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LANGUEDOC

La Pèira's varietal Mourvèdre



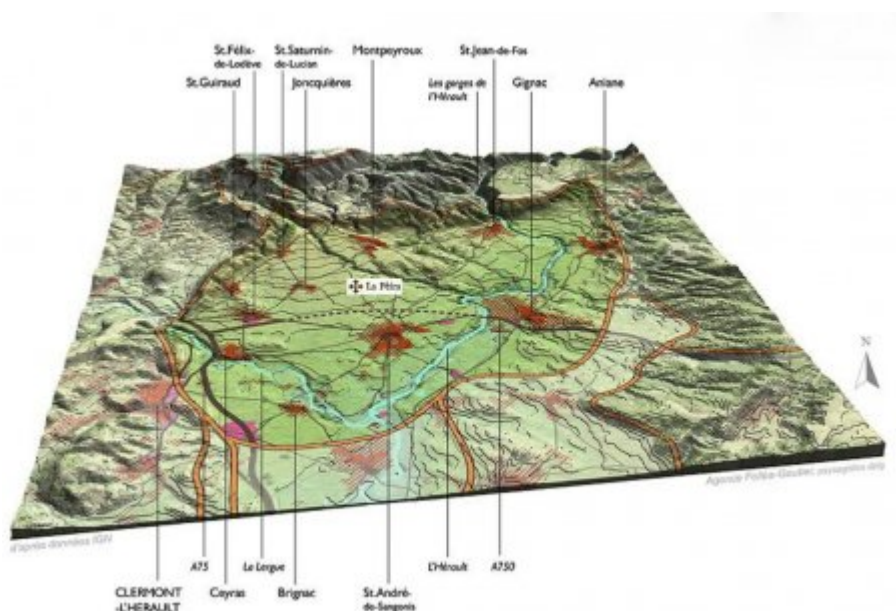
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This vertical of a particularly fine Languedoc wine is offered as a taster for the big collection of tasting notes on wines from this, surely France's best-value wine region, to be published later this week.

La Pèira, or La Pèira en Damaisèla to give it its full name, is a particularly promising enterprise in the exciting Terrasses du Larzac subregion high above the plain of the Languedoc. The illustration below shows exactly where the estate, advised by the admirable oenologist Claude Gros, is to be found. There is clearly real sensibility for the local terrain and varietal traditions.



But as one of the outfit's partners, musician Rob Dougan, pointed out to me, they decided to try one variety that is not strictly speaking of the region and, moreover, to make it, most unusually, in 100% varietal form. Here's how he described their increasingly celebrated Matissat:

We think it's a wonderful expression of Mourvèdre as grown in the inland hills of the Hérault – in the piedmont of the Larzac – far away from its coastal haunt of Bandol.

We're surprised to find it's one of a handful of pure Mourvèdre wines each year in France, and that even in Bandol the practice is frowned upon: 'The tradition has always been to blend. You should be suspicious of 100% Mourvèdre cuvées, which can be simplistic' (Daniel Ravier of Dom Tempier in Bandol).

Here in the Terrasses du Larzac, temperatures drop sharply in late September and October. My father-in-law, who studied medicine in Montpellier, remembers one winter, a fellow student from Norway complaining he'd never been so cold in his life. Harvested in October's morning fogs (as I mentioned in my letter to you) it's about as close we'll come at La Pèira to making a Nebbiolo.

With the same process and single cépage each year, I'd hope the wine might offer an interesting window on vintages 2007-2011 in the Terrasses du Larzac (Bettane and Desseauve's 'Appellation of the Year' in 2011).

Five harvests later, after that of Matissat 2007, we've begun to release the first vintage(s). The few bottles taken up by Berry Bros in the UK, and by our importers in Europe, have almost sold out.

We received various expressions of interest on mentioning the bottling some time ago (and would be more than happy to add others for information only or for direct purchase at matissat@gmail.com).

The letter to which he refers said:

In 2007, the quality of the Mourvèdre, from the Bois de Pauliau plot (grown metres away from where it's vinified), was excellent. It was destined to go into our first wine (La Pèira) and to join the Syrah and Grenache grown in the very same parcel. It never found its place there. And while we've bottled it each year since, we've never shown it, nor offered it for sale until recently. We thought it was a fascinating expression of Mourvèdre, grown in the hinterland of the Hérault as opposed to its heartland by the sea, and of the Terrasses du Larzac.

Also, with the vinification, vineyard work, and the single cépage as constant, it offers an interesting insight into the vintages 2007-2011 in this region.

Since the first bottling, over the years, we've struggled (repeatedly and happily, mind you) to comprehend why this pure Mourvèdre was not valid, complete, and complex on its own singular terms.

Harvested in October fogs here, it's about as close we'll come at La Pèira to making a Nebbiolo. And Mourvèdre could, in a way, be considered France's dark cousin to Italy's great Nebbiolo.

As you can see from my notes, presented from first to most recent vintage, I was impressed. When I tasted the 2007 initially I was blown away by the intensity of the fruit and its superripe liquorice character, but I have to confess that when I tried it with food (a particularly delicious but not excessively spiced Ottolenghi chicken dish), the wine became a little bit porty and tired.

What I loved, however, was the gradual lightening up of the wine, the greater energy and refreshment factor – with the possible exception of the 2009 wine. Make no mistake about it, this is a very special wine made on a very special estate.

I asked Rob whether there had been any evolution in winemaking and he replied, on 1 October:

There's been no conscious change. But no doubt many tiny cumulative changes in vineyard work, harvest dates, soil, age of vines...

This weekend saw 70 mm of rain with many producers unharvested, so 2012 in the Terrasses du Larzac should be interesting.

Wine-searcher cite stockists in France, Germany and the UK (Berry Bros, who list the 2007 and 2009 at £50 a pop).

I see that the New York retailer once offered a La Peira wine on the basis of a quote from California winemaker Manfred Krankl of Sine Qua Non, who urged people to buy it whatever the price. We'll also be publishing Julia's notes on her first exposure to SQN wines later this week.

Still very dark crimson. Direct blackberry essence on the nose. Sweet and subtle. Smudgy liquorice edge. Flattering and round and with almost melted tannins though there's a little chew on the end. Very luscious indeed but too low in acidity to refresh. Just a little overripe. (JR)

14.5%

Drink 2010 – 2014

La Pèira, Matissat Mourvèdre 2008 Languedoc, Terrasses du Larzac

17

Paler than the 2007 with some evolution at the rim. Very mineral and tarry on the nose. Racy and transparent. Lots of freshness. Recognisably related to the 2007 but livelier and drier. A little muscular. Not as heavy as the 2007. Very clean. Not too heavy. (JR)

14.5%

Drink 2013 – 2020

La Pèira, Matissat Mourvèdre 2009 Languedoc, Terrasses du Larzac

16

This wine seems to get lighter with every vintage. Mid ruby with some evolution at the rim. Not much aroma. Light spiciness and then both sweet and some chewy dryness. I'm not convinced about the balance of this wine. The flavour seems to have been rather baked out. A bit awkward. (JR)

14.5%

Drink 2015 – 2020

La Pèira, Matissat Mourvèdre 2010 Languedoc, Terrasses du Larzac

17 +

Mid crimson. Gosh – so different from the 2007! Transparent and lively and very young and racy. I think this could turn out to be a very fine wine indeed. For the moment it's still quite chewy but there is impressive energy here. (JR)

14.5%

Drink 2016 – 2024

La Pèira, Matissat Mourvèdre 2011 Languedoc, Terrasses du Larzac

17.5

Firm transparent deep crimson. Showing the mineral side of this wine at the moment. Delicate but sweet and seductive too. Very appealing. Transparent. This doesn't taste like a 14.5% wine. Very clean, pure and driven. Great energy. (JR)

Drink 2016 – 2026

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