

= Languedoc @-@ Roussillon wine =

Languedoc @-@ Roussillon wine , including the vin de pays labeled Vin de Pays d 'Oc , is produced in southern France . While " Languedoc " can refer to a specific historic region of France and Northern Catalonia , usage since the 20th century (especially in the context of wine) has primarily referred to the northern part of the Languedoc @-@ Roussillon région of France , an area which spans the Mediterranean coastline from the French border with Spain to the region of Provence . The area has around 700 @, @ 000 acres (2 @, @ 800 km2) under vines and is the single biggest wine @-@ producing region in the world , being responsible for more than a third of France 's total wine production . In 2001 , the region produced more wine than the United States .

= = History = =

The history of Languedoc wines can be traced to the first vineyards planted along the coast near Narbonne by the early Greeks in the fifth century BC . Along with parts of Provence , these are the oldest planted vineyards in France . The region of Languedoc has belonged to France since the thirteenth century and the Roussillon was acquired from Spain in the mid @-@ seventeenth century . The two regions were joined as one administrative region in the late 1980s .

From the 4th century through the 18th and early 19th centuries , the Languedoc had a reputation for producing high quality wine . In Paris during the 14th century , wines from the St. Chinian area were prescribed in hospitals for their " healing powers " . During the advent of the Industrial Age in the late 19th century , production shifted towards mass @-@ produced le gros rouge ? cheap red wine that could satisfy the growing work force . The use of highly prolific grape varieties produced high yields and thin wines , which were normally blended with red wine from Algeria to give them more body .

The phylloxera epidemic in the 19th century severely affected the Languedoc wine industry , killing off many of the higher quality Vitis vinifera that were susceptible to the louse . American rootstock that was naturally resistant to phylloxera did not take well to the limestone soil on the hillside . In place of these vines , acres of the lower quality Aramon , Alicante Bouschet and Carignan were planted .

During both World Wars the Languedoc was responsible for providing the daily wine rations given to French soldiers . In 1962 , Algeria gained its independence from France , bringing about an end to the blending of the stronger Algerian red wine to mask the thin le gros rouge . This event , coupled with French consumers moving away from cheap red wines in the 1970s , has contributed to several decades of surplus wine production in France , with Languedoc as the largest contributor to the European " wine lake " and recurring European Union subsidies aimed at reducing production . These developments prompted many Languedoc producers to start refocusing on higher quality , but has also led to many local and regional protests , including violent ones from the infamous Comité Régional d 'Action Viticole (CRAV) .

Despite the general reputation as a mass producer and a consensus that the region is in the midst of an economic crisis , parts of the Languedoc wine industry are experiencing commercial success due to outside investment and an increased focus on quality . Sales have been improved by many vineyards that concentrate on creating a good brand name rather than relying on the sometimes infamous regional designations . Some vineyards have adopted the youngest batch of AOC classifications developed in the late 1990s , while other vineyards eschew designated blends entirely and are instead shifting toward bottling single varietal wines , a practice increasingly demanded by consumers in the large New World wine market .

= = Climate and geography = =

The Languedoc @-@ Roussillon region shares many terrain and climate characteristics with the neighboring regions of Southern Rhone and Provence . The region stretches 150 miles (240 km) from the Banyuls AOC at the Spanish border and Pyrenees in the west , along the coast of the

Mediterranean Sea to the Rhone River and Provence in the east . The northern boundaries of the region sit on the Massif Central with the Cévennes mountain ranges and valleys dominating the area . Many vineyards are located along the Hérault River .

Vineyards in the Languedoc are generally planted along the coastal plains of the Mediterranean while those in the Roussillon are to be found in the narrow valleys around the Pyrenees . The peak growing season (between May and August) is very dry and the majority of annual rainfall occurs during the winter . In the Languedoc , the plains area is the most arid and hottest region of France . The region 's Mediterranean climate is very conducive to growing a large amount of a wide variety of grapes , with vintners in the area excelling in mass production . The average annual temperature is 57 ° F (14 ° C) . The tramontane inland wind from the northwest often accentuates the dry climate ; drought is the most common threat to vine production , with French AOC and European Union regulation prohibiting the use of irrigation . In December 2006 , the French government responded to global warming concerns and relaxed some of the irrigation regulations .

In 1999 severe weather had damaging effects on the wine producing industry , including hailstorms in May that affected Roussillon and a rain surge in mid November that saw a year 's worth of rain fall in 36 hours in the areas of Corbières and Minervois in the western Languedoc .

The composition of soil in the Languedoc varies from the chalk , limestone and gravel based soils inland to more alluvial soils near the coast . Some of the more highly rated vineyards are laid on top of ancient riverbed stones similar to those of Châteauneuf @-@ du @-@ Pape .

= = Appellations = =

The five best known appellations in the Languedoc include Languedoc AOC (formerly known as the Coteaux du Languedoc) , Corbières AOC , Faugères , Minervois AOC , and Saint @-@ Chinian AOCs . The vast majority of Languedoc wines are produced by wine cooperatives which number more than 500 . However , the appellation system in the region is undergoing considerable changes with both new appellations being created and existing ones changing . One recent change is that the Coteaux du Languedoc has changed name to Languedoc and been extended to include also the Roussillon .

Within the larger Languedoc AOC appellations are several sub @-@ districts , or Cru 's , with distinct wine styles of their own . Some of these sub @-@ districts have pending AOC applications to become appellations in their own right and some have been granted sub @-@ appellations to the umbrella appellation Languedoc AOC . These include the Quatourze , La Clape , Montpeyroux , St. Saturnin , Picpoul de Pinet , Terrasses du Larzac , and Pic St.-Loup.

The boundary of the eastern Languedoc with the Southern Rhône Valley wine region was moved slightly in 2004 , with the result that Costières de Nîmes AOC is now a Rhône appellation rather than a Languedoc one . In that year , INAO moved the responsibility for oversight of this appellation 's wine to the regional committee of the Rhône valley . Local producers of Côtes du Rhône @-@ styled wines made from Syrah and Grenache lobbied for this change since the local winemaking traditions did not coincide with administrative borders , and presumably due to the greater prestige of Rhône wines in the marketplace . Such changes of borders between wine regions are very rare , so out of habit , Costières de Nîmes remains listed as a Languedoc wine in many publications .

= = Grapes = =

The Languedoc @-@ Roussillon area is home to numerous grape varieties , including many international varieties like Merlot , Cabernet Sauvignon , Sauvignon blanc , and Chardonnay . The traditional Rhône grapes of Mourvedre , Grenache , Syrah , and Viognier are also prominent .

Chardonnay is a major white grape , used in the Vin de Pays d 'Oc and the sparkling Crémant de Limoux . Others include Chenin blanc and Mauzac , which is also the principal grape in the sparkling Blanquette de Limoux . The sweet fortified wines of the Muscat de Frontignan and Muscat de St @-@ Jean Minervois regions are made with the Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains grapes . In the Muscat de Rivesaltes AOC , fortified wines are made from Muscat of Alexandria grapes .

Among the reds , Grenache , Syrah , Carignan , Cinsault , and Mourvedre are major grapes of the Corbières , Faugères , Fitou , and Minervois AOCs . Cinsault is also commonly used in rosé production along with Lladoner Pelut , Picpoul noir , Terret noir , and Grenache . Grenache is also the main grape used in the fortified wines of the Banyuls and Rivesaltes region . Some of the oldest vines in France are Carignan grapes . Winemakers often use carbonic maceration to soften the tannins .

Other varieties that can be found include Roussanne , Marsanne , Vermentino , Bourboulenc , Clairette blanche , Grenache blanc , Grenache gris , Picpoul , Maccabéo , and Rolle .

= = Wines and taxonomy = =

Wines from the Languedoc can carry an enormous number of names , ranging from broad regional designations like Vin de Pays d 'Oc to very specific geographical classifications with restrictions on grape variety , like Corbières and Minervois . Since the 1990s , the INAO has been creating smaller AOC classifications which take into account the intricate microclimates and soil variations in the Languedoc @-@ Roussillon . Younger appellations like the Cabardes and subregions like Minervois la Livinière , Corbières @-@ Boutenac and St @-@ Chinian @-@ Berlou are much smaller in scope . While these new appellations have been praised for consistently improving their product , others have criticized the additions for further complicating an already esoteric system of classification .

The majority of wine produced in the Languedoc are labeled vin ordinaire . There is also sizable production of Vins Doux Naturels .

= = = Vins de Pays = = =

The introduction of the vins de pays , a classification produced under less stringent regulations than those of an AOC , opened up the Languedoc wine industry to the labeling of varietal wines and the blending of international varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon , Merlot , Syrah and Chardonnay . Examples include Vin de pays d 'Oc , Vin de pays d 'Aude , Vin de pays de l 'Hérault , and Vin de Pays du Gard . Winemakers such as Guy Anderson , Thierry Boudinaud and E. & J. Gallo Winery capitalized on this new horizon , producing wines like FAT bastard and Red Bicyclette .

= = = Vins Doux Naturels = = =

Vins Doux Naturels are " naturally sweet " wines that have been fortified with brandy to stop fermentation , leaving residual sugar to add sweetness to the wine . The majority of Languedoc sweet white wines are made with a variety of Muscat grapes . The red fortified wines of the Banyuls are made from Grenache grapes , normally have an alcohol level between 16 and 17 % and carry residual sugars in the 8 to 12 % range .

In Banyuls , winemakers use various methods to " bake " their wines to encourage deep raisin colors . Some winemakers utilize a solera system of transporting the wine among different size barrels of various ages that are left out in the sun to warm . Others will put the wine in large glass jars to expose it to direct sunlight . In addition to the dark color , the resulting wines often have a nutty , rancid taste called rancio . In the Banyuls Grand Cru AOC the wine is required to be aged in wood barrels for two and a half years .

= = = Crémant de Limoux = = =

The crémant produced in the Languedoc is made according to the Méthode Traditionnelle - formerly known as méthode champenoise , the same method used to produce the Champagne , including a second fermentation in the bottle to encapture the carbon dioxide produced by the yeast - in the small villages around the town of Limoux . The wines are normally composed of 70 % Mauzac and a 30 % combination of Chardonnay and Chenin blanc . AOC regulations require a year of aging on the lees . The Blanquette de Limoux , when labelled méthode ancestrale , is composed entirely of

Mauzac , undergoes only one fermentation and is aged approximately three months less on the lees before the bottling , the actual date being determined by the moon 's cycle .