

My top 30: Languedoc whites



France's far south is home to an abundance of traditional grape varieties, intriguing blends and alternative wine styles that will add a real point of difference to your summer white wine selection. With her new book on the region out now, Rosemary George MW picks 30 of the best to try

TRADITIONALLY THE LANGUEDOC is a region of red wines. With the exception of Clairette du Languedoc, all the region's early appellations concentrated on red and tended to ignore white wine. St-Chinian and Fenugères were appellations for red wine in 1982, whereas their white counterparts were not created until 2005. In the extensive Coteaux du Languedoc, Picpoul de Pinet was recognised as a small pocket of white wine, and indeed became an appellation in its own right in 2005. La Clape, another coastal region, has also developed a distinctive identity, depending on the maritime influence as well as its own grape variety, Bourboulenc.



Rosemary George MW is a widely published wine writer, author and judge. Her latest book is Wines of the Languedoc, published in April 2018 (£30, Infinite Ideas)

white wine came first, after sparkling, in 1993, focusing on the traditional Mauzac, as well as Chardonnay and Chenin Blanc; the appellation is unusual in demanding an élevage in oak. Elsewhere, the international varieties Chardonnay and Sauvignon feature in IGP Pays d'Oc, but do not contribute to the originality of the Languedoc. That comes from the reassessment of some of the original grape varieties of the region, such as Carignan Blanc, Clairette, Grenaches Blanc and Gris, and Terret, to name but a handful, which were ignored but are now being appreciated anew. Blends rather than varietal wines are the true focus of the Languedoc, providing original and eclectic flavours. Marsanne, Roussanne and Vermentino contribute to those, accompanied by a growing list of possibilities. You may find Gros Manseng, Petite Arvine and even the most recently recognised variety of the Pays d'Oc, Albariño, pioneered by Laurent Miguel in the high hills above the Corbières village of Lagrasse.

What follows is a snapshot of the wonderful diversity and originality of the Languedoc, available on the British wine market this summer, based on an extensive tasting at the Maison de la Région Occitane in London. Some of the big names are missing; they are currently not on the market or their wines simply were not submitted for tasting.

1 Château Rives-Blanques, Dédicace Chenin Blanc, Limoux 2016 96

£12.50 The Wine Society

From a leading estate in Limoux. Light in colour, dry/honey on nose and palate with fine varietal character. Well rounded with fresh acidity on the finish. A wine with ageing potential – and arguably more successful and original than Chardonnay in Limoux. **Drink** 2018-2028 **Alcohol** 13%

2 Clos Centelles, Mosaïque de Centelles, Côtes du Brian 2015 96

£21.75 Terroir Languedoc

Patricia Domergue is an enthusiast for the lost grape varieties of the Languedoc, both red and white. The colour of this blend is golden, the nose rich and leesy, and the palate ripe and textured, with good acidity and length. A lovely, original wine, showing the Languedoc's suitability for whites. **Drink** 2018-2025 **Aic** 14.5%



3 Mas Champart, Blanc, Pays d'Oc 2015 96

£15.16 Berry Bros & Rudd, Fife

Morris & Verdin

This St-Chinian estate has a well-established track record for white wines. A blend of 70% Terret with Grenache Gris, making for wonderfully original flavours. Good stony mineral fruit on the nose and palate, satisfying texture and some weight with mineral fruit. A long and intriguing finish. **Drink** 2018-2025 **Aic** 14%

4 Borie la Vitarelle, Le Grand Mayol, Languedoc 2016 95

£24.50 The French Wine Project

This leading St-Chinian estate is now courageously run by Jean-François Izart's widow Cathy. Equal parts Bourboulenc, Clairette and Vermentino, it takes a Languedoc AP for its lack of Marsanne or Roussanne. Depth and intriguing nuances, with fresh herbal fruit and a long, lingering finish. **Drink** 2018-2025 **Aic** 13%

5 Château d'Anglès, Grand Vin, La Clape 2016 95

£17.99-£19.99 Cambridge Wine

Merchants, Perré Hourlier

Richly textured, its weight and length contrast trically with the fresher Claspique from the same property. As Château la Rivière-Haute, this was the pioneering estate for white La Clape in the 1980s. It's now successfully run by the Faivre family. **Drink** 2018-2028 **Aic** 14.5% ➤

Domaine des Trinités, L'Imaginaire Roussanne, Pays d'Oc 2017 95
 £12.99-£14.95 Cambridge Wine Merchants,
 Lea & Sandeman

An original Roussanne, given several days of skin maceration. Depth of colour, some ginger notes with a streak of tannin. Good balancing acidity, elegant freshness. A successful interpretation from a leading Faugetes producer. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Aic** 14%

Château de Lascaux, Les Pierres d'Argent, Languedoc 2014 93
 £20 James Nicholson, St John Wines

This Pic St-Loup estate has a well-deserved reputation for its white wine and provides an argument for the creation of a white appellation. Elegant and fresh on the nose and palate, with subtle nuances from the diverse blend, which is based on Roussanne and Marsanne. **Drink** 2018-2023 **Aic** 13.5%

Château Rouquette sur Mer, Cuvec Arpège, La Clape 2017 92
 £14.99 The Oxford Wine Co

From a long-established estate in La Clape, a blend based on Bourbouleuc with Roussanne. Light in colour, a fragrantly fresh herbal nose and good salty acidity on the palate, with a refreshing finish. Contrasts nicely with this producer's more serious oak-aged Cuvec Henry Lapierre. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Aic** 13.5%

Frontignan Muscat, Terres Blanches Muscat Sec, Pays d'Oc 2016 92
 £10 Vinethentic, Askewine

The declining fortunes of sweet Muscat have resulted in a vast improvement in the quality of dry Muscat, as an IGP rather than an appellation. Very perfumed, with great varietal character. This really does taste grapey. **Drink** 2018-2020 **Aic** 13%



Domaine de l'Hortus, Grande Cuvée, Val de Montfertrand 2015 93
 £22-£24.50 Bancroft, Concept Fine Wines, Dulwich Winemans, Terror Languedoc,
 The Bedford Bottle Shop, The Wine Library

An intriguing blend featuring Chardonnay, Viognier, Sauvignon Gris and Petit Manseng. Lots of nuances from the diversity of grapes. Rich and leesy on the nose, with dry honey and fresh acidity on the palate. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Aic** 13.5%

Mas d'Allezon, Cabretta, Faugères 2016 93
 £20 Terror Languedoc

A satiating blend of predominantly Roussanne with Clairette and Grenache Blanc. Some depth of colour, quite a rich nose and a rounded, textured palate, with rich fruit and a long finish. Intensely characterful. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Aic** 12.5%

Boulevard Napoleon, Grenache Gris, Pays d'Herault 2015 92
 £20.45-£26.99 Exel, Liberty Wines,
 Nickells & Peaks, Noe Young, Vin Cognito

A lovely example of how suited Grenache Gris is to the Languedoc, and an argument for separating its identity from Grenache Blanc (the former often being more distinguished). Textured, with ripe fruit and good acidity. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Aic** 14.5%

Hegarty Chamans, Les Nonnes, Minervois 2013 92
 £18.95 sup

An intriguing blend of Grenache Blanc and Roussanne with 20% Clairette. Light golden colour in the glass, with dry herbal notes on the nose and a rounded palate with herbal fruit, and satisfying depth and length, then a youthful lift on the finish. **Drink** 2018-2023 **Aic** 14%

Château de Marmorières, Les Pinèdes Blanc, La Clape 2017 91
 £14 Made in Little France

Bourbouleuc and Grenache Blanc with Roussanne and Vermentino. Light, fresh herbal notes on the nose; a salty elegant palate with fresh acidity on the finish. Very saline with good grip. From an old family estate that is beginning to regain its reputation. **Drink** 2018-2021 **Aic** 13%

Château la Liquière, Cistus, Faugères 2015 91
 £22 Humble Grape

One of the original pioneering estates of Faugères. The inclusion of 10% Bourbouleuc in this Roussanne-based blend is unusual. Firm and stony on the nose and palate, with understated flavours and a satiating concentration of fruit. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Aic** 14% ➤

16 Château Petit Roubié, Picpoul de Pinet 2016 ⁹¹
 £9.99-£12.50 **Terror** Languedoc, Vincennes

Light golden colour. A soft, rounded nose with good acidity and firm salty notes on the palate. Good depth, maybe from the extra year of bottle age. Picpoul should always have a benchmark saline quality. Perfect with seafood. **Drink** 2018-2019 **Alc** 12.5%

17 Château Rives-Blanques, Occitania Mauzac Blanc, Limoux 2016 ⁹¹
 £14.50-£18.99 **Cambridge Wine Merchants, Ch Wine Merchants, Tamers, The Oxford Wine Co**

A rare example of the traditional grape variety of Limoux as a still wine. A fresh nose with some herbal notes, and salty fruit on the palate, with the typical bitter finish of Mauzac. Fine example of an often-decried grape variety. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Alc** 13%

21 Gayda, Figure Libre d'Oc 2016 ⁹¹
 £14.95-£15.50 **Ac Galie, Cambridge Wine Merchants, Franky, James Nicholson, Love Wine, St Andrew's Wine Co, The Good Spirits Co, The Leamington Wine Co**

A stylish blend. Nuances of flavour will develop with bottle age. From a pioneering estate in one of the Languedoc's coolest areas. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Alc** 13%

22 La Croix Chapral, Clairette du Languedoc 2016 ⁹¹
 £13.99 **France Domains**

Languedoc's oldest white appellation is in danger of disappearing, but for the efforts of Charles-Walter Pacaud, it's one remaining independent grower. A rounded palate and layers of flavour. Illustrates why Clairette deserves more recognition. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Alc** 13%

23 Mas la Chevalière, Peyrol, Pays d'Oc 2016 ⁹¹
 £17.99 **Liberty Wines, Nickolls & Perks**

An out-of-the-ordinary Chardonnay from one of Languedoc's highest and coolest vineyards, in the hills above Lunas – an estate initially developed by Michel Laporte of Chablis, and now part of Advin. Textured fruit, with good acidity and structure. **Drink** 2018-2023 **Alc** 13%



18 Clos Bagatelle, Le Clos de ma Mère, St-Chinian 2017 ⁹¹
 £20.99-£25 **Bouthon, Nickolls & Perks, Terry Herbert**

An intriguing blend of Roussanne, Carignan Blanc, Grenache Blanc and Vermentino from one of the old family estates of St-Chinian. Lightly herbal nose and elegant palate, white blossom notes, fresh acidity. **Drink** 2018-2021 **Alc** 13.5%

19 Domaine de la Réserve d'O7, Réserve d'O Blanc, St Guilhem le Désert 2017 ⁹¹
 £21.95 **Lea & Sandeman**

From a Terrasses du Larzac estate, this intriguing blend includes Chenin Blanc in equal proportions with Grenache Blanc and Roussanne. Fresh savoury notes on the nose, rounded fruit and firm acidity on the palate. **Drink** 2018-2023 **Alc** 14%

20 Gayda, Figure Libre Chemin Blanc, Pays d'Oc 2016 ⁹¹
 £17.99-£18.25 **Cambridge Wine Merchants, James Nicholson**

Quite a rich nose, with the characteristic dry honey of Chenin Blanc. The full palate is rich and honeyed with youthful acidity. Shows the success of Chenin Blanc in the south. **Drink** 2018-2023 **Alc** 12.5%

24 Pierre Cros, Les Costes, Minervois 2016 ⁹¹
 £10.70 **Pierre Houlier**

Pierre Cros is one of the most original winemakers in the Minervois. This intriguing and original blend – largely Grenache Blanc and Vermentino – is firm and stony, with fresh herbal notes and some white blossom. It should develop well in bottle. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Alc** 13%

25 La Combe St-Paul, Calcaires d'Enserune, Languedoc 2017 ⁹⁰
 £10.95 **Stone Vine & Sun**

Fragrant fruit on the nose and palate, plus a fresh finish. A successful example of a Roussanne-Vermentino blend from a rising La Clape producer, who sadly doesn't have Bourboulienc, so can't make white La Clape. **Drink** 2018-2021 **Alc** 12.5%

26 Le Clos du Bailly, Le B Collection Illustrée, Coteaux du Pont du Gard 2017 ⁹⁰
 £10.50 **Perfect Cellar, Sipwines**

Rounded, dry, leafy nose, with firm fruit and good acidity on the palate and a dry, stony finish. This shows how a once-decried grape variety, Ugni Blanc, can produce really appealing wine if treated properly. **Drink** 2018-2012 **Alc** 13% ➤



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LANGUEDOC

27 Chateau Martinolles, Vicilles Vignes Chardonnay, Limoux 2016

89

£12.95-£14.99 JeroBoams, Rude Wines, Soho Wine Supply

A convincing Chardonnay, from one of the cooler areas of the Languedoc, made by a pioneering Limoux estate that is now part of Domaines Paul Mas. Oak aged, with light golden colour, firm nutty fruit on both nose and palate, alongside good balancing acidity. **Drink** 2018-2021 **Alc** 13.5%



29 Les Domaines Aurriol Claude Vialade, Le Jardin de Vignes Rares de Ciceron, L'Albariño,

89

£16 Available via UK agent Mylino Wines

A grape variety we're likely to see more of in Languedoc. Nose is delicate with a perfumed palate, fresh acidity and lightly peachy notes. Nicely balanced, a good aperitif. **Drink** 2018-2019 **Alc** 13%



28 Domaine des Lauriers, Vignier, Pays d'Oc 2013 89

£9.30 Genesis Wines

A beautifully expressive example of Vignier, from an estate within the appellation of Picpoul de Pinet. Herbal, peachy fruit on the nose and a ripe, peachy, rounded palate. Beautiful balance and good depth. **Drink** 2018-2020 **Alc** 13%

30 Saint Cels, Combe Longue, St-Chinian 2017 89

£12 York Wines

A blend of 50% Grenache Blanc, 30% Roussanne and 20% Vermentino, making for a nicely rounded nose, with good weight and texture on the palate. Intriguing nuances with satisfying mouthfeel and a firm finish. **Drink** 2018-2021 **Alc** 13.5% **D**

69% OF ALL
MEDAL WINNERS
AT THE DECANTER
WORLD WINE AWARDS
ARE STOPPED WITH A CORK¹



CONSUMERS PERCEIVE
CORK SEALED WINE AS
15% BETTER
QUALITY
THAN A SCREW CAP²

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WINEMAKERS
PREFER NATURAL
CORK STOPPERS³

¹ From the 17,883 wines submitted, 85% did not specify the closure type. From the 18,882 wines submitted with a declaration of closure, 75% of the wine are sealed from cork, corks, hybrid cork and synthetic cork. ² Based on data from the Decanter World Wine Awards. ³ Data from the International Wine & Food Research Association. ⁴ Experimental, designed by Professor Claire Spence of Oxford University's Consumer Behaviour Laboratory, 2017. www.aficor.fr/en/