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LANGUEDOC

La Pèira vertical and other Languedoc treasures

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An analysis of which of our many articles is most popular reveals that you seem particularly interested in the Languedoc. I'm thrilled by this as I sincerely believe that the best wines of the Languedoc represent some of France's best value: great hand-crafted, terroir-influenced wine, generally without the price tags associated with the most famous (I nearly wrote 'best') wines of Bordeaux, Burgundy and the Rhône.

Below most significantly is an account of all vintages ever made of the

grand vin

of one of the Languedoc's most ambitious estates, La Pèira en Damaisèla. These wines really are very good – as they should be since they cost around £70 a bottle from their principal UK retailer Berry Bros – although admittedly only about 300 cases are made each year. They also make about 500 cases of a second wine, the red Rhône blend Las Flors de la Pèira (about £30 a bottle), and a white blend Deusyls de la Pèira at the same price. Then there is also what might be regarded as a third wine, Les Obriers de la Pèira, that retails at around £17 a bottle (see my tasting notes on a wide array of vintages with an average score of around 16 or 16.5). And as though this were not enough, there is a varietal Mourvèdre called Matissat, about which I wrote last year in

[La Pèira's varietal Mourvèdre](#)

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The 11.4-ha property is located on the wild terrain of the Terrasses du Larzac high above the

Languedoc plain in the Hérault. The grand vin is generally made up of about 70% Syrah and 30% Grenache grown, unusually for the region, side by side on the same soils, deep gravelly quaternary alluvium. Co-owner Rob Dougan describes these deposits as 'set down here over the same period, and in the same way as those in the Médoc, Graves, St-Émilion or Pomerol – but just on a different side of the Massif Central. Instead of the Gironde you have the Hérault river...

'Oddly for this region, La Pèira's Bois de Pauliau vineyard has been designated AOC for over half a century, as the most northerly of the two zones of the Clairette du Languedoc AOC (1948). Near La Pèira, and still in the Clairette AOC,

France's earliest known winery

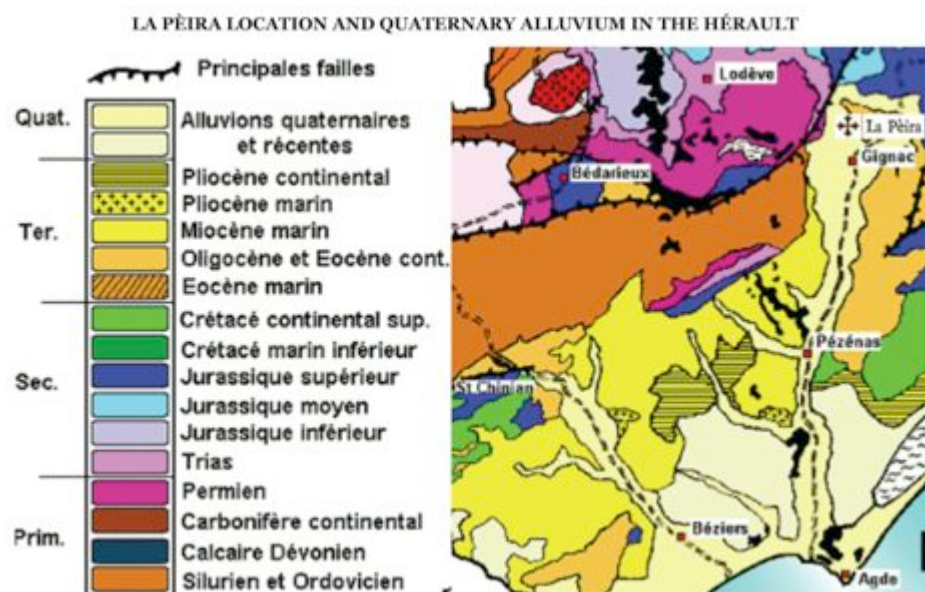
(10 AD) was discovered in 2007. Indeed, the first mention of French wine in literature as being of significant merit is found in Pliny's

Natural History

(77-79 AD) in which the white wines of Baeterrae [Béziers] nearby are cited as worthy of note (alongside the resinous reds of Vienne). (Béziers is situated on a vast plain of quaternary alluvium that follows two seams northward along the Orb river toward St-Chinian and along the Hérault river toward the Terrasses du Larzac – see below). And, of course, Hugh Johnson states of this area in

The Story of Wine

: "These are the first extensive vineyards in France we can be certain about".'



The property is co-owned by Karine Ahton and Robert Dougan with Jérémie Depierre as winemaker and Claude Gros as consultant. Varieties grown are Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre, Cinsault, Carignan, Viognier, Roussanne, Marsanne and Clairette. Here's their assessment of the character of each of the vintages described below.

- 2005 – the first vintage; concentrated and ripe
- 2006 – a cooler year

- 2007 – a great year
- 2008 – another cooler vintage
- 2009 – a warm vintage
- 2010 – a great vintage
- 2011 – an excellent and very interesting year slightly more akin to the 2006, 2008
- 2012 – a lighter and unusual vintage for La Pèira which has produced very interesting results

La Pèira has had less than 10 years to establish a reputation whereas Mas de Daumas Gassac on the outskirts of Aniane south east of La Pèira has been waving the flag for top-quality wine from the Languedoc since its first vintage, 1978. Advised initially by the late Professor Émile Peynaud of Bordeaux, the Guibert family have put most of their eggs in the Cabernet Sauvignon basket. This can mean that in youth the reds can seem pretty callow, so I was delighted to have the chance to taste a fully mature example, a 2000, alongside the latest release of the red, and the particularly interesting and distinctive blended dry white. Richard is planning to attend a major vertical tasting of wines from this celebrated property just before Vinisud, the southern French wine fair in Montpellier, next month.

The other tasting notes below refer to a very small assortment of wines that I happened to have tasted recently. Beaubois and La Dournie share an export manager so I have included both, while being aware that, strictly speaking, the Costières de Nîmes is now part of the greater southern Rhône rather than the eastern Languedoc – not least because of its dependence on Grenache.

LA PÈIRA

La Pèira 2012 Languedoc, Terrasses du Larzac

17

Mid ruby. Very different from the previous vintages – and I suspect not just because it is younger. Broader and more floral and transparent somehow. A real joker with none of the intensity of the previous vintages but with lots of sinewy appeal. Cool and fresh and with lots of freshness. To be drunk sooner than some? (JR)

14.5%

Drink 2016 – 2022

La Pèira 2011 Languedoc, Terrasses du Larzac

17

Crimson and not that dense. Mid crimson. Treacle notes with herbs and spices. Dry finish. Still neat and racy. Transparent. Lively. Overall there is the trademark combination of minerals and sweetness. Sweetness dominates at the moment. Then a bit chewy on the end. (JR)

14.5%

La Pèira 2010 Languedoc, Terrasses du Larzac

18

Very dark indeed. Complex, well-balanced nose. Still very youthful but with most impressive raw ingredients. Lots of both tannin and acidity. Young but hugely promising. Not too hot but very nuanced with a dry, terroir-driven finish. Neat, reminds me of a particularly good Douro red table wine. (JR)

14.5%

Drink 2017 – 2030

La Pèira 2009 Languedoc, Terrasses du Larzac

17

A warm year. Pruney colour. Scented and charming. More obviously sweet and pruney than the earlier vintages. Not as refreshing as some. A bit drying on the end. Very sweet overall. A dramatic wine but less my style than some others. Quite chunky tannins. Heat on the finish. (JR)

14.5%

Drink 2017 – 2025

La Pèira 2008 Languedoc, Terrasses du Larzac

17

A cool year. Dark brownish crimson. Scented and expressive. Quite marked acidity but lovely texture and fluidity. Still with tannins lightly in evidence on the finish. Dry, as opposed to sweet, overall. Lots of minerals and interest here – all nicely showcased. (JR)

14.5%

Drink 2015 – 2023

La Pèira 2007 Languedoc, Terrasses du Larzac

17 +

Dark purplish crimson. Particularly intense nose – so intense that it needs a great deal of coaxing out of the glass. Very intense, almost mentholated nose. Still introvert. Masses of tannin and fruit density but at the moment not much expression. Thick and embryonic with a bit of heat on the finish. (JR)

14.5%

Drink 2015 – 2025

La Pèira 2006 Languedoc, Terrasses du Larzac

17.5

Healthy crimson. A cooler year maybe but a much more refined wine than the very slightly rustic 2005. Polished with a wonderfully sumptuous texture and delightful freshness on the finish after a richly dark-fruited start. There's something black about this wine: tar? liquorice? But overall it has great presence on the palate. Neat finish. (JR)

14.5%

Drink 2010 – 2022

La Pèira 2005 Coteaux du Languedoc

16.5

Hot year. Very concentrated ruby right out to the rim. Warm and savoury on the nose. Really dense and satisfying, even if far from subtle. Quite a charge of tannins still – quite 2005 (as in Bordeaux)! Sweet and with a lightly burnt note. A wine to make an impact, and one that does slightly remind me of [Trevallon](#). Sweet blackberry fruit on the finish and a certain graininess. As though the grape skins were pretty thick. (JR)

14.5%

Drink 2010 – 2020

MAS DE DAUMAS GASSAC

Mas de Daumas Gassac 2012 IGP St-Guilhem-le-Désert

16.5

Viognier, Chardonnay, an unspecified Manseng and Chenin Blanc. Honeyed Viognier elbows its way to the front on the nose but there is admirable tang (thanks to the Manseng?) and acidity (Chenin?). Complex and saved from being fat. Already fun to drink but it tastes as though it will become more interesting. Still a bit tense on the finish. (JR)

13.5%

Drink 2013 – 2017

Mas de Daumas Gassac 2011 IGP St-Guilhem-le-Désert

16.5 +

80% Cabernet Sauvignon. Still very youthful nose (to be fair, the back label suggests three to five years old for drinking young but up to 25 years for drinking it ')

en majesté

'. Dark crimson with more than a suggestion of warm earth underlying the Cabernet structure. Interesting wine with real depth but no excess of sweetness nor alcohol. Halfway between claret and La Pèira? It would be a waste to drink something so embryonic now but it certainly seems to have potential. Just a bit inky on the finish at the moment. (JR)

13.5%

Drink 2016 – 2028

Mas de Daumas Gassac 2000 Vin de Pays de l'Hérault

18

I had to guess at the alcohol since there was a mark over the relevant figure on the label. 80% Cabernet Sauvignon and the rest is a big mix. Pale evolved ruby. Tasted immediately after two rather smart 2000 St-Emilions, this by no means disgraced itself and arguably had more complexity and grunt. Lovely sweetness on the finish but really appetising savoury fruit beforehand. Good freshness too. Some floral notes on the nose and a little dusty soil taste on the palate. Good wine! (JR)

13%

Drink 2009 – 2013

OTHER PRODUCERS

Ch Beaubois, Confidence 2012 Costières de Nîmes

16.5

This wine in a broad bottle is 95% Grenache and 5% Syrah. Mid to pale crimson. Big and rich and yet with good lift and life. Châteauneuf's little sister? One that was grown on sand? Not that concentrated but almost approachable. (JR)

14.5%

Drink 2014 – 2019

Ch Beaubois, Elegance 2012 Costières de Nîmes

16

Bright mid crimson. Rich Grenache nose in a corset of fine Syrah. Not the most complex wine in the world but awfully appetising and friendly. Fine tannins and some lift. Not remotely heavy. (JR)

14%

Drink 2013 – 2015

Ch La Dournie 2012 St-Chinian

16.5

Syrah, Grenache, Carignan blend. Polished, very rich, lightly salty and beautifully balanced. A strangely heady floral note. Not made for the very long term but great fun to drink already. Syrah is definitely the dominant ingredient. And then there is a little suggestion of schist. Long and savoury. (JR)

13.5%

Drink 2013 – 2018

Ch La Dournie, Élise 2010 St-Chinian

16

Blend of Syrah and Grenache. Dark crimson. Sweeter than the regular bottling of 2012. Transparent fruit with more insistent tannins. Not quite ready. Dusty finish. A little sour. (JR)

14%

Drink 2014 – 2019

Vins du Littoral 2011 Languedoc, Pic St-Loup

15.5

Supermarket wine from the co-op of St-Félix de Lodez, high up above the Languedoc plain. Pale ruby and with a slight rusty-nail character on the finish of some attractively dusty, wholesome fruit that doesn't taste at all industrial though it is not especially intense. I wouldn't age it very long. Tastes like a dry year. Not a bad price. (JR)

13%

Drink 2012 – 2014

£8.99 Morrison's

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