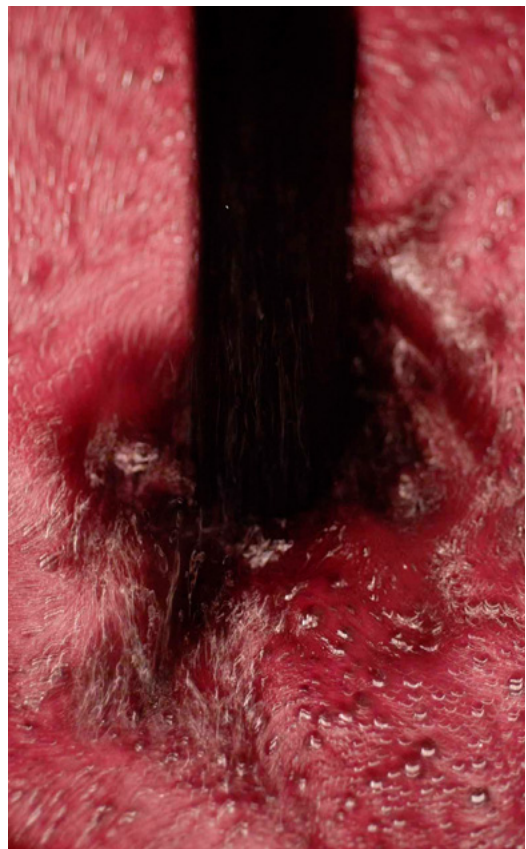
Sorting fruit

WINE BUSINESS

Private companies produce 80 per cent of Cahors and a single co-operative produces 20 per cent, the Cooperative des Vignerons d'Olt, which belongs to Vinotalie that operates in four wine regions.⁵

Since 2007, Cahors has marketed itself as 'Cahors Malbec'.⁶ Top producers seek to raise the prestige and price of their wine with single vineyard selections or bottling and marketing the best barrels separately.

Supermarkets and direct sales account for 70 per cent of the wine sold by volume in France, the two most important channels. Exports make up 30 per cent by volume and are growing. They rose from 10,000 hL in 1997 to more than 40,000 hL in 2020. The top market by volume and value are the UK, Canada and the USA.⁷ Significant producers include Ch. du Cèdre and Ch. de Chambert.



Pumping Malbec wine

9.3. Madiran

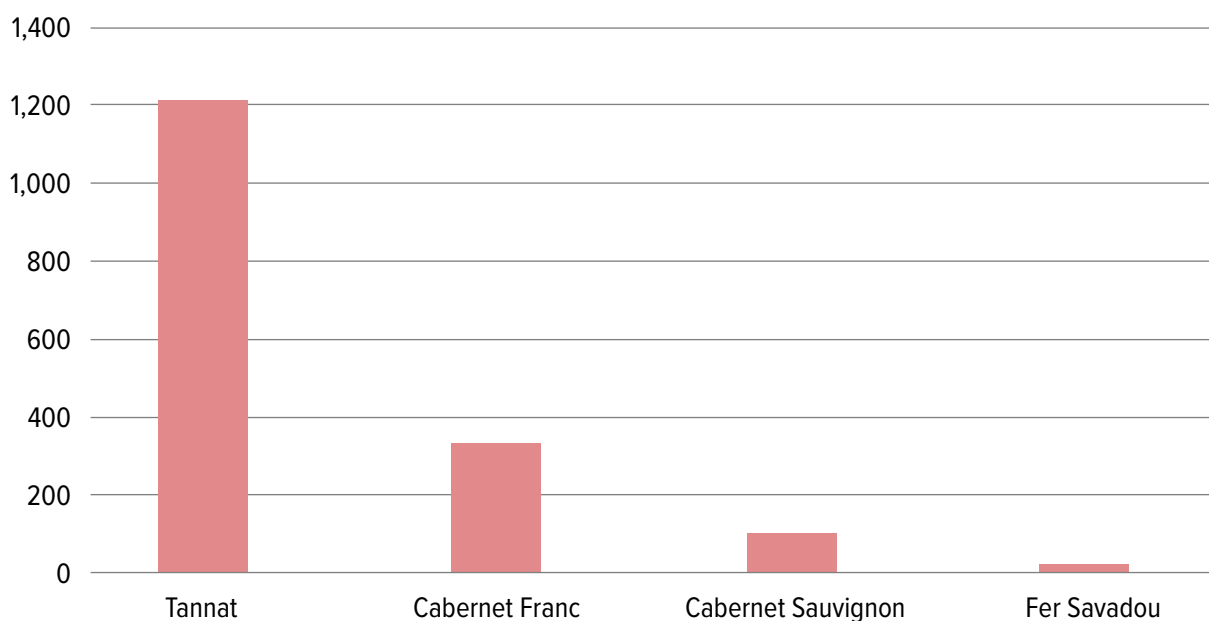
This region is in sight of the Pyrenees mountain range that separates France from Spain and 80 kilometres (50 miles) from the Atlantic Ocean. **Madiran AOC** is a high tannin red wine made principally from the Tannat variety. Within the same geographical area, a white late harvest sweet white wine called **Pacherenc du Vic-Bilh AOC** is made from local varieties, similar in style to [Jurançon](#).

THE GROWING ENVIRONMENT AND GRAPE GROWING

Madiran has some Atlantic influence, with a relatively high annual rainfall of 1,000 mm; however, this falls mainly in late winter and spring. Warm, sunny summers and dry autumns with warm days and cool nights and a hot, dry southern Föhn wind (more detail in [Jurançon](#) below) enable Tannat to ripen fully in most years.

Madiran comprises four large, roughly parallel ridges oriented north–south, with steep west-facing slopes. The soils on slopes are mainly clay and limestone with good drainage, producing grapes that make tannic wines suitable for long bottle-ageing. On the flatter land, clay and clay and loam soils predominate and the resulting wines are less tannic and can be drunk earlier.

Madiran, top varieties, hectares, 2018



Source: Madiran press kit⁸

Tannat

This black grape variety is vigorous and therefore best supported on a trellis. It is mid-ripening, and therefore has normally been picked before the onset of autumn rains. However, it is prone to botrytis bunch rot that has to be controlled. As a variety it is highly tannic, which affects decisions about winemaking (see below).

Madiran wines intended for ageing are typically deep ruby in colour, with pronounced aromas and flavours of blackberry and blackcurrant plus oak flavours, high tannins, high acidity with a full body and alcohol that ranges from the top end of medium to high. These wines are very good to outstanding in quality and mid- to premium priced. Earlier drinking styles with lower levels of tannins and concentration are also made.

WINEMAKING, WINE LAW AND REGULATIONS

Madiran AOC must be made with a minimum of 50 per cent Tannat, blended with Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and/or the local black variety Fer, also known as Fer Servadou. However, most wines have a much higher percentage of Tannat; the highest quality wines are typically 85–100 per cent Tannat. Vines can be trained with the Cordon de Royat or Guyot.

Grapes must be destemmed (to reduce the extraction of further tannins) and the maximum yield is 55 hL/ha. Wine makers have sought to soften the tannins in Madiran by shorter maceration times, ageing in oak and through bottle age (the last two adding cost). In 1991 Patrick Ducournau pioneered the technique of micro-oxygenation, seeking to soften the tannins in Tannat wines.

In addition to wines intended for long ageing, the recent trend is towards a more accessible style. Early drinking styles are achieved by picking only the ripest grapes, gentle pressing and the use of micro-oxygenation.

Wines can only be sold to consumers from the beginning of November in the year following harvest, allowing some time for maturation before release.

WINE BUSINESS

About 80 per cent of Madiran AOC is sold in France (50 per cent of this is through supermarkets, 25 per cent through hospitality and 25 per cent directly or through specialist wine shops). The top export markets are the Belgium, Germany and Canada.⁹ Significant producers include Alain Brumont and Ch. d'Aydie. Production is split roughly 50:50 between private growers and co-operatives. Important co-operatives include Cave de Crouseilles and Plaimont, the latter being the dominant producer in the neighbouring Saint-Mont AOC that also grows Tannat and has members in Madiran.

9.4. Jurançon

This region is in the foothills of the Pyrenes, at an altitude of around 300 m, producing dry wines and a range of sweet white wines from the white varieties Petit Manseng, Gros Manseng and other local varieties. The wines produced are 70 per cent medium sweet or

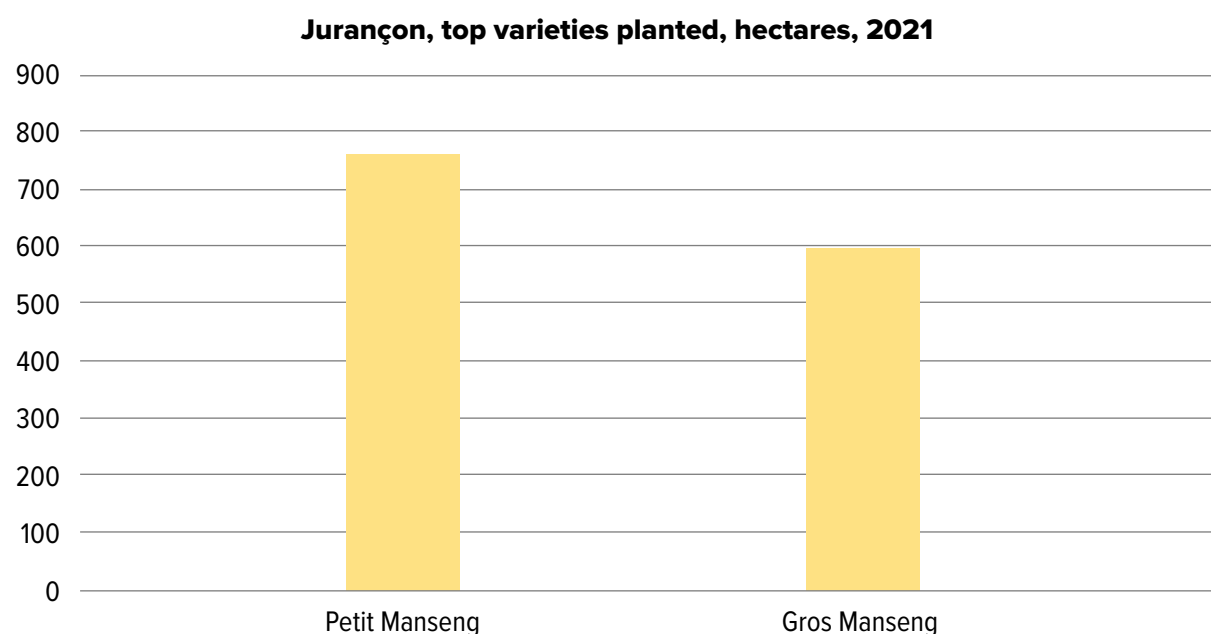


Jurançon vineyards

sweet and 30 per cent dry,¹⁰ and there are three styles: Jurançon Vendanges Tardives (sweet), Jurançon (typically medium sweet) and Jurançon Sec (dry). Jurançon Vendanges Tardives typically have intense aromas and flavours of lemon and mango, high acidity and alcohol between the top end of medium and high with a full body. Jurançon AOC is medium sweet and typically good to very good in quality and inexpensive to mid-priced. Jurançon Vendanges Tardives AOC is sweet and is typically very good to outstanding in quality and mid- to premium in price.

THE GROWING ENVIRONMENT AND GRAPE GROWING

Jurançon has a mild, humid climate with relatively high annual rainfall, about 1,200 mm, which is distributed throughout the year and can affect flowering and fruit set and the period of harvest. Periods of humidity also increase attacks of downy mildew. Vineyards are planted on slopes for good drainage to offset these issues. Some slopes are steep enough to require terracing, increasing initial investment and maintenance. The best sites are south and south-west facing for maximum sunlight interception, thereby aiding ripening. The principal grape varieties are Gros Manseng and Petit Manseng (see graph below).



Source: Les vignerons du Jurançon¹¹

The region is also strongly influenced by the presence of the Pyrenees as this gives rise to a Föhn wind. This hot and dry wind blows in spring and autumn, about one day in three, drying the air and ventilating the canopy (and bunches in autumn), as well as boosting temperature. The heat and the wind help to produce over-ripe berries for the sweet wines. Due to the altitude, spring frosts are also a risk. The budding zone is trained well above the ground to mitigate this risk. Soils are a mixture of limestone, sand, clay and stones. Vines are trained high so as to allow sufficient canopy to produce the high levels of sugar required for medium sweet and sweet wines.

Grapes are picked by hand and, for the sweet wines, in a series of selective pickings, raising cost. The first selection is in October, mainly for dry wines but also some sweet wines for early consumption. The second and third selections (November to December) are used



Pruned vines

for progressively sweeter wines. These last two selections are carried out after over-ripe grapes have been dried on the vine (*passerillage*). The drying process is due to the effect of prolonged time hanging on the vine, the autumn sunshine and the wind. Low yields, see below, raise the intensity of fruit and increase production costs.

Petit Manseng

This variety is early budding and hence prone to spring frosts (see above). It is mid to late ripening, has thick skins and open bunches. As a result, it is resistant to botrytis bunch rot, which makes it suitable for late harvesting. It is moderately aromatic and retains its high acidity, making it particularly suitable for the production of balanced sweet wines. It can reach high levels of potential alcohol (e.g. 17 per cent), which means that producers must be precise about the picking date to balance the goals of full flavour ripeness, acidity and potential alcohol.

Gros Manseng

Gros Manseng shares the characteristics of Petit Manseng but has higher yields and usually less aromatic concentration and flavour intensity. It is principally used for dry wines.

WINEMAKING, WINE LAW AND REGULATIONS

As stated, there are three styles of Jurançon wine. All three must be made with a minimum of 50 per cent of Petit and/or Gros Manseng, although in practice these two varieties are used

exclusively for an overwhelming majority of the wines. These three wines are subject to the following rules:

- **Jurançon Sec** – dry, maximum yield 60 hL/ha.
- **Jurançon** – a medium sweet wine, minimum of 40 g/l residual sugar, maximum yield 40 hL/ha.
- **Jurançon Vendanges Tardives** – a sweet wine, minimum 55 g/L residual sugar but typically much higher, no enrichment allowed, maximum yield 40 hL/ha, Petit Manseng and Gros Manseng exclusively. Grapes for Jurançon Vendanges Tardives may not be picked before 2 November.

The higher quality sweet wines made with Petit Manseng are typically fermented in barriques and aged in them for 12–18 months. Top quality wines typically use old oak, although new oak is occasionally used. This adds complexity to the wines and increases the cost of production. Malolactic conversion typically does not happen as the pH is too low and the acidity too high. This retains acidity and preserves the primary fruit flavours. Producers are increasingly making high quality dry wines and may include a small proportion of Petit Manseng. These are typically aged on the lees, often in stainless steel.



Petit Manseng on the vine

WINE BUSINESS

The production of wine is divided between the co-operative Cave de Gan (64 per cent) and private companies (36 per cent). Sales are divided almost equally between direct sales, supermarkets and the hospitality sector, with a small percentage being exported. Significant producers include Domaine Cauhapé (dry and sweet wines). Producers are giving more attention to dry wine production as there is competition, for example with other French regions, to sell sweet wines, and sweet wines are in general more difficult to sell. In 2021, the production by volume was 32 per cent dry wines, 67 per cent medium-sweet and sweet and 1 per cent Vendanges Tardives.¹²

9.5. IGP Wines

There are 14 IGPs in South-west France. **IGP Côtes de Gascogne** is by far the largest, in terms of vineyard planted.¹³ It has been particularly successful in marketing its white wines in the export markets of UK and northern Europe, led by Tariquet and Plaimont. This resulted in a three-fold rise in production between 1990 and 2000, 80 per cent of which was exported. The wines are made from mainly Colombard (producing neutral white wine with medium–medium (+) acidity, usually used in blends), Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay. The style of wine is fruity and easy to drink, labelled with the name(s) of the variety or varieties. The wines continue to have commercial success in export markets around the world, but now have more competition from the wines from non-European countries. The quality of the wines is acceptable to good and the prices are inexpensive to mid-priced.

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