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## Spring Release Report

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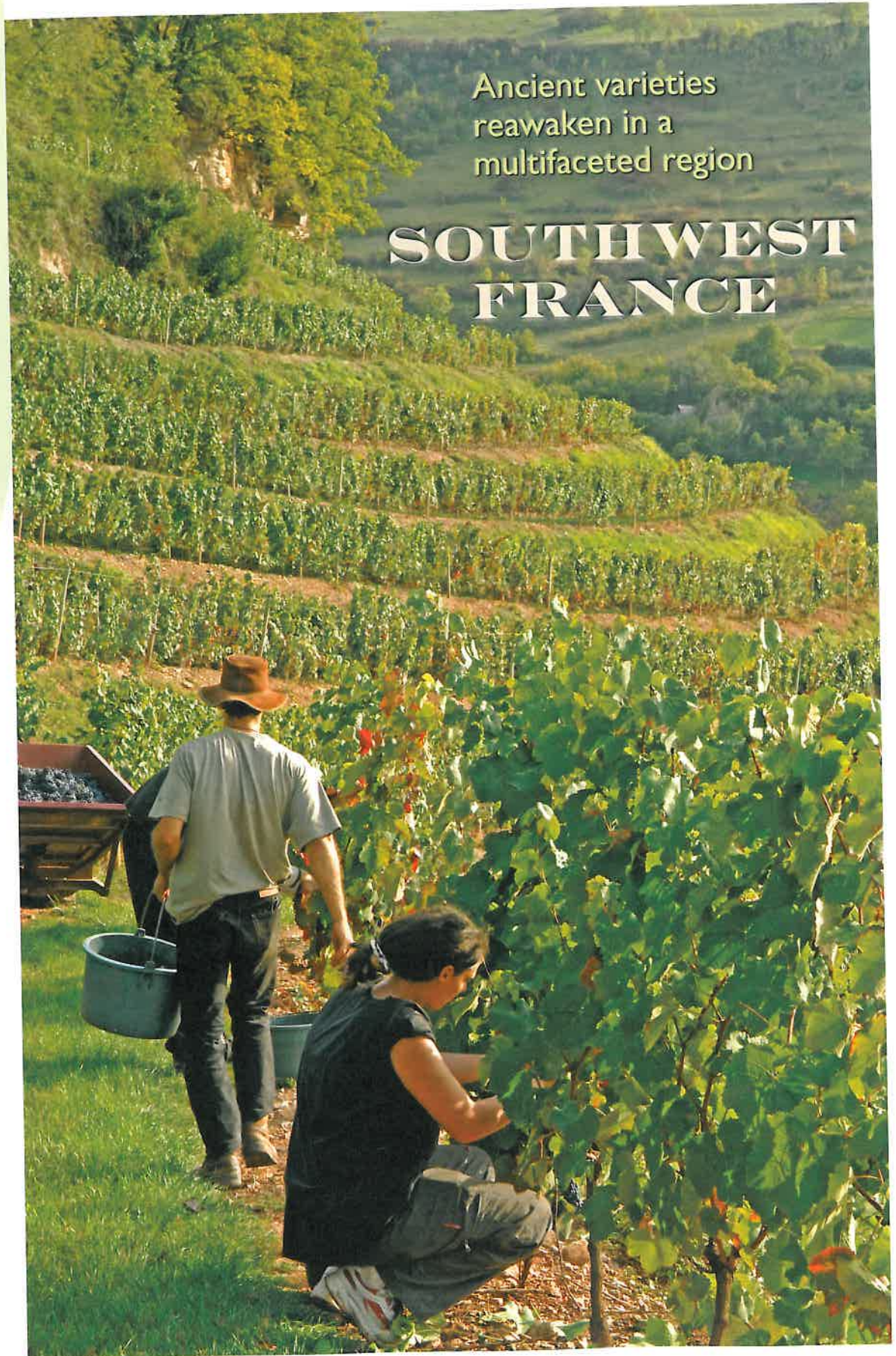
Southwest France

Selling Retail Wine  
in Restaurants

April 30, 2010

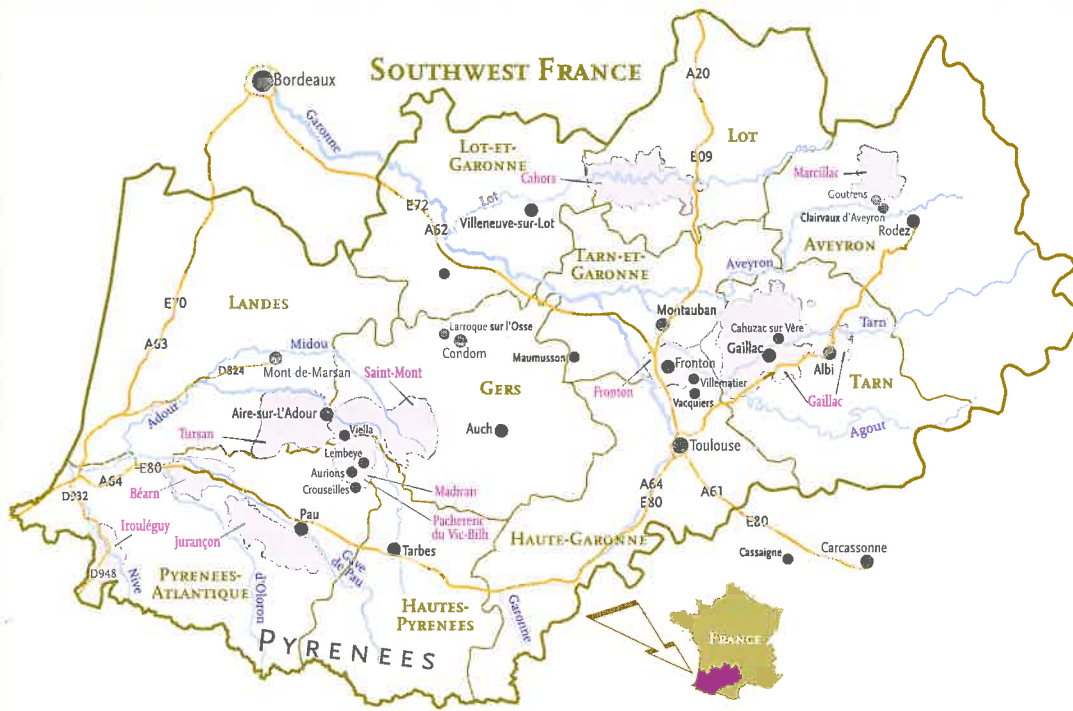
Ancient varieties  
reawaken in a  
multifaceted region

# SOUTHWEST FRANCE



# COVER STORY

Deborah Parker Wong, AIWS, contributes monthly to *The Tasting Panel Magazine*, reporting on the beverage industry in the San Francisco Bay Area and abroad. She has worked as a journalist for the last six years; her previous career spanned 12 years as a communicator, consultant, and educator in the fine-dining and beverage industries.



Domaine Laurens harvest (left); village of Saint-Mont (below).

## DEBORAH PARKER WONG, AIWS

For wine professionals, the southwestern region of France has long been synonymous with such exotic grape varieties as Malbec (which originated in Cahors), the Tannat of Madiran, and the Gros and Petite Mansengs of Irouléguy and Jurançon. Few of us may realize, however, that expressive, indigenous varieties are being resurrected in almost every corner of the region. With French winegrowers facing revised European Union regulations designed to boost quality and competitiveness in the global marketplace, the production of ancient grapes is furthering the region's reputation as a source of unique flavor profiles and values. As today's adventurous wine drinkers explore lesser-known varieties from Spain, Portugal, and Italy, there is good reason to believe they will also be willing to sample the wines of Southwest France whenever quality and price are aligned.

This 311-mile-wide region, bordered by the Massif Central to the east and the Pyrenees to the southwest, has 18 areas that fall into the new category of Appellation d'Origine Protégée (AOP, replacing the former Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée and Vin Délimité de Qualité Supérieure indications) and 20 that can label their wines as Indication Géographique Protégée (IGP, an





Chiroulet director Philippe Fezas and winegrower Dominique Andiran (top center); Plaimont product manager Lise Mannevy and project manager André Dubosc (top right); Château de Cassaigne winery (bottom center) and vineyards (bottom right).



overlapping designation for all *vins de pays*, requiring at least one stage of production to occur within the specified area). Only about a third of these bottlings are currently available on the U.S. market, including wines from the major production areas of Gascony, Cahors, Fronton, and Gaillac and the smaller areas of Irouléguay and Marcillac.

## CÔTES DE GASCOGNE

Perhaps best known as the home of Armagnac, Gascony also produces dry wines from the subregions of Côtes de Gascogne, Béarn, Jurançon, Saint-Mont, Madiran, Pacherenc du Vic-Bilh, and Tursan. Like Armagnac, many of these varietal wines express an intensity unique to the region. Ugni Blanc and Colombard, which are also key ingredients of Armagnac, are often blended with small quantities of international varieties like Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc.

Some independent estates in the Côtes de Gascogne, such as Domaine Chiroulet and Domaine du Tariquet, were long-time Armagnac producers who began making dry wines in the early '90s. In Ténarèze, Chiroulet turns out Merlot-dominated blends with Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Tannat, along with whites from Gros Manseng, Ugni Blanc, and Sauvignon Blanc, grown on soils of chalk and white clay. From the ochre-colored, sandy *sables fauves* soils of the Bas-Armagnac, Tariquet produces expressive blends and varietal bottlings of Ugni Blanc, Colombard, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc, Gros and Petit Manseng, and Sémillon. The Colombard vineyards that surround the Château de Cassaigne, built by the Abbot of Condon in the 13th century, have been used for making dry whites since the late '70s.



## BÉARN

Separated by miles of corn fields, pastures, and woody knolls, the three growing regions of Béarn exemplify the polyculture that still predominates in the foothills of the Pyrenees. The most prolific winegrowing zone is located north





*Domaine du Tariquet estate (left) and press (center); winemaker Rémy Grassa (above); Château de Sabazan vineyards in Saint-Mont (bottom).*

of Irouléguay and west of Madiran in the rolling hills and valleys of Europe's finest salmon- and trout-fishing rivers, the Gave d'Oloron and Gave de Pau. Primary varietals here are the two Mansengs, Tannat, and the Cabernets.

As an AOP, Béarn has included the regions of Madiran and Jurançon since 1975; therefore, some producers in Madiran, where rosés are not permitted, release Béarn rosés, while some in Jurançon, where reds are not recognized, release Béarn reds. Production in Béarn is dominated by the regional cooperative, Cave Coopérative de Bellocq, but there are a few notable independent producers. The family of Pascal Lapeyre was the first domaine to market Béarn in a fluted bottle in 1909, and despite objections from the Alsations, the traditional bottle for Béarn rosé and Jurançon *sec* remains fluted.

## JURANÇON

Located south of Béarn and east of Irouléguay, Jurançon was one of the first appellations in France, dating from 1936. It currently contains 2,471 acres of vines at an average elevation of 984 feet. Vineyards are planted on steep, terraced parcels, often in natural amphitheatres like those of Hermitage. Grape varieties include Petit and Gros Manseng, Courbu Blanc, Petit Courbu, Camaralet de Lasseube, and Lauzet, planted on

two main soil types: marine sediment deposited before and during the formation of the Pyrenees in the south, and a conglomerate of chalk and clay pebbles with siliceous gravel to the north.

Dry Jurançon, vinified from Gros Manseng and noted for its clear green color, lively acidity, and complex minerality, accounts for 75% of the total annual production of about 40,000 cases; the other major product is a sweet, golden, late-harvest Petit Manseng, typically with a touch of botrytis, that combines honeyed aromas of exotic fruits, pineapple, and cinnamon with refreshing acidity. Henri Ramonteau at Domaine Cauhapé is a noted producer of both styles.

## SAINT-MONT

Saint-Mont fits like a puzzle piece into the southwestern corner of the Armagnac region. Vineyards here are situated on the often-steep hillsides of the Adour River and its tributaries, with Tannat, Pinenc, and Cabernet varieties grown on the eastern and southern slopes and Petit Corbu, Arrufiac, and the Mansengs on the western expositions. The region is home to 200 winegrowers and the Plaimont cooperative (its name a contraction of the three local appellations, Plaisance, Aignan, and Saint-Mont), which





Plaimont vineyards in Saint-Mont (left); Château de Sabazan (right).



Le Faîte du Saint-Mont (above); winemakers of Madiran and Pacherenc du Vic-Bilh (left to right): Bastien Dutour of Plaimont; André Beheity, president of Maison des Vins de Madiran; Didier Barré of Domaine Berthoumieu; Lise Mannevy of Plaimont; and Jonathan Martinet, enologist for Cave de Crouseilles and Plaimont (bottom middle left).



manages most of Saint-Mont's 6.5 million-liter annual production.

Considerable work is being done by Plaimont producers such as Château de Sabazan to isolate clones unique to the region, reduce yields, and pursue quality with mandates for high-density planting, hand harvesting, and other modern viticultural methods. Plaimont bottles several heritage wines, including the red and white Le Faîte du Saint-Mont blends, whose cuvées are chosen each year by a panel of sommeliers and restaurateurs and labeled with wooden tags—a practice dating back to the days when they were buried in clay.

## MADIRAN

The structure and vivid expression of the fiercely tannic Tannat grape are hallmarks of Madiran's red wines. While color and flavor descriptors may still revolve around the word "black," new winemaking methods have been introduced to make younger Madirans infinitely more approachable. This international style, termed *tendance*, produces wines that are fresh and generous, with fruity, polished tannins. In a blind tasting of the 2006 and 2007 vintages at the Maison des Vins du Madiran,

the style was typified by the "1907," a wine produced for export by Plaimont to provide a point of entry for modern consumers. The wines of the Cave de Crouseilles cooperative (Premium de Crouseilles and Château de la Motte), Château Viella, Domaine Capmartin, Domaine du Crampilh, and Domaine Labranche-Laffont exhibited savory, concentrated red fruits redolent of cardamom and black pepper, with tannins ranging from sweet and powerful to pleasantly astringent.

Only 20% of Madiran wine is exported, and traditional styles that require several years of aging are still preferred domestically. For example, Didier Barré's signature Domaine Berthoumieu Haute Tradition (60% Tannat, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon) needs two to eight years of bottle age to reach optimal expression, while his 90% Tannat Charles de Batz cuvée is considered positively youthful at 15 years. Tradition and technology go hand in hand in Madiran, as evidenced by second-generation winegrower François Laplace of Château d'Aydie, whose father Pierre was the first independent Madiran producer to bottle wines from his own estate, and his cousin Patrick Ducournau of Domaine Mouréou, who created the technique of micro-oxygenation specifically to tame the wild Tannat.



## PACHERENC DU VIC-BILH

The dry and sweet white wines of Pacherenc are produced from a mere 124 acres of stony vineyards, called *peyrusquets*, in the same area as the reds of Madiran. Winemakers here believe that vigor allows for greater fruit expression, adding ripe stone fruits to a floral-citrus-mineral framework. In fact, Pacherenc's whites, made primarily from Gros and Petite Manseng, can rival those of the Jurançon in their concentration and intensity. As with the Madiran reds, I found focused flavors, midpalate concentration, and considerable length in wines from Château Laffitte-Teston, Château Montus, and Domaine Labranche-Laffont.

## CAHORS

Defined by Le Causse, an old limestone plateau of calcareous stones over a clay subsoil, and the scree-covered hills of the Lot River valley, Cahors is a red-wine region: 70% of its acreage is devoted to Malbec, 20% to Merlot, and 10% to Tannat. Malbec, also known here as Côt or Auxerrois, is a low-yielding variety that produces strong, alcoholic wines. In the glass, Cahors wines are often described as opaque black, exhibiting intense black-fruit, licorice, and violet aromas. On the palate, they are concentrated, with firm and fleshy tannins that expand and gain complexity with age.

Bertrand-Gabriel Vigouroux at Château de Haute-Serre produces two modern AOP wines, Château de Haute-Serre Rouge (85% Malbec, 10% Merlot, 5% Tannat) and Pigmentum (100% Malbec). Neither is intended for long aging, and both will benefit from gentle decanting an hour before service.

## FRONTON

East of Gascony and just north of the city of Toulouse lies Fronton, where the local grape, Negrette (known in California as Pinot St. George), has adapted itself particularly well to the gravelly and alluvial soils of the region. Negrette produces colorful, meaty wines that are relatively low in acidity, with aromas ranging from violets and licorice to animal.

At Château Plaisance, Marc Pénavayre cultivates Negrette, Syrah, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Gamay on the low-yielding alluvial terraces above the Tarn River. Pénavayre works the soils organically to help maintain acidity in his vibrant reds, offering three cuvées. Other Frontonais producers of note include Château Bellevue la Forêt, Château la Colmbière, Château Montauriol, Domaine Laurou, and Domaine Le Roc.

## GAILLAC

Bisected by the Tarn River, Gaillac is divided into three terroirs by the parallel river valleys of the Vère and the Tarn. Sandy, gravelly soils dominate the left bank of the Tarn; the right bank is a diverse area with the clay-limestone soils that give Gaillac reds their softness. The same soil types are found on the high plateau of Cordes, which spreads across the northern end of the region.

Many distinctive varieties that have long been cultivated in Gaillac are emerging from obscurity in the hands of modern producers like Robert and Bernard Plageoles of Domaine des Très Cantous. Of those that hold AOP



Château Plaisance director Marc Pénavayre (top); Domaine Le Roc winery (middle top); Plaisance vineyards (middle bottom) and wines (above).

## KEY PRODUCERS

### Cave Coopérative de Bellocq

La Cave de Gan  
53 Av. Henri IV  
4290 Gan  
+33-559-215703  
www.cavedejurancon.com  
Importer: Bordeaux,  
Etc. Wine Trade  
www.bwtrade.com

### Cave de Crouseilles

64350 Crouseilles  
+33-559-681093  
Importer:  
Winesellers, Ltd.  
www.winesellersltd.com

### Château Bellevue la Forêt

5580 Route de Grisolles  
31620 Fronton  
+33-534-279191  
www.chateaubellevuelaforet.com  
Importer: Wine  
Traditions, Ltd.  
Falls Church, Va.

### Château d'Aydie

42 Place Marcadieu  
64350 Lembeye  
+33-540-853035  
Importer: Frank Leonard  
www.viwinewholesale.com

### Château de Cassaigne

32100 Cassaigne  
+33-562-280402  
www.chateaudecassaigne.com  
Importer:  
Winesellers, Ltd.  
www.winesellersltd.com



Aerial view of Gaillac (left); Domaine des Très Cantous vineyard (right); winemakers of Gaillac (left to right): Pascal Tamalet, president of the Gaillac Wine Board; Alan Geddes of Château de Mayragues; Alain Cazottes of Château de Terrisses; Jean Gervais of Domaine Pialentou; and Benoît de Guigné, export manager for La Cave Labastide (bottom).

status, Mauzac Vert, Ondenc, and Lion de l'Oeil are the most widely grown whites, and Braucol (or Fer Servadou), Duras, and Mauzac Roux the most widely cultivated reds. Sauvignon Blanc, Muscadelle, Syrah, and Gamay are also present in smaller quantities. The white Verdanel and the red Mauzac Noir and Prunelart are gaining popularity, but are still classified as IGP.

Mauzac Vert is also grown farther east in Limoux, where it's the traditional variety for sparkling wines, but the Plageoleses' version is a bright, simple white with pure aromas of ripe, red apple and a decidedly creamy finish. Ondenc offers aromas of bitter orange rind that carry through on the palate with a broad mouthfeel and a soft finish. Verdanel also exhibits citrus aromas, its ripe grapefruit melding with creamy *croustade* (a local pastry). Lion de l'Oeil, which is named "far from the eye" because of its long-stemmed grapes, is lower in acidity and typically blended with Mauzac for softness. The Plageoleses are credited with recovering the last remaining vines of Prunelart at an ampelographic conservatory in nearby Marseillan, and the variety is now being cultivated by several of the region's young winemakers. Compared to

Prunelart's earthy blackberry aromas, Braucol shows more blackcurrant, along with lighter, red-pepper-laced tannins and a touch of menthol. Duras, with its deep color, supple tannins, and peppery, spicy flavors, is the preferred variety for rosés.

Blending is relatively new to Gaillac, dating only to 2003. At Château de Rhodes, for example, winemaker Agathe Catinat blends Duras, Braucol, and Syrah to make three different cuvées.

## MARCILLAC

One of the region's youngest appellations, Marcillac lies east of Cahors, with vineyards sited on steep, terraced hillsides averaging 1,300 feet in elevation. Its distinctive red-clay *rougiers* soils, rich in iron oxide, result in a singular expression of Fer Servadou—or Mansois, as it is known here—with deep color, lean redcurrant and raspberry flavors, granular tannins, and an iron-laced minerality. Although as much as 10% Cabernet Sauvignon is allowed, top producers such as Domaine du Cros and Domaine Laurens eschew blending, preferring to turn out wines of absolute typicity.



## SOUTHWEST FRANCE APPELLATIONS

AOPs	GAILLAC	IGPs**
BRULHOIS	IROULÉGUY	COMTÉ DE TOLOSAN
CAHORS	JURANÇON	CÔTES DE GASCogne
COTEAUX DU QUERCY	LAVILLEDIEU	CÔTES DU TARN
CÔTES DE MILLAU	MADIRAN	
ENTRAYGUES ET DU FEL	MARCILLAC	
ESTAING	PACHERENC DU VIC-BILH	
FLOC DE GASCogne*	SAINT-MONT	
FRONTON	SAINT-SARDOS	
	TURSAN	

\*Grape must be blended with Armagnac, a *mistelle*, or *vin de liqueur*; white and rosé versions permitted.

\*\*Of 20 IGPs, these three produce 80% of the exports to the United States.



## OUTSTANDING RECENT RELEASES

### Producteurs Plaimont Colombelle, Côtes de Gascogne

2009 \$9

70% Colombard, 30% Ugni Blanc. A warm 2009 growing season allowed producers to bring out focused citrus, mango, guava, and passionfruit flavors. Crisp, clean, and easy at 11.5% alcohol.

### Domaine du Tariquet Classic, Côtes de Gascogne

2009 \$9

60% Ugni Blanc, 40% Colombard. Tariquet's *océanique* terroir produces floral and citrus notes that are well concentrated on the palate, with crisp yellow apple and bright, tangy minerality on the finish.

### Producteurs Plaimont

#### Les Vignes Retrouvées, Saint-Mont

2008 \$16

60% Gros Manseng, 20% Petit Corbu, 20% Arrufiac. Plaimont's white blend features delicate aromas of white flowers and ripe pomelo zest, concentrated minerality, and dry extract on the midpalate, with a lengthy finish enhanced by *sur lie* aging and *bâtonnage*.

### Domaine Brana Ilori Blanc, Irouléguay

2008 \$13

50% Gros Manseng, 50% Petit Courbu. Delicate floral, creamy pineapple, and smoky mineral aromas mingle on a vibrant midpalate that finishes with plenty of length.

### Producteurs Plaimont

#### Château de Sabazan, Saint-Mont

2005 \$25

70% Tannat, 15% Pinenc, 15% Cabernet Franc. This old-vine cuvée shows concentrated boysenberry fruit on a fleshy midpalate, with chewy tannins and a complex finish.

### Domaine Berthoumieu

#### Charles de Batz, Madiran

2005 \$19

90% Tannat, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon. Opaque black in color, with robust amounts of fruit and tannin. Rich blackberry and cassis flavors, well-integrated oak, and a long, tannin-driven finish make for a wine with loads of potential.

### Producteurs Plaimont 1907, Madiran

2007 \$15

Predominantly Tannat, blended with Cabernet Sauvignon. Inky and medium-bodied, with blackberry and mulberry aromas and flavors. Black olive and black spices complement round and decidedly sweet-wooded tannins.

### Château Plaisance, Fronton

2008 \$11

70% Negrette, 25% Syrah, 5% Cabernet Franc. Finely balanced between fruit, acid, and tannin, with a vibrant, dark-fruit core and black-pepper aromas.

### Château Plaisance Thibaut, Fronton

2008 \$15

80% Negrette, 20% Syrah. Named for the winemaker's son, this cuvée spends 18 months in second-use oak. It displays deep black-raspberry aromas; a meaty, dense midpalate with rich, spicy tannins; and black licorice on the finish.

### Château Plaisance Tot Co Que Cal, Fronton

2006 \$25

80% Negrette, 20% Syrah. Marc Pénavayre's flagship wine (whose name means "all that you need" in the Occitan dialect), offers blackberry aromas; rich, velvety, savory tannins; and a long, mineral finish.

### Domaine Le Roc Folle Noir d'Ambat, Fronton

2008 \$14

100% Negrette. Playfully titled the "crazy black," this cuvée hails from a unique site with ferrous clay soils that contribute notes of smoky, provocative black olive. A massive midpalate with black-plum flavors is followed by a concentrated, graphite-dominated finish.

### Domaine des Très Cantous Le Prunelart, Côtes du Tarn, Gaillac

2008 \$20

100% Prunelart. Soft, with earthy aromas of blackberry and fresh prune, flavors of cinnamon and spice, and a complex finish.

### Château de Rhodes Rouge, Gaillac

2006 \$19

40% Duras, 26% Brauacol, 14% Syrah, 11% Merlot, 9% Cabernet Franc. Complex aromas of black fruit and bay leaf lead to a dark-cherry and black-pepper midpalate; lean, well-structured tannins; and an earthy, mineral-driven finish.

### Château de Rhodes Chevalier du Rhodes, Gaillac

2006 \$17

41% Duras, 34% Syrah, 20% Cabernet Franc, 5% Merlot. A complex nose of black licorice and bay leaf is followed by dark cherry on the palate and black pepper and licorice on the finish.

### Château de Rhodes Rouge, Gaillac

2006 \$26

50% Syrah, 17% Brauacol, 19% Merlot, 14% Cabernet Franc. Agathe Catinat's Syrah-dominated blend spends 12 months in oak and offers red fruits; silky, ripe tannins; and notes of vanilla and coconut. Leaner than her other two reds, it displays graphite and earthy minerality on a lengthy finish.

### Domaine Brana Rouge, Irouléguay

2006 \$25

70% Cabernet Franc, 25% Tannat, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon. Violet-colored, with aromas of blackberry, spices, and licorice. Smooth tannins emerge from a year of aging in second-use oak. Prices are current estimated retail.

## IROULÉGUAY

The terraced vineyards of Irouléguay, a tiny village of 200 inhabitants, lie nestled in the heart of Le Pays Basque—the Basque Country—on the Franco-Spanish border. One of the smallest AOPs in France, the region produces primarily red wines from Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Tannat, with 10% of its production devoted to the white varieties of Gros and Petit Manseng and Courbu. Vines are grown on

narrow, steeply terraced slopes with an average grade of 65% and soils of sedimentary Triassic sandstone and limestone, rich in iron with occasional patches of calcium.

Domaine Brana is one of the few families to continue producing white wines from Petit Courbu, along with red blends characteristic of the region.

Famed for its *douceur de vivre*, or "sweetness of life," Gascony is a region where Arma-

## COVER STORY

### KEY PRODUCERS

#### Château de Haute-Serre

46230 Cieurac  
+33-565-208020  
www.hautserre.fr

Importer: Baron François  
www.baronfrancois.com

#### Château de Rhodes

Boissel  
81600 Gaillac  
+33-563-570602  
www.chateau-de-rhodes.com

Importer: The Old World Wine Agency  
www.frenchwineimport.com

#### Château la Colombière

190 Route de Vacquiers  
31620 Villaudric  
+33-561-824405  
www.chateaulacolombiere.com

Importer: Bourgeois Family Selections  
www.bourgeoiswines.com

#### Château Laffitte-Teston

32400 Maumusson  
+33-562-697458  
www.chateau-laffitte-teston.com

Importer: Grape News Importing  
www.grapenewsimporting.com

#### Château Montauriol

31340 Villematier  
+33-561-353058  
www.vignobles-nicolasgelis.fr  
Importer: WineWise  
www.winewise.biz

#### Château Montus

32400 Maumusson-Laguian  
+33-562-697467  
Importer: A French Paradox, Inc.  
www.afrenchparadox.com



Château de Rhodes wine-maker Agathe Catinat (top); Domaine des Très Cantous's Bernard Plageoles (above).



## KEY PRODUCERS

**Château Plaisance**  
Place de la Mairie  
31340 Vacquiers  
+33-561-849741  
www.chateau-plaisance.fr  
Importer: USA Wine West  
www.usawinewest.com

**Château Viella**  
32400 Viella  
+33-562-697581  
www.chateauviella.com  
Importer: The Old World Wine Agency  
www.frenchwineimport.com

**Domaine Berthoumieu**  
32400 Viella  
+33-562-697405  
www.domaine-berthoumieu.com  
Importer: Charles Neal Selections  
www.charlesnealselections.com

**Domaine Brana**  
64220 Saint-Jean Pied de Port  
+33-559-371428  
www.brana.fr  
Importer: Frederick Wildman & Sons, Ltd.  
www.frederickwildman.com

**Domaine Capmartin**  
34200 Monmusson  
+33-562-697492

Importer: Charles Neal Selections  
www.charlesnealselections.com

**Domaine Cauhapé**  
64360 Monein  
+33-559-213302  
www.cauhape.com  
Importer: Michael Skurnik Wines  
www.skurnikwines.com

**Domaine Chiroulet**  
32100 Larroque sur l'Osse  
+33-562-280221  
www.chiroulet.com  
Importer: Charles Neal Selections  
www.charlesnealselections.com

**Domaine des Très Cantous**  
81140 Cahuzac sur Vere  
+33-563-339040  
www.vins-plageoles.com  
Importer: Charles Neal Selections  
www.charlesnealselections.com

**Domaine du Crampilh**  
64350 Aurions-Idernes  
+33-559-040063  
Importer: Bourgeois Family Selections  
www.bourgeoiswines.com

**Domaine du Cros**  
12390 Goutrens  
+33-565-727177  
www.domaine-du-cros.com  
Importer: Frederick Wildman & Sons, Ltd.  
www.frederickwildman.com

**Domaine du Tariquet**  
32800 Eauze  
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www.tariquet.com  
Importer: Robert Kacher Selections  
www.robertkacherselections.com

**Domaine Labranche-Laffont**  
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Importer: Charles Neal Selections  
www.charlesnealselections.com

**Domaine Lapeyre**  
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www.jurancon-lapeyre.fr  
Importer: Charles Neal Selections  
www.charlesnealselections.com

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7 Avenue de la Tour  
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www.domaine-laurens.com  
Importer: Triage Wines  
www.triagewines.com

**Domaine Laurou**  
31620 Fronton  
+33-561-824088  
Importer: The Old World Wine Agency  
www.frenchwineimport.com

**Domaine Le Roc**  
31620 Fronton  
+33-561-829390  
www.leroc-fronton.com  
Importer: Charles Neal Selections  
www.charlesnealselections.com

**Georges Vigouroux**  
46003 Cahors  
+33-565-208081  
www.g-vigouroux.fr  
Importer: A French Paradox  
www.afrenchparadox.com

**Producteurs Plaimont**  
32400 Saint-Mont  
+33-562-696287  
www.plaimont.com  
Importer: Winesellers, Ltd.  
www.winesellersltd.com

gnac is still assessed by rubbing a few drops on your palms and then nosing your cupped hands for quality and character. The stalls at local markets brim with seasonal produce and local specialties, including mild red garlic, walnuts, prunes, charcuterie, and cheeses, along with the ever-present tins of foie gras and cassoulet. The latter, the region's signature dish, is a multi-cultural conglomeration of the New World's haricot verts, which made their way to France in the 16th century, and the slow, clay-pot cooking indigenous to the Southwest. White corn is planted across the area, both for use in fattening ducks and geese for foie gras and for the production of *millas*, a cornmeal porridge. Cahors is known for its high-quality truffles, mushrooms, and milk-fed lamb.

Gascony's diverse soils are fertile ground for world-renowned cheeses such as Roquefort, made from unpasteurized ewe's milk, and Cabécou, a goat cheese from the medieval settlement of Rocamadour in the rich countryside of Causses du Quercy. Farther west, Ossau-Iraty, a soft ewe's-milk cheese, is produced either in Ossau (in the valley of Béarn), or Iraty (in the forests of the Pays Basque). Tourmalet, a rustic, semihard ewe's-milk cheese, is made in neighboring Jurançon. Mineral spas and mineral waters, including the popular brands Abatilles and Luchon, are also major regional industries.

Whether it takes the form of table wines, Armagnac, cheese, or water, American restaurateurs could benefit from offering a little of Southwest France's *douceur de vivre* to their guests. 🍷