French Wines

ROBERT JOSEPH

GRAPES • REGIONS • TASTING
BEST BUYS • VINTAGES
French Wines

ROBERT JOSEPH
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How to Use this Guide

Whether you are a wine buff or simply enjoy drinking a glass of wine with a meal, this comprehensive guide will provide you with all the information you need on the world of French wines.

Highlights of the introductory section include an informative outline of the history of wine, detailed information on how wine is made, step-by-step instructions in the art of wine tasting, a useful guide to starting a cellar, and handy hints for cooking with wine.

The bulk of the book is divided alphabetically into the 10 wine-making regions of France, with full-color photographs throughout. Each regional chapter opens with an introduction to the region as a whole, followed by a driving tour that encompasses some of the region’s highlights. The pages that follow provide an insight into Robert Joseph’s choices of wine among the region’s appellations, and include a selection of recommended producers, examples of good vintages, ideal wine and food partnerships, and tasting tips.

Because wine and food are so inextricably linked, each chapter includes a mouth-watering introduction to the local dishes, together with a separate box on the various cheeses made in the region, which invariably pair very well with the local wines.

As you delve into the world of French wines, this book will be useful both at home and on your travels through the vineyards of France.
THE REGIONAL TOURS

Locator Map
This locator map pinpoints the part of the region covered by the driving tour.

Driving Tour Map
A suggested route for a driving tour of the region is plotted on this map.

THE INDIVIDUAL APPPELLATIONS

Name of Appellation
In bands color-coded by region, the main appellations appear in alphabetical order.

Description of Appellation
This text describes the appellation and the styles and qualities of its wines.

Key Facts Box
This fact box systematically provides further information about the appellation.

Locator Map
The locator map pinpoints the appellation on a map of the region.

Illustrated Wine
An important wine from the appellation is shown.

KEY FACTS SYMBOLS

- Quality designation, ranked from least good to best
- Top villages and/or vineyards
- Yield
- Climate
- Soil
- Grape varieties, for red, white, and rosé
- Wine style(s)
- Producers or top wines (Champagne)
- Associated producers (Champagne only)
- Recommended dish
- Key vintages, in descending order
- Longevity for red, white, and rosé

TOUR SYMBOLS

- Tasting possible
- Places to eat
- Tourist information
- Site of interest
- Tour route
- Viewpoint

Tour Symbols
A key explains the symbols used (above) on the map.

Touring Tips Box
Here you will find addresses and telephone numbers for the local tourist offices.

Description of Tour
Here you will find details of the sites and places covered by the driving tour.
FIRST FELL IN LOVE with the wines of France as an adolescent while exploring the cellar of my parents’ country hotel. Wine, I imagined then, came in four colors—red, white, pink and brown—and in various levels of sweetness. Pulling a few corks, however, I discovered an extraordinary range of flavors concealed behind the green and clear glass of the bottles.

There was young, red Burgundy, its raspberry tang contrasting with the gamey flavor of older vintages. There was flinty Chablis and nutty Meursault, red Bordeaux full of black currants from the Médoc and full of plums from St Émilion. I discovered notes of gooseberry in Sancerre and spring flowers in wine from Condrieu in the Rhône Valley.

I continued my education on youthful trips to France with the help of a book or two and many generous wine-makers. Both well-known and lesser-known wines, including Jurançon, Château Chalon, and Banyuls, gave me a combined course in geography and history. I discovered the tastes of different grape varieties and the effects of changing soils, climates, and vintages. Even more important, both then and later when I was living in Burgundy, I learned about the vital role of the wine-maker in the alchemy that transforms a simple fruit into a drink that can somehow touch the emotions and linger for decades in the memory of the drinker.

The story of a wine cannot be fully understood without proper reference to the place where it is made, the people who make it, and the local food with which it is drunk. Celebrating all of these things in this book, I have chosen some of France’s best-known wines—and some of the least known—from the merchant’s shelf and restaurant wine list, and endeavored to set them in a context that makes the most sense of their flavor and style.

As well as exploring the flavors and styles of French wines, I have also drawn attention to some of the pitfalls that you may encounter when you come to buy your own wine. Critics now agree that the famous French system of *appellations contrôlées* is in urgent
need of a thorough overhaul. The name of a region on a wine label provides no guarantee of its quality—so while one bottle of Champagne or Bordeaux may be a delight, the next may be a disaster. A supposedly basic Burgundy made by a skilled and diligent wine-maker often tastes much better than an expensive wine made to less exacting standards using grapes from a neighboring grand cru appellation. Besides its inadequacy as an indicator of quality, the appellation system can also be extremely confusing. Cheverny and Cour-Cheverny, for example, are both white wines, made in the same place but from different grape varieties, resulting in wines with completely different flavors. Further, the wines made in Rully taste nothing like the wines made in Reuilly, and likewise, the wines made in Pouilly-Fumé, Pouilly-sur-Loire, and Pouilly-Fuissé have very little in common beyond the first part of their name.

With so many problems like these, it is easy to understand why a growing number of people choose wine that is labeled simply by grape variety, such as Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, or Merlot. By doing so, however, they are missing out on the enormous range of subtle flavors that set wine apart from almost anything else you can drink. The myriad variables of the French climate, microclimates, soils, grapes, wine-makers, and wine-making traditions come together to create an ever-changing maze of different wines, each with its own unique flavors. Despite, and perhaps because of, its complexity, France’s long wine-making tradition still offers surprises and delights to match, and often surpass, those of any other wine-producing country in the world.

My aim in this book is to provide you with a few paths through the exciting maze of French wine, and a few detours around its potential pitfalls. More important, perhaps, I want to provide you with the confidence and the knowledge that will enable you to anticipate the qualities of almost any French wine that you may encounter. I hope you enjoy reading this book half as much as I have enjoyed researching and writing it.
Introducing FRENCH WINES
For those of us who now heed medical warnings about the minimum and maximum weekly consumption of wine, it is worth pausing to recall that, for most of man’s history, wine tended to be the safest, healthiest drink available. It was finding water pure enough to drink that was the luxury.

To listen to some of France’s more chauvinist wine growers, it would be easy to believe that it was their ancestors who first had the notion of turning grapes into wine. In fact, while it was the French who most successfully developed the art of wine-making and created what are now regarded as the world’s most famous wines, credit for the actual invention must go elsewhere. The biblical legend says that it was Noah who first drank wine. According to the Bible, soon after Noah’s boat had come aground in the country that we now know as Turkey, he noticed the giddy antics of a goat that had been eating overripe, partially fermented grapes. Encouraged by the sight, he planted a vineyard and, to the shame of his sons, Noah “drank of the wine and was drunk, and became uncovered in his tent.” If this story is to be believed, not only was Noah the first wine-maker, he was also the first person ever to get drunk. Wine is also featured elsewhere in the Bible. In one case, Lot’s two daughters are described as making their father, with whom they are hiding in a cave, drink wine on two successive nights so that they could “lay with him” and “preserve [his] lineage.” Wine evidently had other uses, too: Abraham, Lot’s contemporary, is described as being blessed and given bread and wine by a priest called Melchezidek.

The Persians, however, tell a very different story. For them, the person who invented wine was not Noah, but a sad princess who was intent on doing away with herself. Assuming that a jar full of frothing grape juice was poisonous, she drank what she believed to be a deadly dose. The pleasurable effects that immediately followed, and indeed her survival, must have come as quite a surprise to the young princess. Sadly, her reaction to the world’s first hangover has gone unrecorded.

SURVIVAL OF THE COOLEST

Whatever story you prefer, it cannot have taken long for man to discover that grape juice, given half a chance, ferments into something alcoholic, and that, with a bit of luck, the beverage may even be pleasant to drink. At the same time, experience would have taught him that fermented grape juice, though generally more robust and
longer-lived than in its natural state, is vulnerable to bacteria that have the ability to convert it into vinegar. We now know that these bacteria are most active at warmer temperatures so, in the absence of the refrigeration and sulfur dioxide that are used today to protect wine against these bacteria, there is no question that the wines with the greatest chance of remaining drinkable from one vintage to the next would have been the ones produced and stored in regions that were relatively cool.

From the earliest vintages made in what is now called the Middle East, the story of wine can be traced alongside the history of most of the civilized world. Archaeological discoveries suggest that wine has been made in Egypt for at least 3,000 years and, according to records, Marco Polo enjoyed wine that was imported into China from Persia in the 1400s. The Romans were very serious about their wine-drinking and laid down the best vintages for as long as 100 years. They are known to have planted vines even in Britain. However, archaeological finds suggest that then, as now, imported wine was more popular.

When European emigrants traveled to the New World, they took both wines and vines with them, so that by the late 19th century it was clear that nothing could stand in the way of the production and gradual spread of wine around the world.
THE HISTORY OF FRENCH WINE

Monks, emperors, and revolutionaries all shaped France’s wine industry. However, more recently, it has been ravaged by disease and jolted by competition from younger countries and the demands of supermarkets.

We have no way of knowing exactly when anyone enjoyed the first mouthful of wine produced from French grapes that were grown on French soil, but we can be pretty sure that there was plenty of wine being drunk in France more than 500 years before the birth of Christ. Some of the first drinkers would have been the Phoenicians and the Greeks in their trading posts on the Mediterranean coast.

The climate of this region, the presence of indigenous vines, and the difficulties of transporting wine in amphorae from their homelands meant that it was inevitable that the newcomers would soon turn their hands to the production of wine.

By the time the Romans occupied the northern part of the country in the first century AD, vines were growing and wine was being made in many of the regions that have since become synonymous with wine. The men who made these wines were often members of tribes that took to the ways of the Romans and continued to make and trade wine following the collapse of the Roman Empire. From the outset, the vine growers sought out pieces of land where the grapes stood the greatest chance of reaching full ripeness. According to local legend, the 9th-century French emperor Charlemagne chose a particular slope on the hill of Corton, in Burgundy (see pp112–159), on which to plant a vineyard. He is said to have noticed that, thanks to regular exposure to sunlight, the snows on that slope were always the first to thaw.

PAVING THE WAY

The churches and monasteries, which were established between the 10th and 13th centuries throughout France, played a crucial role in the further development of wine-making both in this country and beyond. However, France is a fairly large country, and

The Observant Charlemagne

The Emperor Charlemagne is said to have spent much time selecting promising new sites for vineyards.
the difficulties of transporting wine over poor roads limited the markets that the wine could reach. Places with river access, such as Alsace (see pp64–79), and sea ports, such as Bordeaux (see pp80–111), clearly had the greatest advantage.

The arrival of the cork in around 1650 further increased the popularity of wine. In the 1780s, the French Revolution removed the church from the industry. Vineyards that had once been owned by the monasteries were sold off to the middle classes and even to peasants. In 1804, the Code Napoléon was introduced, stating that all heirs, regardless of their age or sex, would share any inheritance, including vineyards, equally between them.

A BREAK FROM TRADITION
The resulting fragmentation of the vineyards, coupled with the arrival of a new breed of landowners, opened the way for merchants whose role lay in blending and selling the wines of numerous small producers. The merchants also benefited from access to new markets as a result of better roads, canals, and railroads.

A century after the revolution, France’s wine industry was thrown into turmoil by the vine diseases mildew and oidium and, worst of all, the phylloxera louse, which affected almost every vine. The vineyards that were replanted—or, to be more precise, grafted with phylloxera-resistant vines—were often very different from the ones that had gone before. Once-famous vineyards shrunk, once-familiar grape varieties disappeared, and, between the two world wars, fraudulent labeling was rife. This latter practice was countered in the 1930s when the appellation contrôlée legislation was introduced.

During the second half of the 20th century, unprecedented competition from producers in the New World resulted in extensive research into the “how” and “why” of vine-growing and wine-making. As the evolution of French wine accelerated, previously neglected vineyards in the south of the country were given a new lease of life.

If the way in which wine is made has changed as a result of increased competition, so has the way in which it is bought and drunk. The recent rapid growth in the number of supermarkets in France has encouraged wine-drinkers to try wines from other regions. Most French wine-drinkers now drink less, but better, wine than they did in the past. However, many young French people do not drink wine at all, which helps to explain why many French wine-makers now have to be much more focused on selling their wines overseas.

Napoleonic Inheritance
Here Napoleon is pictured signing the Code Napoléon, the law that splits every inheritance, including any vineyards, equally between all the heirs.

Supermarket Revolution
Today, we buy wine with an ease that was undreamed of by the Romans or Charlemagne, and at far lower prices for the quality offered.
How Wine is Made

Wine-making is both one of the simplest and one of the most complex activities known to man. It brings together the skills of the farmer, the horticulturist, the cook, the chemist, and, occasionally, the artist.

The French language has no commonly used translation for “wine-maker” or “winery,” terms that are used frequently throughout the English-speaking world. In French, the person who turns grapes into wine is known as the vigneron or viticulteur—words that refer to the growing of grapes in the vineyard rather than the process of converting the harvested fruit into wine. As far as the word “winery” is concerned, even a state-of-the-art, fully computerized establishment is still usually known in France as a cave, or a cellar, when it could be mistaken by passersby for a semiconductor factory.

In France, traditionally at least, outside of Bordeaux, Champagne, and Alsace, the most visible words on a wine label refer to the place where the grapes were grown. The name of the producer appears only in small print. In the New World, by contrast, it is the wine maker or winery—“the brand”—that takes center stage.

DIFFERENCE OF OPINION

These differences reveal the French producers’ sense of tradition and their belief that wine is, as they say, “made in the vineyard.” Few New World producers would disagree with this view, but in the US and Australia, the emphasis has often been on what happens to grapes at the winery. In the 1990s, the two attitudes collided when, unhappy with the wine they were getting from some French regions, British retailers sent “flying wine-makers,” who were often Australian or had been trained in Australia, to the coopératives in France to make the wine for them.

BOTTLING IT UP

Historically, grape-growers could not afford wooden presses, barrels, and fermenting vats, so they had little to do with the making of wine. Grapes went to the monastery or château that served as a central processing plant. Even when, as in Burgundy, individual estates did make their own wine, they usually sold it on to merchants and négociants who blended and bottled it for them.
Today, Burgundies bottled at the domaine are becoming increasingly popular and represent a growing proportion of the region’s wine. But even in Bordeaux, where châteaux have maintained their good reputations for centuries, the idea of the wine-maker, rather than a merchant, bottling the wine only dates back to the end of World War II.

**SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL**

The 1970s and 1980s brought the arrival of New World competition and of a new generation of **vignerons** who had learned their skills in college. Unlike their parents, they know how things are done in other regions of France and often have experience of working in Australia or California. They prefer to deal with customers worldwide than to be restricted to a local merchant or **coopérative**, and they want to see their own labels on their bottles. Even 20 years ago, it was a rare Champagne that was not produced by a big merchant or **coopérative**. Today, however, it is as though every other cottage in the region houses a grower with wine to sell, and a sign advertising the fact.

Competition among **vignerons** is fierce. They know the value of a good rating from an influential critic, and are aware that skillful grape-growing is only the first step on the journey to success. They appreciate that the way in which they treat those grapes will have a crucial influence on the quality and flavor of the wine. A wine may be made in the vineyard, but it can be improved immensely—or ruined completely—by the way it is handled in the **cave**.

**The Old Way**

Wine presses like this one were built to last for centuries. Until recently, wine-making techniques had altered very little over the years.
GRAPE VARIETIES

The character of any wine is influenced by the soil, the climate, and the art of the wine-maker, but nothing will dictate its flavor more than the variety, or varieties, of grape from which it is made.

Stringent rules applied over the centuries have decreed precisely which varieties of grape might be planted where, but in spite of these, wine-growers in France obstinately continued to experiment with new grape varieties. All that was brought to an end, however, with the establishment of a country-wide *appellation contrôlée* system set up in 1935 to control the origin and quality of French wines. Pomerol (see p.103), for example, which produced white wine before 1935, is now a red-only zone; the only area of choice left open to its wine growers is the precise proportion of the Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Cabernet Sauvignon grapes that they grow. In regions such as Burgundy (see pp.112–59), where only one grape variety is used in each style of wine, all the wine growers can choose is the specific clone, or group of clones, with which to replant their vineyards. The *appellation* rules have undoubtedly, and laudably, helped to protect the individuality of France’s best-known wines and encouraged the adoption of traditional French grape varieties in the New World. Less positively, however, they have also effectively halted experimentation in French vineyards, sadly stopping vinous evolution in its tracks.

Fortunately, there are some welcome exceptions to this state of affairs. In southern France, for example, recent moves have been made to acknowledge the improvement that judicious change can bring to wines. Quality has improved following a reduction in the use of traditional, rather dull grape varieties, such as Carignan, and the introduction of proven alternatives, such as Syrah and Mourvèdre. Other regions, such as Muscadet, could benefit from similarly innovative thinking.
TOP RED GRAPES

**Carignan** The traditional grape variety of southern French regions such as Minervois, Corbières, and—in particular—Fitou. Old Carignan vines, when carefully used, can produce delicious, rich, earthy wines. Overproduction, however, tends to lead to dullness.

**Cabernet Franc** This grape is Cabernet Sauvignon’s more vibrantly black-curranty kid brother. Cabernet Franc is best known as a crucial component of most red Bordeaux blends—most famously, it contributes considerably to the quality of Vieux Château Certan and Châteaux Cheval Blanc wines. However, it is not only a blending tool, as it also flies solo in the Loire Valley, in *appellations* such as Chinon, Bourgueil, and Saumur-Champigny.

**Cabernet Sauvignon** The mainstay of the Médoc and Graves *appellations* in Bordeaux, this black-curranty, green-peppery, sometimes even minty grape grows well on gravelly soil, and usually performs at its best in blends with Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Syrah—though this last marriage is rarely found except in Provence and *vins de pays* wines.

**Gamay** The only grape used to make Beaujolais, this variety benefits from that region’s combination of granite soil and use of the *maceration carbonique* technique to produce bright, cherryish wines. Gamay is also grown in the Loire Valley and southwest France, but the wines it makes there are usually less interesting.

**Grenache** The peppery grape of Côtes du Rhône (and Châteauneuf du Pape) also performs well in blends in Languedoc-Roussillon and can also produce good Rhône Valley and Provence Rosé.

**Malbec** Once overlooked even in its traditional heartland of Cahors (and consequently more or less banished from the Bordeaux blend), this spicy variety is now attracting attention elsewhere in France. It is now proving a success in the wines of Bergerac, but less so in those of the Loire Valley—where it is known as Cot.

**Merlot** A global superstar thanks to its plummy fruit, soft texture (it is less tannic than either of the two Cabernets) and association with big-name wines like Château Pétrus. Whether blended with Cabernet Franc (for example, in St Émilion and Pomerol) or used straight as it is in the south, it can sometimes also produce very dull, weedy wine.

**Pinot Noir** Some people consider this the greatest red grape of all. It is single-handedly responsible for all great red Burgundy, as well as some enjoyable reds and rosés that are produced in the Loire Valley. Expect to find raspberry and cherry fruit backed up by gentle tannins.

**Syrah** This is the smoky, spicy, blackberryish grape found in the Rhône Valley *appellations* of Côte Rôtie and Hermitage. It also produces delicious results in Pic St Loup and other parts of Languedoc-Roussillon. The same grape variety is widely known in the New World as Shiraz.
TOP WHITE GRAPES

**Chardonnay** Synonymous with white wine for many people these days, this versatile grape can produce a huge range of wine styles. The list covers everything from stony-dry, unoaked Chablis to buttery, nutty examples from Meursault, a little farther south, and fruit-salady, woody wines made in the southern part of the country under the Vin de Pays d’Oc label.

**Chenin Blanc** Appley, honeyed, and waxy, this Loire Valley grape variety is capable of producing both bone-dry and medium-dry wines, as well as lusciously sweet ones like Vouvray that can last for decades. Acidity can be very high when young, however. Chenin Blanc also gives good results in sparkling wine.

**Gewürztraminer** Famous for its lychee and parma violet character, this Alsace grape also produces both dry and sweet wines, and has an easily recognizable, unusually oily texture.

**Gros Manseng** Best known for its use in the wines of Jurançon, where it is blended with Petit Manseng. Gros Manseng is now also being used in Vin de Pays des Côtes de Gascogne.

**Marsanne** Lemony and rich, this Rhône grape makes wines at their best young, or after six or seven years.

**Muscat** This variety gives truly grapey-tasting wine. There are several strains, the best being Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains. Alsace makes fine dry examples; sweet, fortified ones come from the Rhône Valley and southern France.

**Petit Manseng** At its best in the Jurançon appellation of Southwest France, where it is blended with its lesser relative, Gros Manseng, to produce floral dry and sweeter wines.

**Pinot Blanc** An Alsace variety that is like a less fruity Chardonnay. Almost always unoaked, it makes creamy dry wines with a brazil-nut character.

**Pinot Gris** The grape known in Italy as Pinot Grigio produces peary, gently spicy wines in Alsace. These are most interesting when off-dry or sweet.

**Riesling** The greatest white grape, widely grown in Alsace, Riesling makes terrific dry and lusciously sweet wines with a richer texture than most examples from the German side of the Rhine.

**Roussanne** This partner to Marsanne contributes to dry white wines such as Hermitage and white Côtes du Rhône.

**Sauvignon Blanc** A fresh, zingy variety with black-curranty, gooseberryish flavors is at its best as a dry, unoaked varietal from the Loire Valley (Sancerre and Pouilly Fumé) or as a barrel-fermented Bordeaux, perhaps blended with a little Sémillon. Lighter, unoaked Bordeaux Blanc (or Entre Deux Mers) and vins de pays are less exciting.

**Sémillon** A rich, peachy, honeyed grape that shines (with the help of some Sauvignon Blanc) in sweet white Bordeaux.

**Viognier** The extraordinarily floral, apricoty grape used in Condrieu and a growing number of vins de pays from southern France. It produces good dry and sweet wines.
OTHER GRAPES

ALIGOTÉ An acidic white grape variety grown in Burgundy, where it is used to produce often ordinary but sometimes good white wine, especially in the village of Bouzeron. It is best known for its role in Kir, a cocktail in which it is mixed with black-currant liqueur.

CHASSELAS This once-popular non-aromatic white variety is still used in Alsace and Pouilly-sur-Loire, although it has largely been supplanted by Sauvignon Blanc. Chasselas usually proves better for eating than making wine.

CINS SAULT A full-bodied and increasingly widely used component of many red wines, Cinsault is most often found in the southern part of the Rhône Valley and throughout southern France.

COLOMBARD A basic apple varieties that is used primarily for making Vin de Pays des Côtes de Gascogne in Southwest France.

FER This tough, tannic grape is used in the southwest of France to produce wines like Madiran.

GROS PLANT Gros Plant is an undeniably undistinguished grape variety that is used to produce the dry, acidic white wine of the same name in the Loire Valley. It can make a passable accompaniment to oysters if no Muscadet is available.

MELON DE BOURGOGNE A non-aromatic white variety that can produce attractively lemony wines, Melon de Bourgogne is used exclusively for Muscadet.

MOURVÉDRE This blackberry-flavored component of Rhône Valley reds is another grape grown in southern France, particularly in the Provençal appellation of Bandol.

MUSCADELLE A spicy white grape variety that is used—albeit in small doses—in white Bordeaux wines and now occasionally also finds its way into examples of southern France’s Vins de Pays d’Oc.

PETIT VERDOT Traditionally a spicy ingredient of red Bordeaux, Petit Verdot is now being used on its own in the New World.

PINOT MEUNIER This black-skinned cousin of Pinot Noir is far more widely used in the wines of Champagne than producers generally admit. It is rarely used to make still wines.

SYLVANER A non-aromatic white grape used in Alsace. Good examples can be excellent, but earthiness is often a problem.

TANNAT This tough red grape variety is widely planted in the Madiran appellation in Southwest France. It is now also being used in Uruguay.

Cabernet Sauvignon Vines at Château Haut-Brion
This Bordeaux vineyard offers the perfect combination of Cabernet Sauvignon grapes and gravelly soil.
CLIMATE, SOIL AND VINEYARDS

The individual flavor of every wine is created by a combination of factors. A subtle variation of soil or microclimate can make wines produced in neighboring vineyards taste quite different.

If the French language has no translation for the English term “wine-maker,” it has in terroir a far more valuable and untranslatable word of its own, which is now being used throughout the wine-making world. The classic definition of this term was offered by Bruno Prats, former owner of Château Cos d’Estournel in Bordeaux. For Prats, terroir is “the combination of the climate, the soil, and the landscape” that forms the character of a vineyard and its wines. At its simplest, terroir could be used to refer to a chalky hillside in a cool region, but it can also be far more precise. As Prats continues, “the night and day temperatures, the distribution of rainfall, hours of sunlight, the slope and drainage... All these factors react together in each part of the vineyard.”

So, although the literal meaning of the word terroir is simply “soil,” it actually encompasses far more than that. The climate, or to be more precise the specific combination of macro- and microclimate, is a vital component of terroir. The macroclimate is the weather of a whole region—for example, the sea-influenced and moderate conditions of Bordeaux, or the more extreme, continental conditions of Burgundy. The microclimate refers instead to prevailing conditions and the geographical location of a specific vineyard: the altitude of the vineyard and the proximity of hills, forests, rivers, lakes or the sea. The site’s exposure, orientation, and gradient also play a part in determining its microclimate.

ASPECTS OF THE TERROIR

Vines grown on south-facing slopes get more sunshine and, as a result, ripen much better than those that are grown on flat land. While hills and woods can offer a protective “rain shadow” against storms, they can also provide shelter from winds that would otherwise blow away the pockets of cold air in which frost develops. A nearby lake or river can increase humidity, which in turn raises the likelihood of both the desirable noble rot (see p109) and the undesirable gray rot developing.

The soil in which vines are grown has three sets of properties. The first, texture, is

Healthy Chill

While frost can cause problems in spring, cold weather in winter helps to keep vines dormant and ensures that their sap is kept down in the roots.
determined by the size of the particles that make up the soil. Vines can be grown in soil that is either as fine as sand or as lumpy as pebbles. However, if the particles are not to be blown or washed away by the wind or rain, they must be glued together by clay. Some soils contain more clay than others, with the clay itself varying in nature. The second property, the soil’s structure, determines the way in which clay bonds particles of soil together and how water is retained in the soil or drained away. This depends also on the amount and nature of organic matter, the level of sodium and calcium and the nature of the clay. Soil’s third property, its degree of acidity, determines how acidic the wine will be.

THE PRINCIPAL SOILS OF FRANCE

**ALLUVIAL** Potentially fertile, sandy, silty, gravelly soil laid down by rivers. At its best in the Médoc.

**ARGILLACEOUS** Catch-all term for sedimentary clay, siltstones, marl or shale. *Argilo-calcaire* means a combination of clay and limestone.

**CLAY** Acidic, malleable, argillaceous compound that holds water well and drains poorly. Important as subsoil in Pomerol, where it is well suited to the Merlot grape.

**GRANITE** Both a quartz-rich, hard rock and the alkaline, easy-draining, low-fertility soil of the best vineyards of Beaujolais and the northern Rhône.

**GRAVEL** Easy-draining, low-fertility, pebbly topsoil that is at its best in Bordeaux and Châteauneuf-du-Pape, where it retains the heat of the sun.

**LIMESTONE** Alkaline, easy-draining rock, mainly consisting of calcium carbonates. Best suited to white wines.

**LOAM** A crumbly mixture of clay, silt and sand. Generally too fertile for fine wine.

**MARL** Acidic mixture of limestone and clay that is at its best in the Côte d’Or, the Rhône, and the Jura.

**SAND** Sandy soil has the advantage of deterring the phylloxera louse and the disadvantage of draining too easily and storing no nutrients.

**SANDSTONE** Variable sedimentary rock that can be composed either of quartz or of calcium carbonate.

**SCHIST** Crystalline rock that can be split into layers. Found beneath the soil of Alsace and in the Côte Rôtie. Rich in magnesium and potassium.

**SILT** Quite fertile, poor-draining river deposit.

**SLATE** Crystalline rock formed from clay, mudstone and shale, to be found beneath the topsoil of Pouilly Fumé and parts of southern Beaujolais; known in French as schiste.

**TUFA/TUFFEAU** Easy-draining limestone soil found in the Loire Valley.
GRAPE-GROWING AND HARVESTING

Wherever the vineyard and whatever the variety of vine or style of wine, the grapes develop according to an inexorable timetable, dictating precisely what the wine-grower will be doing at any given time of the year.

JANUARY Despite low temperatures, wine-growers are out pruning their vines. Traditionally, pruning was begun on the 22nd, the feast day of St. Vincent, patron saint of wine growers.

FEBRUARY A quiet month in the vineyards once the pruning is finished. There is, however, plenty of work to be done on the new wine maturing in the cellars.

MARCH Most wine-growers have finished pruning and will now be tilling the soil in order to aerate it and remove weeds. In some areas, depending on soil type and local climate, late March sees bud-break, the first sign of new growth on the woody vine.

APRIL Rapid growth of leaves, shoots, and embryo bunches follows bud-break. The embryo bunches, which will eventually flower and become grapes, are the first indication of the size and date of the coming harvest. Cool temperatures or rain at this crucial time may cause millerandage, the formation of seedless grapes that will never grow to maturity. A spell of especially warm sunshine, on the other hand, will encourage the vine’s sap to feed the leaves rather than the embryo grapes, often leading to coulure, in which the embryos fail to develop, and fall off the plant.

MAY Oil stoves and windmills are often used at this time of year to protect the vulnerable leafy vines from frost. The soil is fertilized and tilled to remove weeds, and many growers spray the vines against mildew and oidium fungus.

JUNE This is the month in which the vines pollinate, fertilize, and flower. Dry, warm weather now allows the vines to flower rapidly, and the grapes on each bunch to grow simultaneously. Changeable weather produces bunches with berries of uneven ripeness—so-called “hens and chickens.” After flowering, some shoots are trained to the wires and others are removed. Spraying against oidium continues.

JULY As the vines respond to the warm weather, each fertilized berry in the embryo bunches becomes a recognizable tiny grape. This process is called “fruit set.” Some grape varieties, such as
Merlot, set less successfully than others. The wine-grower removes some of the bunches at this stage in order to concentrate the vines’ energy into the remaining fruit. Spraying against oidium continues in the vineyard, and growers may also clear the ground of weeds.

**AUGUST** This is the time for *véraison*, a series of important chemical changes marked by the changing color of the grape skins. The fruit’s sugar content increases dramatically at this stage. It is a critical moment for the vines: a bad storm followed by warm weather provides perfect conditions for rot, one of the reasons why growers increasingly remove some foliage to allow air to circulate and sunlight to reach the grapes. Drought conditions now will slow the ripening process. In exceptionally hot years like 2003, harvesting of white grapes may even begin at the end of this month.

**SEPTEMBER** Quality-conscious growers will be trimming the vines tightly and possibly performing a *vendange verte*, or green harvest: removing a proportion of the potential crop in order to concentrate the vines’ energies. Drought conditions can still pose a danger to the ripening grapes. Likewise, rain or even hail at this time of year may expose the fruit to the risk of rot. Depending on the region, the weather conditions, and the grape variety, the grape harvest is usually begun in late September, although there is a growing trend of delaying picking until the grapes are as ripe as possible.

**OCTOBER** In most regions, grapes are still being picked. In some years and in areas where late-harvest wines are made, the harvest may just be beginning. Once the crop is in and the grapes have been pressed, the skin, stalks, and seeds, known collectively as the *marc*, are spread among the vines, often together with a combination of manure and chemical fertilizer.

**NOVEMBER** As cold weather returns, the sap retreats into the vines’ root systems. The vineyard is tidied up and the feet of the vines are buried with soil in preparation for the rigors of winter.

**DECEMBER** Many of France’s wine growers are busy shipping wines to customers in time for Christmas. A few may now begin some early pruning in the vineyards, as the annual cycle begins once again.
HOW RED WINE IS MADE

Human skill will always be the essential key to transforming grapes into a fine and typical wine, whether the equipment and techniques used are highly traditional or ultra-modern, very simple or highly sophisticated.

Once the wine-grower has determined the moment when the grapes are as ripe as possible, while retaining sufficient acidity, they can be harvested, either manually or by machine. Many people believe that harvesting by hand makes for higher quality, but machine harvesting, in which the grapes are shaken from the vines, has the advantage that it may be conducted both in daylight and at night.

FERMENTATION

Quality-conscious producers remove rotten grapes, either in the vineyard or at the cuverie. Stalks are also removed at this stage to avoid the harsh tannic character they might give the finished wine. The fruit is then lightly crushed and transferred into a stainless steel tank, the cuve, or a wooden vat, the foudre. The grapes are now left to macerate, or soften, for two or three days. Fermentation is kicked off using either cultured yeasts or yeasts that occur naturally on the grapes. The fruit may be heated or juice—known as must—that is already fermenting may be added. To prevent the floating skins and seeds from drying out, the must is pumped over them, or they are pushed down with wooden paddles in a process known as pigeage. Some wine-makers now use rotary fermenters similar to sealed cement mixers, although some critics argue that these cause excessive astringency.

For successful fermentation, the fruit must be kept at 77–86°F (25–30°C). Soft, fruity wine such as Beaujolais (see pp.126–7) is made by a process known as macération carbonique, which involves fermenting the grapes uncrushed.

Harvesting Black Grapes

The key to making good wine lies in the quality of the grapes. Quality-conscious producers take pains to sort the grapes in the vineyard or on conveyor belts at the cuverie, discarding any that are either underripe or rotten.
ADJUSTING THE MIXTURE
The alcoholic strength of the wine may be increased—in some regions—by adding sugar, or chaptalizing, during fermentation. Likewise, acidity may be increased by adding tartaric acid, a substance that occurs naturally in the grape. Legislation restricts both chaptalization and acidification, but is often ignored. If the mixture is too watery, some of the part-fermented pink juice is drawn off, concentrating the remainder. The drawn-off juice may become wine that is sold as rosé.

AFTER FERMENTATION
Fermentation is complete when all the sugar has been converted into alcohol. The wine may now be left to macerate on the skins for a period of between one and four weeks, during which time the color will deepen and the tannins soften. The free-run juice, the vin de goutte, is then drawn off and the solids transferred to a press, which extracts from them tougher, darker press wine—vin de presse. Depending on the vintage, some or all of this will be blended into the final wine. Following fermentation, red wine will almost always be allowed to undergo a natural process called malolactic fermentation, in which appley malic acid is transformed into the creamier lactic acid.

Some wine, such as Beaujolais and basic vin de pays, is intended to be drunk young, but most high-quality wine will now be matured for up to 18 months in wooden casks. Increasingly, in recent years, some or all of the casks tend to be made of new oak from forests in the heart of France. When used carefully, new oak can add complexity, while giving the wine an appealing vanilla character that often wins favor from critics and wine-drinkers used to woody wines from the New World. It can, however, easily overpower other, subtler flavors.

RACKING AND FINING
Sulfur dioxide is used to protect the wine against bacteria throughout the wine-making process. If not managed carefully, though, it can combine with hydrogen to produce the stink-bomb smell and flavor of hydrogen sulfide, or foul-smelling mercaptans, which are hydrogen sulfide and alcohol compounds. Racking the wine—transferring it from one cask to another to aerate it—should prevent this.

Before bottling, the wine is likely to be fined or clarified with powdered clay or lightly beaten egg whites to remove cloudiness. It may also be filtered to remove sediment, though many producers now prefer to bottle their wine unfiltered, and possibly even unfined, to preserve as much of its subtlety and flavor as possible.
HOW WHITE WINE IS MADE

Many factors can influence the more delicate flavors associated with white wines, and many wine-makers believe that producing a really good white presents the ultimate challenge.

While the skins of black grapes provide the tannins that give red wine its longevity and are responsible for the color of the finished red wine, the skins of white grapes have little or no role to play in finished white wine. For various reasons, it is far trickier to make white wine that tastes good than it is to make a drinkable red wine. First, the thinner skins of most white grape varieties increase the risk of harmful rot in the vineyard. It is also easy for white grapes to become oxidized or “cooked” if they are left out in the sun after picking, as happens at many southern cuveries. Some producers reduce the risk by using machines to pick the grapes at night, but quality-conscious growers still prefer to harvest by hand.

THE HARVEST

Picking white grapes too early will give the wine a green character, while harvesting too late makes for dull wine. In some regions, however, grapes are deliberately allowed to overripen, developing as much natural sugar as possible in the hope that they will become covered by the sought-after fungus Botrytis cinerea (see p109), or noble rot. This fungus concentrates the flavors of the grape and adds a dried-apricot character of its own. Noble rot, however, only occurs in humid conditions in which undesirable gray rot is also a risk. For this reason, makers of sweet botrytized wines have to take special care to select only grapes with the right kind of rot.

SULFURING AND PRESSING

One of the best ways to avoid oxidation and unwanted rot is to use sulfur dioxide, which works both as an antiseptic and as an antioxidant. Sulfur is as necessary in a cuverie as soap is in a kitchen, but in excess, it is as unwelcome in a wine as detergent in a sauce. Nowadays,
in any case, most producers also use cooling equipment that helps to keep bacteria at bay.

Having arrived at the cuverie, white grapes often pass into the press uncrushed and still attached to their stalks. Alternatively, in the case of less aromatic grape varieties, the winemaker may crush the grapes and leave them for several days in a vat or a cement-mixer-like tank called a Vinimatic, which extracts the aromatics stored in the skins before the grapes are pressed. Once the grapes have been pressed, the juice will be separated from the seeds and skins. The juice may be chilled, fined, or filtered at this point, but many producers of quality white wines believe that these procedures remove flavor and richness from the wine.

**FERMENTATION**

Fermentation, using natural or cultured yeasts, now follows—either in stainless steel tanks or in wooden barrels. Fermentation takes place at anything from 41° to 86°F (5–30°C) and can take weeks or even months. Low temperatures produce light, crisp wines with a pear character. Warmer temperatures produce richer, fatter-textured wines with less specific flavors. After fermentation, dry white wines such as Burgundy and Bordeaux will be allowed—and if necessary, encouraged with cultured yeasts—to undergo a naturally occurring biochemical process known as malolactic fermentation, in which apple malic acid is transformed into richer lactic acid. For sweeter wines that benefit from the freshness of the malic acid, malolactic fermentation is prevented by adding sulfur.

Light-bodied, fruity wines will now be fined, filtered, and bottled, often within a few months of the harvest. Finer wines will be matured for up to 18 months, probably in oak barrels. Filtering may then take place. Sulfur dioxide, ideally in as small a quantity as possible, will be added before bottling to protect the wine from oxidation as it matures. The drier and more alcoholic the wine, the less sulfur will be needed. Late-harvest wines get larger doses to protect them from refermenting.

**ROSE WINES**

Champagne rosé is unique in that it is made by mixing red and white wine. All other French rosé wines are made from black grape juice that is drawn off before the skins have had time to give it much color. In every other respect, rosé wine is produced in the same way as white. It rarely goes into new oak barrels, however.
SPARKLING AND FORTIFIED WINES

Many areas of France produce excellent sparkling wines, including, of course, the world-famous region of Champagne. Also of interest are the various fortified wines known as vins doux naturels.

Both the simplest of cola drinks and the finest Champagnes contain bubbles of dissolved carbon dioxide. To make cola, the carbon dioxide is injected directly into the drink. The same method can also be used in wine-making, but it will not produce a wine of any quality or longevity. Four different methods are used to produce fine sparkling wine, all of which create carbon dioxide naturally during fermentation.

MÉTHODE RURALE

The most traditional method is the now-rare méthode rurale, which involves bottling the wine during its initial fermentation like cider or beer. The carbon dioxide released as fermentation continues has nowhere to go and so remains dissolved in the wine. One wine produced by this method is the sweet Clairette de Die Méthode Dioise Ancestrale, from the northern Rhône. Fine dry wines are also made by this method in Gaillac in southwest France, where it is known as the méthode gaillaçoise.

MÉTHODE TRADITIONELLE

More widely used for the production of high-quality wines than the méthode rurale is the méthode traditionelle. In wines made using this method, a second fermentation is induced in the bottle. To achieve this, the wine-maker adds a liqueur de tirage, a blend of wine, sugar, and yeast, to the wine after the initial fermentation has taken place and just before bottling. As in the méthode rurale, the carbon dioxide cannot escape and so remains dissolved in the wine. Unlike in the méthode rurale, however, the wine also acquires a distinctive flavor from the yeast solids that are used to kick off the second fermentation. These are broken down in a process known as autolysis, which gives the finished wine the yeasty or biscuity character that is the hallmark of the méthode traditionelle. The bottles are then aged for between one and four years, depending on the region and the style of wine. The longer the aging period, the stronger the biscuity flavor.

To avoid leaving a gritty deposit at the bottom of your glass, the dead yeast must be removed once the second fermentation and ageing is complete. This is achieved by
a process called riddling or remuage: by manually or mechanically turning and shaking the gradually upturned bottle, the yeast solids are made to slide down into the neck of the bottle, where they are collected in a thimblelike container beneath the stopper.

Eventually the yeast is removed in a process called dégorgement: the wine close to the cap is frozen and the stopper, usually a beer-bottle cap, is removed. The pressure that has built up in the wine propels the icy yeast out of the bottle, leaving the remaining wine clear. The bottle is now topped up and a blend of wine and sugar syrup, known as the liqueur d’expédition, is added. Finally, the bottle is resealed with a traditional Champagne cork.

OTHER METHODS
The remaining two methods are simplifications of the méthode traditionnelle, and neither of them is used to make appellation contrôlée wine. In the transfer method, instead of undergoing remuage, the wine and yeast are transferred into a tank before being filtered and rebottled. The cave close method is similar to the transfer method, except that the second fermentation takes place in a sealed tank instead of in the bottle.

FORTIFIED WINES
Less famous than port, sherry, Marsala, and Madeira, France’s fortified wines, or vins doux naturels, deserve a larger share of the spotlight. The principle behind the production of all fortified wines is the same: the fermentation of the juice of very ripe white or black grapes is interrupted by the addition of neutral grape spirit. This raises the alcohol content of the vat above 15 percent, the point at which the yeasts that transform sugar into alcohol can no longer function, and thus halts fermentation. French wines made in this way, such as the famous Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise (see p259), are by definition sweet and fruity. They are usually fairly simple in character and rarely improve with age.

One exception is Banyuls (see p194), the most southerly appellation in France. Red Banyuls is the wine that chauvinistic French experts like to compare to vintage port. Like that Portuguese wine, the best examples develop complexity with age and can mature for up to 40 years in the bottle. But truly great Banyuls is rare. Other fortified wines that can be worth aging are well-made rancio wines such as Rasteau (see p260) in the southern Rhône. To be labeled rancio, fortified wine must be stored in oak casks and exposed to heat (often sunshine) and oxygen for at least two years, during which time the wine develops its distinctive nutty, tangy, rancio flavor.
Reading the Label

**Understanding the label is essential to choosing wines successfully.** French labels can be some of the most informative, and unfortunately also some of the most confusing, in the world.

Fraudulent labeling by wine merchants was not uncommon at the beginning of the 20th century, and since that time the French authorities have done their utmost to lay down labeling legislation designed to protect the consumer. The most vaunted and visible part of this legislation is the system of *appellation contrôlée*, or controlled appellation (see pp36–7). However, before putting the *appellation contrôlée* system under the magnifying glass, it is useful to understand the other pieces of information that appear on French wine labels.

The label on the front of every bottle, whether it is classified as a basic vin de pays (see pp276–279), a vin délimité de qualité supérieure or VDQS (see p33) or an *appellation d’origine contrôlée*, is legally required to include certain pieces of information: first, the bottle volume, usually 37.5 cl, 75 cl, or 150 cl; second, the name and address of the bottler, who may or may not also be the producer. Unhelpfully, this information sometimes appears in code, as *JFV à 5600*, for example, or may be one of a number of pseudonyms adopted to help sell the same wine to a variety of customers. A third piece of information that is required by law is the place where the wine was made. Any wine that fails to reveal its geographic origins can be labeled only as a lowly vin de table and, as such, is denied the right to declare either a vintage or a grape variety. Finally, the alcoholic strength, which is usually between 10.5 and 15 percent, and classification (vin de table, vin de pays, VDQS or *appellation d’origine contrôlée*) must be given.

Other information that can often be found on the label, although it is not required by law, includes a brand name, such as Mouton Cadet, Malesan, or Piat d’Or; the name of a particular vineyard, such as Clos du Mesnil, or of an individual cuvée, such as Cuvée Laurence; an indication of whether...
or not the wine was bottled on the estate; and finally, the vintage in which the wine was made.

LOCAL CLASSIFICATIONS
In addition to the terms discussed above, different regions also use various local systems of classification. To illustrate this point, I have chosen labels from three different regions, Alsace (see pp64–79), Burgundy (see pp112–159), and Bordeaux (see pp80–111). In Alsace, the grape variety nearly always appears on the label, and, in addition, 50 or so of the best vineyards are classified as grand cru. In Bordeaux and Burgundy, on the other hand, classifications of the best estates and vineyards are confusingly varied, including cru bourgeois, cru classé, premier cru, grand cru, grand cru classé and premier grand cru classé. In the case of these wines, the grape variety almost never features on the label. It is also important to be aware of a number of grand-sounding words that often appear on labels, but which should be taken with a large pinch of salt. Grand Vin de France, Cuvée Prestige and Réserve Speciale, for example, are all legally meaningless terms. Almost unbelievably, any Bordeaux producer who wants to use the words “Grand Vin” can do so—provided they don’t use the shortest, cheapest bottles for it. Likewise, while vieilles vignes or “old vines” suggests especially rich wines, no one has ever defined how old a vine must be to qualify as vieille. Finally, while a wine labeled élévé en fûts de chêne will have spent time in an oak barrel, there is no way of knowing the age of the barrel, important since old and young oak affect the wine differently.
WINES FOR EVERYDAY DRINKING

The majority of French vineyards produce wines that fall outside the prestigious appellation contrôlée classification system, but which can still offer enormous enjoyment and interest.

All French wines are classified according to a pyramid system that was designed as a guide to quality. There are four categories: the bottom layer consists of vin de table; next, vin de pays; then vin délimité de qualité supérieure (VDQS); and finally appellation contrôlée.

VIN DE TABLE

Covering 22 percent of French wines, this is the most basic of the French quality designations. There are no rules as to how vin de table should be produced; the only stipulation is that no grape variety or place of origin may be stated on the front label. Vin de table is rarely of great quality, although the classification does occasionally include good wines that fall foul of restrictive appellation rules. Examples include the innovative, sweet Pouilly-Fumé (see p.220) made by Didier Dagueneau, one of the best wine-makers in the Loire Valley, and Rebelle, the award-winning red blend produced by the Bordeaux firm of Dulong.

VIN DE PAYS

The next layer in the pyramid of categories is made up of 150 or so vin de pays or “country wine” appellations, which were introduced in 1973 in order to promote regional wines. Unlike the vin de table category, this classification allows producers to specify an area of origin for each wine, and also to state which production methods were used. In addition, they are permitted to print the name of the dominant grape variety on the label—a privilege that is denied not only to vin de table but also to most appellation contrôlée wines.

This fast-evolving category was not designed to cater to anything better than decent daily-drinking fare, and the fact that the best vin de pays now demand higher prices than some appellation contrôlée wines is something that many supporters of the appellation contrôlée system still find very hard to swallow. To achieve this state of affairs, ambitious producers such as Aimé...
Guibert of Mas de Daumas Gassac in the Hérault (see p278) and Robert Skalli of Skalli Fortant de France in Languedoc-Roussillon have applied skill and care in the production of their vins de pays to match that of the better producers of appellation contrôlée wines. Accounting for a quarter of French wine production, the success of vins de pays has led to the strange situation where grapes from appellation contrôlée vineyards in Minervois (see p199) and Corbières (see p195), for example, are being used, for the time being at least, to make wines that will be sold as vins de pays, rather than under their appellation. The vins de pays producers now successfully lobby to prevent any changes to other parts of the French appellation system.

VDQS
Squeezed in between the vin de pays and appellation contrôlée classifications is the much smaller category of vin délimité de qualité supérieur or VDQS, which was officially due to have been phased out some years ago. Many VDQS-designated areas—including, most recently, Sauvignon de St Bris, which is now known simply as St Bris (see p155)—are now being promoted to appellation contrôlée status, but new ones are still being created to replace them. This inevitably adds to the existing confusion. Possibly the best explanation for this seemingly ludicrous situation is that the VDQS wines are not of sufficient interest to either the appellation contrôlée or the vin de pays authorities.
Since its creation in 1935, the system of *appellation d’origine contrôlée*, or controlled appellation, has included all of France’s best-known wines and has been widely copied around the world. The system was devised to protect honest producers and their customers by ensuring that the wine in every bottle corresponds to what is claimed on its label.

Today, as in 1935, the words *appellation contrôlée* aim to provide a guarantee of origin, style, and quality. In reality, most wine-makers agree that, despite valiant efforts, the system often fails in a task fraught with pitfalls. On the plus side, the presence of an *appellation d’origine contrôlée* label will, despite a certain amount of illegal transfer of wine from one region to another, generally guarantee that a wine comes from the region, commune, or vineyard on the label. In addition, it will almost certainly guarantee the grape variety or varieties that have been used, as each *appellation* has its own list of permitted varieties. Even here, however, there are quirks in the system. More than 99 percent of the white wines of Burgundy (see pp112–159), for example, are made from the Chardonnay grape, so wines made from the equally legal Pinot Blanc come as a surprise. In the same way, most wines from the *appellation* of Minervois (see p199) are, like many southern French reds, made from a blend of grape varieties. Some producers, however, perhaps seeking to copy wines made in Australia and the Rhône Valley (see pp238–263), have

**Young Vines in Muscadet**

Only Melon de Bourgogne grapes can be used to make wines sold as *appellation contrôlée* Muscadet. Legal restrictions on grape varieties help consumers to know what to expect from the wines of a particular appellation.
found a legal loophole that allows them to make their wines purely from the Syrah grape, giving them a completely different flavor. Grape variety aside, while the appellation d’origine contrôlée rules do help to identify the style of a wine, they often do so in a rather irregular fashion. Didier Dagueneau’s luscious, sweet, late-harvest Pouilly-Fumé (see p220), for instance, is illegal, while there are plenty of producers in Vouvray (see p226) and Alsace (see pp64–79) who make sweet wines that are perfectly legal and often delicious, but that one would expect, from the label, to be dry.

**FLAWS IN THE SYSTEM**

Further confusion is created by the arcane legislation governing the way in which premiers crus vineyards are identified. Take, for example, the Charmes vineyard in Meursault (see p145), which enjoys premier cru status. Producers there can label their wines either as appellation contrôlée Meursault Charmes Premier Cru or as appellation contrôlée Meursault Charmes. Down the road from Charmes is the non-premier cru Clos de la Barre vineyard, whose wines may be labeled either as appellation contrôlée Meursault or as appellation contrôlée Meursault Clos de la Barre. So, if you were confronted with two bottles, one Meursault Charmes and the other Meursault Clos de la Barre, how would you know which was from the premier cru vineyard? It’s simple: according to appellation rules, unless the wine is from a premier cru vineyard, the vineyard name must be printed in characters no more than half the height of the ones used for the village name. Easy! These difficulties, however, are minor in comparison with the worst failing of the system, which lies in the way it oversees quality. To carry the term appellation contrôlée on its label, every wine must undergo a blind tasting. The first flaw here is that the tasting is carried out by local experts who have been known to be rather generous in assessing the wines of their friends. Much more crucially, the tasting always takes place before the wine is bottled, often even before it is sold in bulk to a merchant, who will blend it with other wines. In other words, there is no reason to believe that the wine you are drinking is the one that was given its appellation by the tasting panel.

In 2004, confronted by growing competition from the New World—and a falling market share in countries like the US and the UK—the authorities finally began to acknowledge the need for change. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that this will be achieved in a coherent and effective way, thanks to blinkered thinking and political lobbying by vin de pays producers.

**Hidden Quality**

Although they do not have appellation contrôlée status, the long-lived, top-class red and white vins de pays produced at Mas de Daumas Gassac in Languedoc-Roussillon sell for higher prices than many well-known Bordeaux.

**Wine Pioneers**

In 1923, Baron Leroy (above right) sowed the seeds of what became the national appellation contrôlée system. This was put into practice by men such as Joseph Capus (above left), known as the “godfather” of the appellation laws.
You can see the cartoonists’ point. What, after all, is the connection between drinking and enjoying wine, and all that very serious-looking swirling, sniffing, and spitting? We in the West draw lines between the different ways in which we perceive and experience things. On one level, we see, hear, eat, and drink, while on another we watch, listen and taste. The difference is plain: sometimes we apply more of our brain to the task. A person may buy an expensive concert ticket and listen intently to Miles Davis, Mahler, or Mick Jagger, but will, on another occasion, use the same music as the background to a social event.

Every day, all around the world, billions of mouthfuls of food and drink are eaten and drunk. How often will their flavors really make a lasting impact on the brains of the eaters and drinkers?

Memory lies at the heart of the appreciation of almost anything. We may like or enjoy something on a first encounter, but we are bound to be setting it in the context of previous experiences, and of tastes and prejudices we have developed over the years. Wine tasting consists of briefly concentrating on a glass of wine sufficiently to be able to compare its characteristics with those of other wines you have tasted. Does it taste the same, better, or worse than similar examples you can remember? If the flavor is unfamiliar, do you like it? The following procedure, which will not look impolite in a restaurant, will help you to develop your tasting skills.

**See**

When analyzing a wine, first look at it. Whatever the style or age, it should be transparent and bright. Any cloudiness—unless it is simply caused by disturbing the deposit in a red wine—reveals a fault. A wine’s color, and the depth of that color, indicates the wine’s age, while the way in which the liquid flows down the inside of the glass will reveal its richness.

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**Beaujolais**

This youthful Beaujolais, with its almost violet color that runs right to the rim, is typical of young red wine from almost any region or grape variety.

**Burgundy**

Burgundy can be recognized by its brick-red color. This one is three years old and already going slightly pale at the rim—a feature that will be more marked in a very mature wine.
Swirl the wine around the glass, take a good sniff, then concentrate on what you have smelled. Does the wine seem light or intense? Fresh and clean, or musty, dirty, or vinegary? Does it smell of fruits, spices, flowers, or vegetables? Fix that smell or mixture of smells in your memory, and you will be surprised how quickly you begin to acquire the skill of guessing at the identity of a wine without having to read the label.

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Spitting is a good idea if you have many wines to taste and do not want to ingest too much alcohol. Concentrate on the flavor—if any—that the wine has left behind. One of the greatest differences between really fine wine and the ordinary stuff lies in the quality and longevity of the “finish” or aftertaste.

A three-year-old botrytized wine like this example from Sauternes, if made in a good vintage, will have a lovely golden color that gets deeper with age.

A two-year-old dry Riesling from the Alsace region will have the delicate color of pale straw. Over the course of a decade, however, this wine, too, will turn gold.
JUDGING QUALITY

Having learned the mechanics of tasting wine, the next stage is to focus your new skills on the task of judging the quality of a wine, and, just as importantly, its potential for improvement in the future.

Assuming that a wine possesses attractive and well-balanced flavors, the feature that sets a fine wine apart from the rest is its complexity. While plenty of wines are like a melody played on a single instrument, the greatest wines have the many-layered quality of a full-blown symphony.

As it ages, the appearance of any wine will change. Try holding your glass tipped away from you against a white background, and look at the far edge of the liquid. The older the wine, the paler and more watery the edge will appear. The color of the wine itself will give you more clues to its age, with reds beginning life as violet, changing to ruby, then to brick and finally to brown. Whites change from green-gold to gold and then to bronze. Smell and flavor also evolve. The wine loses the simple primary characteristics derived from its grape variety and the way in which it was fermented and matured before bottling. These are replaced with the more complex secondary smells and flavors that develop only during its time in the bottle.

Most wines nowadays are drunk while primary characteristics are still evident. Some wines, such as Beaujolais (see pp126–7), Muscadet (see p219) and Vins de Pays d’Oc (see p279), are actually at their best at this stage. Drinking great reds and whites in their youth, however, can be compared to going to watch a play in rehearsal rather than on its opening night.

FORECASTING THE FUTURE

In order to judge a wine’s future potential, you should look for various characteristics. Does it smell and taste fresh? Like sprightly old people, good wines can retain an element of their freshness throughout life. Unfortunately, a wine that seems...
dull or stale today is likely to be even more so tomorrow. Does it have enough flavor to survive a few more years in the bottle? A light, delicate wine may taste good now, but after storage it may be thin and watery. There is also the matter of balance. A red wine will need a certain amount of tannin (its harshness balances the fruitiness of black grapes), and a white needs acidity to keep any tendency to sweetness in check. Neither tannin nor acid is good in excess, however, and it can be tricky to forecast changes in the balance between them as the wine ages.

When tasting young claret, it is difficult to assess the amount and the quality of the fruit behind the tannin. Critics who ranked the intensely tannic 1970 red Bordeaux as great when they first tasted it dismissed 1982 Bordeaux as being too short of tannin to be worth keeping. Both these assessments were proved wrong. The 1970 retained its toughness throughout its life and was rarely an enjoyable drink. The 1982 vintage, like an athlete with hidden reserves of strength, turned out to have more tannin than had seemed to be the case.

PATTERNS OF CHANGE
Another challenge confronting the wine taster is the unpredictable way in which different wines evolve. Some grape varieties and some regions produce wines that consistently evolve much faster, or slower, than some others. Wines made from the Viognier grape in the Rhône Valley appellation of Condrieu (see p.252), for example, age faster than those made from the Riesling variety in Alsace (see pp.64–79). White Rhône Valley wines made from the Marsanne and Roussanne grapes go into decline for a few years after bottling, and then develop more interesting flavors when they reach seven years old.

Wine Competitions
Tasting wines “blind” (see below) against each other, as shown here at the annual international Wine Challenge event, occasionally brings unexpected results.

The wines of Bordeaux, too, tend to decline for a year or so at various stages of their development. Unlike with the Rhône whites, however, this trait varies from one vintage to another. The wines of 1985 went through no such sulk, for instance, while good examples of the 1966 vintage have been known to return from apparent death on more than one occasion. Red Burgundy, which contains less tannin than many other red wines, can fade from fruity drinkability to watery fragility in the space of six months. The weightier red wines of Bordeaux generally take rather longer to lose their appeal, but can quite often end their days with a mouth-drying, tannic edge. Decanting and airing a wine in the glass can—to a certain extent—mimic the way a wine will evolve in the cellar.

Blind Tasting
At a blind tasting, the tasters do not know the identity of the wines, and must judge purely by their impressions. Here, the labels are hidden by napkins.
The Language of Wine

Every generation and every country—and almost every region—develops its own vocabulary for the challenging task of describing wine.

Translating the flavor of a wine into words is as difficult as trying to describe a symphony or a painting. Language is clearly not the ideal medium in which to convey physical sensations. That said, in describing a wine, one is trying to define three aspects of its character. First, there is the smell and the flavor, often best evoked by reference to familiar fruits, spices, and herbs. Next, there is the style and texture. Is it tannic like stewed tea, or flabby like a dull Golden Delicious apple? Is it thin or concentrated? Last, although inextricably bound up in the description of flavor and style, there is the question of whether it is actually enjoyable to drink. Is it immature, at its peak or past its best? Is it clean or dirty? Simple or complex?

A GALIC GLOSSARY

ACETIC Wine with a vinegary taste caused by bacteria that produce acetic acid.

AMYLIQUE The pear-drop character of wine that has been fermented at a low temperature.

ANIMAL The character of some mature reds and examples of the Syrah grape. May also indicate a wine-making fault.

ÂPRE Describes a bitter, harshly tannic wine.

AROMATIQUE The spicy or perfumed character of wines made from aromatic grape varieties such as Gewürztraminer.

ARÔME Term used to describe the fresh, grapey smells of a young unbottled wine.

AUSTERE An acidic white wine or a tannic red one.

BALANCED A wine whose component flavors are in harmony.

BARRIQUE An oak barrel, usually new.

BISCUITY The rich flavor of mature white Burgogne and Champagne.

BOISÉ A woody-flavored wine.

BOUCHON (GOÛT DE) Corked.

BOUQUET The smell of a maturing wine, as opposed to the arôme of a younger wine. Can also refer to the smell of a wine generally.

BUTTERY Describes the character of wines such as a good white Burgundy.

CAPITEUX Describes an overly alcoholic wine.

CHALEUREUX Suggests a richly flavored red wine with a high alcohol content.

CHAPTALISÉ Wine whose alcoholic strength has been increased by the addition of sugar during fermentation.

CHARNNU A less pronounced version of chaleurux.

CHARPENTÉ A full-flavored but slightly over-tannic red wine that will improve with keeping.

CHÊNE Oak—probably new.

CIGAR BOX The cedar-wood character of maturing red Bordeaux.

CLOSED Wine whose smell and flavor are hard to discern. Such wines may open out with time and exposure to the air.

COMPLETE Complex and balanced.

COMPLEX Wine with more than one flavor.

CORKED Describes a musty-tasting wine, caused by a mold-infected cork. This fault affects three to six percent of bottles of wine to a lesser or greater extent. Sadly, after inventing screwcaps for wine, French producers have been slower than their New World counterparts to exploit them.

CORSÉ Similar to charnu and chaleurux.

DÉPOUILLÉ A faded, flavorless wine.

DILUTE/DILUÉ Wine lacking concentration because of overcropping or a rainy harvest.

ELEGANT A subtle, well-balanced wine.

ÉTOFFÉ Muscular, full-bodied wine with aging potential.

ÉVENTÉ A wine that is past its best.

FAT Flavorome wine made from ripe fruit.

FÉMININ Delicate, light wine.

FINISH The flavor that lingers in the mouth after the wine has been swallowed.

FLabby Wine lacking acidity, which will deteriorate further with time.

FONDU A mature wine that is in its prime.

FRIAND Wine, of any age, with a good fruity balance of ripeness and acidity.

FUMÉ Smoky. The term is used differently in the New World, where it refers to oaky wines.

GOBS OF FRUIT American description for a fruit-packed, new-style red.

GREEN A wine made from unripe grapes. Often the result of a cool summer or overcropping.
Does the flavor vanish quickly or linger in the mouth? Descriptions of wines have ranged from Michelangelo’s Italian wine that “kisses, licks, bites, thrusts and stings,” through a wine described by one nameless drinker as “like the little Lord Jesus slipping down your throat in velvet pantaloons,” to wines with “silky,” “satiny,” or even “lacy” textures. In North America, reference is frequently made to such technical terms as “malolactic fermentation” and “skin contact.” The following list is a personal attempt to bring together some of the most commonly used French, US, and British terminology.

- **HOT** Similar to capiteux. A wine with too much alcohol for its flavor.
- **HYDROGEN SULFIDE** If wine is insufficiently aired in the cellar, the sulfur, added as an antioxidant when the wine is bottled, can turn into hydrogen sulfide, giving the wine a very unpleasant rotten-egg odor.
- **LONG** A wine with a lingering flavor.
- **LOUCHE** A wine that is cloudy, usually as a result of bacterial spoilage.
- **MEATY** A wine with a texture so dense that you almost imagine you could chew it.
- **MERCAPTAN** A foul-smelling chemical compound, produced once the wine is bottled when hydrogen sulfide reacts with alcohol.
- **MOISI** A musty smell, usually caused by dirty casks or tanks.
- **NOBLE ROT/POURRITURE NOBLE** This benevolent fungus grows on white grapes, adding a unique flavor to sweet white wines.
- **NOSE** A wine’s “nose” is its smell, including both its ârome and its bouquet.
- **PÂTEUX** Describes a flabby, sweet white wine lacking in acidity.
- **PÉTILLANT** Similar in meaning to crémant, this describes a slightly sparkling wine. An even lighter sparkle is described as perlant.
- **PIERRE-À-FUSIL** Meaning “gun-flint,” this term is used to describe the steely character of some wines made from Sauvignon Blanc grapes.
- **POURRI** Describes wines made from grapes that have been spoiled by harmful rot.
- **PUISSANT** A wine with plenty of flavor and a high alcohol content.
- **RANCIO** Refers to a fortified wine or vin doux naturel that has been stored in oak casks for at least two years, often exposed to direct sunlight.

This oxidizes the wine and gives it a much-prized sherry-like character that is especially popular in the Roussillon area.

- **RICH** English equivalent of puissant.
- **ROBE** The appearance (literally, “dress”) of a wine.
- **ROTI** Describes the roasted character of wines made from nobly rotten grapes.
- **SHORT** Describes a wine whose flavor fades fast.
- **SOYEUX** Refers to a wine that is silky in texture and easy to drink.
- **STALKY** This refers to a wine spoiled by the woody flavor of grape stalks.
- **STRUCTURE** A wine’s structure is made up of various components, including tannin, acidity, sugar, and fruitiness, in relation to its alcohol content.
- **SULFUR** Used throughout the wine-making process as an antiseptic and an antioxidant, sulfur is cough-inducing when used excessively, especially in sweet white wines.
- **TANNIC** Used to describe a tough red wine with the mouth-puckering character of strong, cold tea.
- **VEGETAL** Vegetal smell and flavor of a wine made from unripe grapes.
- **VIF** Lively, light.
- **VOLATILE ACIDS** Acids that evaporate at low temperatures. One of the most important volatile acids is acetic acid, which, in excess, gives wine an unpleasant vinegary character.
- **VOLUPTUOUS** Refers to wine that is rich and flavorsome with a high alcohol content.
- **YEASTY** The characteristic flavor of good Champagne, and of traditional Muscadet bottled sur lie—that is, without racking or filtering.
Serving Wine

Over the centuries, wine has been drunk out of a variety of glasses, ranging from heavy beakers to delicate crystal flutes. Nowadays, glasses are even designed to bring out the best in particular wines.

Among the best wine-drinking experiences I have ever had were drinking Champagne directly from the bottle in a cornfield with a woman with whom I was madly in love, and sipping a 50-year-old red Burgundy from a hotel toothbrush mug. On neither of these occasions was the wine served in the ideal glass, at the correct temperature, or with the appropriate dish, but that was more than compensated for by the setting, the company, and the flavor. Had I been drinking either of these wines at home, however, I would have taken the trouble to serve them in glasses that helped to bring out their potential. The Austrian glass manufacturer Georg Riedel has, with inventive genius, proven that by altering the form of the glass, he can subtly but perceptibly bring out the flavors of different kinds of wines. So his red Bordeaux, red Burgundy, and red Rhône glasses all have their own distinctive shape, as do those designed for an ever-growing range of other regions. If you are a fan of a particular wine, there is a lot to be said for indulging in a full set of Riedel glasses. Possessing a range of ideal glasses, however, is not unlike having an array of kitchen knives, in that you can, in fact, accomplish almost everything you want with three or four really good ones. My own most frequently used quartet consists of a large red wine glass, a long-stemmed, smaller glass for white wines, a flute for Champagne, and a small, but not too small, glass for port and sweet white wines.

Whatever glass you use, it should conform to the following criteria if it is to bring out the wine’s best qualities. It should be made of clear crystal and be large enough to contain a reasonable
amount of wine when only a third- to half-full. The circumference of the rim should be quite a bit smaller than that of the bowl, while the bowl itself should be taller than it is wide. In other words, no wine glass is more poorly designed for the task than the traditional “saucer” Champagne glass that is said to have been modeled on Marie Antoinette’s breasts. This glass’s wide brim allows both the aroma and the bubbles to escape from the glass.

DECANTING WINE
The business of decanting wines and allowing them to “breathe” is a controversial one. In my opinion, opening a bottle a few hours before serving it is almost pointless, since the surface area that is in contact with the air is far too small. Decanting wines, however, achieves two purposes. First, in the case of older red wines, it offers a means of separating the wine from the deposit that has settled at the bottom of the bottle. Second, decanting is an effective way to “open out” and soften young reds, whites, and even sparkling wines, provided that the wine is allowed to spread across the surface of the glass as it flows into the decanter. Young wines can be decanted two or three hours before serving, but older wines are best decanted as late as possible, since forcible exposure to air in a decanter after decades in a bottle can be tiring for a mature wine. Never forget that a wine may continue to evolve in the glass after decanting.

According to tradition, at dinner, light wines should come before full-bodied examples, whites before reds, young before old and dry before sweet. The wines should also improve with every course. So what should you do if the white Burgundy is finer than the red that it precedes, or if, as is highly likely, the mature Bordeaux you have saved for the cheese is more delicate than the Hermitage that you served with the venison? As with every other form of etiquette, the best rule to follow is common sense. You will do a fair wine no favors by serving it after a great one, unless that fair wine happens to be the perfect partner for the dish with which it is to be drunk. Treat a series of wines as you do a set of paintings, giving each the space and setting it needs to be enjoyed at its best.

Choosing a Corkscrew
While no corkscrew does the job better than the “Screwpull,” the American “Ah-So” is useful for old corks, and the “Waiter’s Friend” is another reliable alternative. Whatever corkscrew you choose, make sure its screw is in the form of an open spiral.

SERVING TEMPERATURES

A dry white wine served too cold will have hardly any taste, while a red served too warm will be like soup. To chill wine, put it in a bucket full of water and ice for 10 minutes before serving. Wines that are too cold can be warmed in tepid water.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wine Type</th>
<th>Suitable Temperature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Light, dry, and semisweet white wines such as Vouvray</td>
<td>43–48°F (6–9°C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosé, Champagne, aromatic white wines such as Riesling, and fuller-bodied ones such as Sancerre and basic Chablis</td>
<td>46–52°F (8–11°C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richer white Burgundies and Bordeaux, and light reds such as Loires and Beaujolais</td>
<td>52–55°F (11–13°C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger red Burgundy and Rhônes and older Bordeaux</td>
<td>57–61°F (14–16°C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older red Burgundy, tannic young Bordeaux, and Rhône reds</td>
<td>61–64°F (16–18°C)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Food and Wine

It is no accident that a region's wines go so well with its food; wine-makers first supply their own tables. To get the perfect match, always try to think of the wine as a secondary sauce for the dish.

When it comes to matching wine to food, and vice versa, there are two very different schools of thought. On the one hand, there is what could be called the doctrinal approach of traditional sommeliers, who prescribe specific partnerships of wine and food as if they were holy writs. On the other, there is the laissez-faire approach that suggests there are no rules and that the choice is down to personal taste.

In my experience, neither approach is as useful as a readiness to learn from both common sense and the experiences of others. It is only natural that over the years, wine-growers have more often than not produced styles of wine to suit the types of food that are laid on their tables. Burgundy (see pp112–159) is the source of some of France's best beef and chicken, while the Médoc (see p99) is more famous for its lamb; Sancerre (see p222) is as well known for its goat's cheese as it is for its wines. The wine that accompanies a meal fills much the same role as a sauce.

A powerful Hermitage (see p258) will do no more favors for a dish of sweetbreads than sauce poivrade (cracked pepper sauce) will, and a Muscadet will be as overshadowed by venison as a creamy sauce would be. So, when choosing a wine to go with a dish, consider the intensity of its flavor. Next, bear in mind the flavor itself. Gamey dishes such as venison are complemented by spicy sauces such as sauce poivrade and by spicy wines like Hermitage. Fruity dishes, such as sole Véronique, which contains grapes, call for fruity wines like Riesling and Muscat. The textures of both dish and wine are also important. One of the worst culinary marriages I have ever come across is the one between smoked salmon, which is an oily fish, and Gewürztraminer, a wine that has an oily texture. A crisp Sauvignon Blanc would be a far better match.

The Effects of Wine
Slow cooking with wine helps to tenderize a tough old bird (below left), and gives mussels (below right) added flavor and aroma.

Wine and Cheese
Not all wines go with all types of cheese. Sauvignon Blanc is the perfect accompaniment to goats' cheese like this Chavignol.
Tough, tannic red wines are a poor match for beef, which makes them taste harsher, so you’d be better off drinking Burgundy with the beef and saving your Bordeaux (see p93) for the lamb. If this incompatibility between beef and Bordeaux comes as a surprise, just try a good, young Médoc with an unpasteurized Brie and you’ll find a partnership from hell. The creamy cheese makes the tannic wine taste positively metallic, and would be far better served with a soft red Burgundy or a dry white wine.

Rich dessert wines are often laced with the scents of the fruits that share the grapes’ growing space, and make ideal matches for them. Whether dessert wines should accompany a meal’s sweet ending or themselves be the dessert is a debatable point.

An alternative to the usual dessert is to make one from wine—a gelatin dessert with Claret and red currants, for example, or a Champagne sherbert.

Wine is used for a wide range of purposes in the kitchen. Since Roman times, people have been making marinades from wine, olive oil, and herbs, using them to soften and flavor potentially tough meat. The best wines for this are simple, youthful, full-flavored reds from the Rhône valley (see pp238–263), Bordeaux (see pp80–111) and southern France. Similarly, peaches improve with white Bordeaux (see p93), strawberries with old red Bordeaux, and fruit salad with Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise (see p259).

Fish can be poached in white wine and stock, while dishes like coq au vin and boeuf Bourguignon show what slow cooking in red wine can do for sinewy meat.

When it comes to choosing the wine you are going to use in the kitchen, be rigorous—if you wouldn’t choose to drink it, you should avoid cooking with it. If you want a dish to taste of vinegar or sherry, use stuff from bottles bearing those exact words on their labels. By the same token, though, ignore classic recipes that instruct you to cook with the same expensive wine you plan to enjoy with the meal. Few people nowadays can afford even to drink the rare Grand Cru Chambertin very often, so using it in a chicken dish seems terribly extravagant. I would instead argue that a full-bodied Vin de Pays (see pp276–79) Pinot Noir, Mâcon Rouge, or any other soft, juicy red would be a perfectly acceptable alternative.

Where a recipe specifies that red Bordeaux should be used, good Vin de Pays Cabernet Sauvignon will do more for the dish than a watery Bordeaux Rouge. Any dry sparkling wine can be used as a substitute for Champagne (see pp160–177), as could a yeasty Muscadet (see p219). If you do cook with wine, remember to add it to the pan early so that the alcohol has time to evaporate.

Adding Wine
Unless you are making a dish like sherry trifle, in which the alcohol is supposed to be apparent, don’t add the wine right at the end of the cooking.
FOOD AND WINE GLOSSARY

The following partnerships are not necessarily ones with which every sommelier will agree, but they all represent the fruits of my personal experiments and experience over the years.

APPETIZERS

Caviar This delicacy and Champagne were made for each other.

Eggs Burgundians poach eggs in their red wine, and Beaujolais and young basic Burgundy can go well with omelets. Alternatively, I’d suggest blanc de blancs Champagne or white wine from Burgundy, the Loire valley, or Bordeaux.

Foie Gras The rich, “sweet” character of foie gras is delicious with Sauternes or any other top-quality late-harvest wine.

Terrine A good country terrine is best served with a rustic wine like a Madiran, a Fitou, a Provence rosé, a Côtes du Rhône, or a Beaujolais.

Melon This fruit does unexpected damage to the flavor of most wines. Quarts-de-Chaume or vendange tardive Riesling will fare better than most.

Salad A vinaigrette sauce will do no wine any good at all. If you must drink wine with your salad, try a basic white.

FISH AND SHELLFISH

River fish These flavorsome fish call for flavorsome wines. White Burgundy, Riesling d’Alsace, Sancerre, and dry white Bordeaux all work well, as does dry rosé and even young red Burgundy (the Burgundians go so far as to cook trout in it).

Sea fish The key here is subtle wines to complement the light flavors of the fish. Chablis, white Hermitage, dry Juraçon, Pinot Blanc, and dry white Bordeaux all work well with most sea fish.

Smoked fish The oily character of most smoked fish needs crisp wine, so forget the recommendation to drink Alsace Gewürztraminer with smoked salmon. This is also the one type of dish that calls for oaky white wine, such as modern Pessac-Léognan, Burgundy, and vins de pays.

Shellfish “Sweeter”-tasting shellfish such as crayfish, crab, lobster, and scallops go well with white Burgundy, Sancerre, dry Vouvray, Pinot Gris, or Riesling d’Alsace. Rosé Champagne and peppery Rhône rosés can also be delicious. Mussels are best partnered with Muscadet, Chablis, or Sauvignon de Touraine.

Oysters Chablis or Muscadet would be my choice here. Alternatively, you could opt for Champagne.

MEATS

Beef Everything depends on the way the dish is prepared. However, I believe that red Bordeaux is far less appropriate than red Burgundy or wines from the northern or southern Rhône.

Lamb Red Bordeaux is the best choice here, although red Loire like Chinon or Bourgueil can be good, as can Cahors.

Offal Liver and kidney dishes suit red Bordeaux (especially St Émilion and Pomerol) and Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

Game Red Burgundy is good here, too, but Rhône reds are better, as are the finer wines from southwestern regions such as Cahors and Madiran.

Chicken Avoid flavors that are either too strong or too subtle. Creamy chicken dishes need the bite of dry, fruity Sauvignon Blanc, dry Vouvray, or Alsace Riesling. A Chardonnay or an Alsace Riesling will work better if the chicken is simply roasted.
Duck The ideal wine here is red Burgundy, but a flavorsome Alsace Riesling or a fruity southern Rhône wine, such as a Châteauneuf-du-Pape or Gigondas, will also work well.

SPICY DISHES
In India, wine has no traditional place. It can, therefore, be a challenge to select a wine to accompany a curry. Everything depends on the spiciness of the dish, but Gewürztraminer or fruity white Sancerre should work. Ginger is no friend to most wines, but seems best suited to Gewürztraminer or Clairette de Die Tradition.

VEGETABLES
Most vegetables can be enjoyed with any style of wine. Some, however, have strong flavors that should be taken into account. Artichokes, for example, are not always an easy match for wine. This flavorsome vegetable will make most reds taste metallic, especially when a Hollandaise sauce is involved. White or rosé Sancerre works well here, as does dry Tokay Pinot Gris, Cabernet d’Anjou, or rosé from the Jura or Burgundy regions. Dry white Loire Sauvignon is delicious with asparagus, as the wine can have an asparagus flavor of its own. Another option is unoaked Chablis or good Pouilly Fuisse. Whether they are stuffed or used in ratatouille, eggplants are well matched to reds from southern France and peppery Côtes du Rhône. The fatty character of avocado calls for crisp wines like Loire Sauvignon or Chablis. Pinot Gris is a good alternative. The licorice flavor of fennel can overpower many wines, so in this case I would choose a full-bodied Pouilly-Fumé.

CHEESES
The more appealing and varied the cheese board, the greater the risk of choosing an inappropriate wine. As a rule, tannic reds such as young Bordeaux are only worth drinking with a hard, savory cheese such as Parmesan. Smoky and slightly sweet cheeses like Comté, Gruyère, and Emmenthal go well with fruity Alsace wines such as Pinot Gris, Muscat, or Gewürztraminer, while blue cheeses such as Roquefort are delicious with late-harvest wines like Sauternes, medium-sweet Jurançon, or Bonnezeaux. Creamy cheeses such as Brillat Savarin, Brie, and Camembert are horrible with many red wines, but perfect with whites such as Sancerre and Pouilly Fumé, both of which are also ideal with goat’s cheese. Because of its lack of tannin, red Burgundy is better with creamy cheese than red Bordeaux or Rhône, but strong Burgundian cheeses like Ami du Chambertin will overwhelm a subtle, mature Burgundy. Champagne is a good match to all sorts of cheese, as is vin jaune from Arbois.

DESSERTS
Chocolate-based desserts The strong flavor of milk or semi-sweet chocolate is one of the most formidable enemies for most wines. The strongest contenders are Muscat vins doux naturels such as Beaumes-de-Venise and Banyuls. Clairette de Die Tradition can just about handle chocolate mousse, but any kind of Champagne is a bad idea.

Cream-based desserts The best sweet wines for these dishes are not the fruitiest. Try semi-sweet Jurançon, sweet white Bordeaux, or riche or doux Champagne.

Fruit-based desserts Fruit calls for fruit, so go for vendange tardive Riesling or Muscat vin doux naturel.
Starting a Cellar

For anyone with more than a passing interest in wine, stocking even a modest wine cellar is as rewarding as building up a collection of good books or music. But keeping track of your bottles calls for planning.

In an age when not all of us are lucky enough to live in a home with a basement, the term “cellar” has to be a broad one. For some, it is a rack beneath the stairs or in an unused fireplace; some opt for a Eurocave—a commercially made, temperature- and humidity-controlled cabinet; others use a converted refrigerator.

A cellar should enjoy a constant, cool temperature. Around 52°F (11°C) is ideal, but constancy is more important than coolness.

A cellar should be reasonably humid, to prevent corks from drying out: aim for 75–85 percent humidity. Drier cellars should be humidified, while ones that are too humid can be improved with a bit of gravel. This also greatly reduces the risk of bottles breaking when they are dropped. Fresh air should circulate reasonably freely through the cellar. And then, a cellar must be secure. There is little point in locking up your jewelry while leaving priceless bottles at the mercy of thieves. Don’t neglect to insure the cellar, and to keep the insured value up to date. Finally, you need racks or bins—examples are illustrated on this page.

ORGANIZATION

However good your cellar, it is in effect only the vinous equivalent of the shelves on which you store your books. It is just as frustrating to have to search for a bottle of Musigny as for your copy of Les Misérables. Once, in the days when most people drank only a dozen or so different wines, keeping track of them was quite simple. Today, with an ever-growing selection of new wines to discover, it is a lot trickier.

The system I use removes the need to group together wines of similar style and allows me to fill every hole in the rack while being able to lay my hands on the bottle I want almost instantly. I use a business spreadsheet, and identify the individual holes or bins with a system of numbers and letters. Numbers run horizontally, while letters run vertically. So, bottles of the same Nuits-St Georges bought...
Anyon on starting a cellar should aim to have four different sets of wines: current daily drinking, current “special occasion” bottles, and a set of examples of each for the future. Muscadet, most Pinot Blanc, and most basic red Côtes du Rhône are not worth laying down, for example, while most good red Bordeaux will improve after a few years in the cellar. Some wines are supposedly ready to drink when sold but are well worth maturing for a year or two: an example of this, in my experience, is good non-vintage Champagne.

I offer the 210-bottle selection below as a possible starting point; an alternative might be to halve all the quantities, resulting in a total of 105 bottles.

### LIST OF SUGGESTED WINES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bottles of assorted, mature (or maturing) high-quality red Bordeaux.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bottles of young, high-quality red Bordeaux.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Cru bourgeois or petit-château Bordeaux.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Northern Rhône reds: Hermitage, Côte Rôtie or Cornas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Southern Rhône reds: Châteauneuf-du-Pape or Gigondas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Good red Côtes du Rhône-Villages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Good young red Burgundies such as Beaune, Volnay, or Vosne-Romanée.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Older examples of the above wines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Bottles of red Burgundy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bottles of Chinon or Bourgueil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bottles of Fleurie.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Assorted Cahors, Minervois, and Côtes d’Aix en Provence reds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Good Vin de Pays reds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bottles of top white Burgundy: Chablis Grand Cru, Meursault, or Chassagne-Montrachet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Bottles of white Burgundy or good Chablis.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bottles of Alsace Riesling, Pinot Gris, or Gewürztraminer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bottles of good Alsace Pinot Blanc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bottles of Alsace Vendange Tardive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bottles of good Condrieu.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bottles of Sancerre or Pouilly Fumé.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bottles of Vouvray Sec.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bottles of Vouvray Mousseux.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bottles of Pessac-Léognan Blanc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Bottles of good white Bordeaux (choose with particular care).</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bottles of young Condrieu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bottles of Sauternes or Barsac.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bottles of Jurançon Sec.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Bottles of good white Vin de Pays Sauvignon or Chardonnay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bottles of Muscadet (useful for oysters).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bottles of good non-vintage Champagne.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bottles of vintage Champagne.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Investing in Wine

Every bottle of wine, like everything else we buy, comes at a price. In some cases, that price rises quite dramatically over time. In others, unfortunately but inevitably, it falls.

Most of the wine we buy is intended for drinking. Just try auctioning off, for example, a case of basic Côtes du Rhône. If, however, in 1993 you offered an auctioneer some 1982 Château Latour in the barrel, your profit might have been as high as 1,000 percent. Provided you buy the right bottles and take care of them, wine can be one of the best investments around.

Many producers feel that there is something unacceptable about speculating on wine. However, how many of them, when deciding the price of each year’s wine, ignore the popularity of previous vintages at auction?

Unlike paintings, which can last forever, bottles of wine have a life-span that depends on the vintage and the quality of the vineyard and wine-making. It is as difficult to predict the longevity of a particular vintage as it is to foretell the success on the racecourse of a newly born foal. The 1983 Château Latour, for example, would have initially cost you around the same price as the 1982, but, like other wines of that vintage, is aging far more quickly and is now worth much less.

Until the early 1990s, the people who fueled the market by buying mature and maturing bottles at auction rarely strayed far beyond the wines of a few “blue chip” Bordeaux estates like Château Latour. This changed, however, both with the growth in popularity of pundits who “discover” and recommend “new” wines, and with the arrival on the scene of a wave of “new” wine buyers.

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**The rising stars**

Once buyers have filled their racks with “blue chip” wines, they move on to purchasing novelties that their friends don’t have. So wines from the recently created Château le Pin, which produces only 25,000 bottles each year, are now worth more than the longer-established Château Margaux, which produces 10 times as many. Wines in limited
production from little-known châteaux in St Émilion and Pomerol, and domaines in Burgundy and the Rhône, also attract investors.

The long-term investment potential of these wines will, however, depend on whether they stand the test of time as well as the “blue chips.” The one certainty is that, unless the world turns teetotal or top restaurants turn to offering only cola with their meals, the value of classic, fine wines will continue to rise. The only rules for wine-lovers who would like to benefit from this trend are to keep track of what influential commentators are saying about the vintages in your cellar, to take care of your wines, and to buy the ones that you enjoy drinking. At least then, if their performance is disappointing, you can always enjoy your liquid assets—which is more than can be said for underperforming stocks.

Test of Time
The value of the wines produced by individual châteaux can fluctuate. Recording the value of the 1982 vintage at auction, this chart, produced by wine merchants Bordeaux Index, shows that “blue chip” châteaux like Cheval Blanc and Pichon-Lalande are far more reliable than some humbler estates.
Vintages

Assessing the potential of a wine from a given year’s grapes is never easy. Favored vintages may ultimately disappoint, while apparently average years can yield rare classics.

Vintages are one of the aspects of wine that can confuse even the most experienced wine enthusiasts and professionals. Every year, in every region and every vineyard, nature provides a fresh set of challenges for the wine maker. Grapes on the vine, and wines in the bottle, often develop in unpredictable ways. Add to this the fact that wine enthusiasts differ in their definition of a perfectly mature wine, and it is clear that predicting the longevity of any wine is going to be tricky.

When using a vintage chart, it helps to bear in mind that it is the work of a broad brush. A chart cannot take account of the lucky or exceptionally skilful producer, nor can it encompass, at the other end of the spectrum, underperforming wine makers who fail to make the most of a good vintage. The example on the following pages is based on the performance of wines made by better-than-average producers. It indicates how good a particular vintage was and when wines made in that vintage are best drunk. For example, 1998 was a very good vintage for Margaux and bottles made by good châteaux from this year would be best drunk between 2004 and 2020.

The first key to understanding vintages lies in appreciating that they often vary from region to region (and even within the same region) and from wine style to wine style. So, while 1982 was a great year for Bordeaux’s red wines, it was a mediocre vintage for Burgundy, on the other side of France. Years that suit the Merlot grape in Bordeaux, for example, are not always as kind to Cabernet Sauvignon. So, in 1998, it was easier to make good claret in the Merlot-filled vineyards of Pomerol and St Émilion than in their Cabernet Sauvignon-dominated neighbours of the Médoc. Similarly, vintages that provide ideal conditions for the development of the “noble rot” that is needed for sweet white wine are often years when it is hard to make good dry red wine.

There are different kinds of good and poor vintages. There are some years when the best wines are drinkable almost from the outset, while others from the same regions repay patience in their early life. So-called “bad” vintages may be unpalatably acidic, or simply lightweight and dilute. Some supposedly “lesser” vintages give a great deal of pleasure during their brief heyday, while so-called top-class vintages may never fulfil their initial promise.
## FRENCH WINES VINTAGES

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**KEY**
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** Key: ** Average, ** Good, Very good, Very good, Excellent

'06–'10 Best drunk between 2006 and 2010—Not a good vintage

** Past it
Touring

*France’s wine-makers are surprisingly approachable, and many, including some of the most famous, welcome visitors to their cellars and are happy to pour—and sell—examples of their wine.*

The pebbled vineyards of Châteauneuf-du-Pape, the chalky hills of Champagne, and the sheer slopes of the Rhône all look very different once you have tasted the wines they are instrumental in producing. The experience can be likened to watching a play performed live that you have only ever seen before on paper.

The timing of your visit to any wine region depends very much on what you are planning to do there. For a sightseeing vacation, the summer is a good choice: wine-makers will be delighted to welcome you into their cellars, though you may have to share a limited amount of space and attention with other tourists. Harvest time is likely to appeal to an avid photographer. No one who has watched pickers of all ages in the vineyards, and witnessed the picnics among the vines and the banquets in the cellars, will ever forget the experience. As a general rule, most French grapes are picked at some point between September 20 and October 15. However, timing your trip to coincide with the week or two of the harvest can be very tricky. Like sailors trimming their sails to the wind, wine-makers are often forced to reschedule the harvest according to the weather. If you are thinking of combining your tour with some wine-buying, bear in mind that people busy picking, pressing, and fermenting grapes are unlikely to have time for a leisurely chat over a barrel or bottle, which means that harvest time is not a good time to fill your cellar.

In my experience, to be sure of getting the warmest possible welcome from wine-growers, the best time to visit the cellars is midweek in January or February. Most growers will be glad of an excuse to spend time in the cellar, showing you wines, rather than among the freezing vines. In addition, you run far less risk than in the summer of being elbowed out of the way by a succession of other visitors.

**VISITING THE CELLARS**

In New World countries like the United States and Australia, wineries often offer tasting rooms and gift shops packed with branded glasses, corkscrews, T-shirts, hats, and posters. In the vast majority of French cellars, however, the person who welcomes you will be either the wine-maker or a member of his or her family. Of course, there are plenty of tourist-friendly cellars that advertise their presence at the side of the road, but, like the restaurants with the brightest neon signs, they are not always the best places in which to discover the wines that a region can offer.

It is important to remember that, when you visit the cellars of a small estate, you are entering a place that is not so much a shop or a showroom as a cross between the wine-maker’s home and place of work. Most producers prefer to offer tastings by appointment,
restricting them to hours that do not interfere with work time or with family time. Lunchtime, especially, is a bad part of the day to arrive. Interrupting a Gallic wine-grower who has sat down to enjoy his midday meal is less impolite than intruding on him at prayer, but not much.

One hazard to be wary of when visiting out of season is the “tired” bottle, one that has been opened some days earlier for the last people to visit the cellar. Always be politely honest about your impressions of the wines you are tasting so as to give the wine-grower an idea of your tastes. If you know anything at all about the region, its wines, and its vintages, then tactfully ensuring that your host is aware of that knowledge may persuade him or her to open another bottle or two for you to taste. As a rule, never purchase a wine from a producer who is not willing to let you taste at least a few of his bottles. Most producers will be happy to sell you anything from a single bottle to several cases or more. If you find nothing that you like, or you think the wines are overpriced, there is no need to feel pressured into buying. At the same time, it is important to avoid wasting the producer’s time by outstaying your welcome in his cellar.

**Patron Saint of Wine Growers**

In many wine-growing regions, producers show off their wines on the weekend following January 22, feast day of St. Vincent, the patron saint of wine-growers.

**Living History**

Artifacts and wine-making equipment from Greek, Roman, and medieval times appear in many museums in wine-producing areas. Together with old maps and written records, these help to put a region’s wine into context.
The FRENCH WINE REGIONS
Wine Map of France

Within its hexagonal borders, France boasts an extraordinarily diverse collection of wine regions, each of which has its own, immediately recognizable style and flavor. The quality and character of these regions is dictated by the climate, soil, and tradition. Popularity, price, and prestige may have more to do with historical chance; once-modest wines have now overtaken others that were once served on royal tables.

The Loire Valley is home to many of the world’s best white and rosé wines.

The wines of southwest France offer some fine alternatives to Bordeaux.
Champagne still produces many of the world’s top-quality bottles of bubbly.

The unique whites of Alsace and Lorraine are now regaining popularity.

When they are at their best, the wines of Burgundy are unequaled.

The vast Rhône Valley produces a huge quantity of delicious, warm, spicy reds.
Alsace is, as its neighbor Lorraine once also used to be, the source of some of the world’s most extraordinary white wines.

Alsace stands apart from other French wine regions. Around 20 years ago, I remember judging a set of anonymous wines at a French competition, alongside wine-makers from Burgundy and Bordeaux. For one member of our team in particular, this was a daunting task. Having taken a perplexed few sniffs, and an even more confused sip, he spat out the first sample, spluttering the words, “C’est pas du vin, c’est du parfum!” ("This isn’t wine, it’s perfume!"). For a man who was used to drinking Chardonnay, a wine made from the extraordinary Gewürztraminer grape, with its combined flavors of spice and perfume, simply made no sense. Fortunately, this was not my first exposure to Alsace’s most characterful grape, but I could easily sympathize with the plight of that Burgundian.

Today, thankfully, most French wine-makers are far less insular when it comes to wine tasting. The relatively recent experience of being a territorial tug-of-love child between the Germans to the east and the French to the west has left the Alsatians with a language, cuisine, and wines that are part Germanic, part Gallic, and 100 percent Alsatian. This is the only significant wine-making region in France to devote itself almost exclusively to growing white grapes. It is also the only major appellation contrôlée to have embraced the notion of printing the names of the grapes from which its wines are made on the labels.

So, while people buying white Burgundy may choose between wines produced from the same Chardonnay grape variety in the well-known appellations of Chassagne-Montrachet (see p. 135) or Puligny-Montrachet (see p. 153), for example, the Alsace-wine-drinker is confronted with labels like Riesling d’Alsace, Gewürztraminer d’Alsace, or Tokay Pinot Gris d’Alsace. These three wines are made from very different grapes that are grown almost anywhere within an area of 32,000 acres (13,000 ha), covering very diverse soils and benefiting from very diverse climates. If you are lucky, the label might mention a grand cru vineyard, but, with over four dozen of these to remember, that could be of little help.

When buying Alsace, read the small print on the label and look for the name of a producer whose quality and style you trust. Although the same can be said for all wines, it is particularly important with Alsace.

**REGIONAL OVERVIEW**

- **33,300 acres (13,500 ha): 157 million bottles.**
- **Northern continental, with warm summers. The Vosges Mountains create a rain shadow and most vines are planted on slopes so they ripen well and allow generous yields.**
- **Very varied, with granite and sandstone on the slopes of the Vosges, limestone on the hills, and fertile soil on the plains.**
- **White: Pinot Blanc, Tokay-Pinot Gris, Muscat, Gewürztraminer, Sylvaner, Auxerrois, Pinot Noir.**
While Alsace takes the spotlight, the old wine-making region of Lorraine is often overlooked. A century ago, like Alsace, Lorraine was a wine region with a difference. Its main river is the Moselle, which, across the border in Germany, still waters a great wine region. Lorraine, however, now boasts little more than two areas classified as VDQS: Vin de Moselle and the Côtes de Toul.

Sweet Lorraine

Alsace is one of the only regions of France to focus attention on its grape varieties.
The History of Alsace and Lorraine

Wine-making in the neighboring regions of Alsace and Lorraine dates back to Roman times, since when it has had its ups and downs. The trade in both regions became depressed in the 1870s. In Alsace, a renaissance was begun in the mid-20th century, whereas Lorraine has yet to see a return to the levels of trade it enjoyed in the 19th century.

The region of Alsace has been passed back and forth between France and Germany for perhaps as long as 2,000 years. The first time this is known to have happened was in the 1st century AD, when a Germanic tribe called the Suebi wrested the region from a Celtic people known as the Sequani.

The Romans under Julius Caesar reversed the situation. They ruled the region for the next 200 years, but in the 4th century another Germanic tribe, the Alemanni, overran Alsace. Later, in 496, the Alemanni in their turn were expelled from Alsace by the Franks—the ancestors of the modern French.

Fortunately for wine enthusiasts, when the Alsatians were not involved in these wars, they evidently had time to plant and grow vines. By 780 the ecclesiastical chronicler Adam the Monk was referring to wine-making as the most profitable of the region’s activities.

The 843 Treaty of Verdun gave Charlemagne the right to share his pan-European empire between his three grandsons. The Alsace region was presented to Louis the German, who also received Germany; in order that, among other things, “he might have wine in his new kingdom.” By the end of the 9th century, vines were tended and wine made in no fewer than 119 Alsatian villages.

Over the next 500 years, vine-growing extended to over 400 villages and some 300 abbeys. According to one of the region’s best-known wine merchants, Johnny Hugel, in his book Reasons for the Renaissance of Alsace Wines, by 1481 exports had risen to the modern equivalent of nearly 80 million bottles: twice today’s total.

VARIETY SHOWS

The first wine-grape variety to be grown in Alsace was probably Pinot Noir. This may have been introduced by the Romans for use in red wine.

A shift from red to white wine was already taking place during the 12th century. “Rissling,” Traminer (Gewürztraminer), and Muscat seem to have been introduced before the 15th century. These were followed by Pinot Blanc, which was almost certainly imported from Burgundy. The Tokay Pinot Gris variety probably also originated there, although the locals prefer to believe that a heroic Alsatian general brought it back from campaigning in Hungary. Whatever the origins of Pinot Gris, Alsatian growers of the 16th century certainly had a sophisticated understanding of the varied potential offered by different grape varieties. They also knew plenty about the ways in which these grapes should be grown and harvested. At that time, the wine-making trade was governed by a body known as the...
Wine Growers’ Association of Riquewihr, which established rules to ensure that grapes were picked as late and as ripe as possible.

PROSPERITY, THEN DECLINE
Under Riquewihr rules, officially registered tasters—Weinsticheren—were given the task of rating wines as either hüntsch (which had to be drunk within Alsace) or vin noble (in German, Edelwein), the export variety. Sale outside Alsace was in the hands of such wine houses as Dopff, which opened in 1574 and whose name survives today in the firms Dopff au Moulin and Dopff & Irion. Among other existing exporters, Trimbach and Hugel began trading in 1626 and 1637, respectively.

These firms thrived, but the early heyday of Alsace’s wine industry was brought to a halt during the Thirty Years’ War of 1618–48. By the end of the 17th century, the number of Weinsticheren had halved and vineyards were being taken over by settlers from other parts of France, from Switzerland, the Tyrol, and Germany, who were given land for nothing by Louis XIV of France. The newcomers were often less quality-conscious than their predecessors, preferring to plant vines on flat, fertile land rather than the more rewarding but labor-intensive slopes. In spite of the royal edicts that were issued in 1731 and 1766 to protect them, Riesling, Muscat, and Traminer, as well as the Pinots, were steadily supplanted by the dull but productive Elbling, Chasselas, and Sylvaner grapes.

RETURN TO FRENCH RULE
Following the French Revolution in 1790 and the resulting breakup of ecclesiastical estates, the Alsace region saw another enthusiastic bout of planting, which this time involved yet another substandard grape variety, Knipperlé. This soon comprised all but a fifth of the region’s vines.

The banalization of Alsace’s wines was exacerbated by the annexation of the region to Germany in 1871 and by the devastation caused by a set of virulent vine diseases and the spread of phylloxera. After World War I and Alsace’s return to France, the area was, as Johnny Hugel recalls, in a sorry and very confused state.

“To change nationality is not only to change flags. It is also to enter into a different economic space. They move the customs offices, you lose all of your customers, and you are subjected to another set of viticultural rules ... in 1918, we didn’t have a single customer in Paris.” Even if there had been Parisian customers, it is questionable how fond they would have been of the wines that the region was then making.

The survival to this day of Alsace’s wine industry, with its traditional standards, is largely the work of a set of unusually dynamic and quality-conscious coopératives.

Warring Neighbors
Although the war between France and Prussia was over 130 years ago, it is still remembered as one of the low points of Alsace’s vinous history.
This tour covers part of the Alsace Route du Vin, an official scenic route meandering over 108 miles (180 km) from Marlenheim to Thann. The tour takes in some of the region’s most spectacular landscapes and prettiest villages and towns, many of which are reminiscent of tales from the Brothers Grimm.

A Peaceful Retreat
Sentiers viticoles, lovely paths that run through the vineyards, complement the charm of Alsace’s towns and villages.

A Driving Tour of Alsace

COLMAR TO EGUISEIM
Wandering around the cobbled streets of Colmar, past the clocks, ornate signs, and half-timbered, often pastel-colored buildings, is like listening to the overture before the opera that is the rest of Alsace. Like so many towns and villages in this region, Colmar is so idyllic that it looks as though it could have been put together by Walt Disney’s designers. As elsewhere in Alsace, the best way to explore is on foot—the town is not made for cars. While in Colmar, make sure you visit the Petite Venise canal and the Maison Pfister on the Rue des Marchands.

Rouffach, the southernmost port of call on your journey, is an old walled town with an impressive church that has been added to over the centuries and a 15th-century corn exchange. Husseren les Châteaux is nestled in the hills here, nearly 1,300 ft (400 m) above sea level, and is distinguishable by the Tours d’Eguisheim, three ruined towers that poke through the woodland like dinosaur teeth. Kuentz-Bas makes good wine here and in Eichberg Grand Cru, located in the nearby commune of Eguisheim, your next stop on this tour. An exquisite 15th-century town, Eguisheim’s château once belonged to Pope Leo IX, who was born here. Bruno Sorg and Leon Beyer are the producers to visit, but the huge coopérative also makes good wines. Nearby Wintzenheim has a pair of ruined châteaux and the great Hengst Grand Cru vineyard, which makes great Gewürztraminer.

TURCKHEIM TO RIQUEWIHR
Turckheim offers the chance to sample and compare the wines of Zind Humbrecht, one of the best producers in Alsace, with those of the excellent Turckheim coopérative. Don’t forget to look up at the roofs, where, with luck, you will see the white storks that nest here.

Albert Schweitzer, one of Alsace’s most famous sons, was born in Kaysersberg, a village that sits astride the Weiss River. The long and prosperous history of wine-making here is evident in the beauty of its buildings and in the fact that there is a chapel whose statue of Christ is holding a bunch of grapes. The place of pilgrimage for wine-lovers, though, is Domaine Weinbach’s cellar, where Laurence Faller makes exquisite Riesling.

The twin communes of Bennwihr and Mittelwihr are a triumph of restoration and reconstruction, following their near-destruction by war. Here, the often unloved Sylvaner grape variety gets almost as much tender loving care and attention as the buildings. Make sure your visit to Riquewihr isn’t in the summer, unless you enjoy rubbing shoulders with crowds of tourists. It was here that the merchants Hugel first opened their doors—and where they are still to be found. On your way through...
Hunawihr, note the fortified church, the clock of which has hands that look like bunches of grapes.

**RIEBAUVILLÉ TO MITTELBERGHEIM**

Riebeauvillé ⑤ still feels like the wine capital of Alsace. Here you will find lovely old churches and ruined castles as well as plenty of fine restaurants, wine producers, and top-class grands crus vineyards. Your next stop, Bergheim ⑥, is known for its town hall and Porte Haute gateway, through which outlaws seeking sanctuary once fled. St Hippolyte’s claim to fame lies in its stately town square and the quality of its Pinot Noir. The old watchtower is worth photographing, but save some film for the castle of Haut-Koenigsbourg that towers over the vineyards between Kintzheim and Châtenois.

Dambach-la-Ville ⑪ used to be known as Dambach-la-Vigne, and the importance of wine here is reflected in the 4th-century chapel to St. Sebastian that sits almost within the Frankstein Grand Cru vineyard. In Dambach itself, the half-timbered houses and flowering plants are so perfect that they look as though they are touched up daily. Andlau ⑫ is said to owe its situation to a bear that was sent by an angel to indicate the valley where a 9th-century abbey should be built, while Mittelbergheim ⑬, the historic “City of Wine,” is arguably the most ornate and least changed of all the region’s communes.

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**TOURIST OFFICES**

**Colmar**
4 Rue Unterlinden
📞 03 89 20 68 92
✉️ 03 89 41 34 13

**Eguisheim**
22 Grand Rue
📞 03 89 23 40 33
🌐 www.ot-eguisheim.fr

**Kaysersberg**
39 Rue Charles de Gaulle
📞 03 89 78 27 44
✉️ Info@kaysersberg.com

**Ribeauvillé and Riquewihr**
1 Grand Rue, Ribeauvillé
📞 03 89 49 08 40
✉️ 03 89 49 08 49
🌐 info@ribeauville-riquewihr.com
The Food of Alsace and Lorraine

Nothing more vividly illustrates the geography and history of these two regions, sandwiched between France and Germany, than the food that is eaten here. Lovers of the way in which pork and pickles are served to the east of the Rhine River will relish several Alsatian dishes, while those favoring the freshwater fish recipes of the Loire will also find much to enjoy.

Pastry has always played a large part in the cuisine of both Alsace and Lorraine, ranging from the world-famous but, sadly, often bastardized quiche Lorraine to flamme-küche, an onion, bacon, and cream tart that is made, like pizza, using bread dough.

Traditional references to le seigneur cochon, the “lord pig,” reveal how important pork is, especially in Alsace. Several of the ways in which this meat is prepared may be sampled by ordering a dish of choucroute (Sauerkraut), which includes smoked and unsmoked pork, sausages, ham, and bacon. Of course, it is the cabbage that has given this dish its fame and its place of honor in the region’s households. Every fall, after the wine harvest, a specialist choucroute cutter would go from door to door shredding the freshly picked cabbage before putting it in a barrel with salt, water, cumin, juniper berries, bay leaves and vine or cabbage leaves. The barrel was then covered with a cloth and a lid that was weighed down with a stone. When cut and stored in this fashion, the cabbage lasted all through the cold winter.

Pastry

Kugelhopf, the most beloved of Alsatian pastries, is a rich yeast cake with raisins and almonds. Made in fluted earthenware ring molds, this slightly sweet delicacy is intended to look like a medieval merchant’s hat.

Choucroute Garnie

Pickled cabbage, like Sauerkraut in Germany, is made in wooden barrels filled with salt, cumin, juniper berries, and bay leaves. It is left for a month before being cooked slowly with pork, ham, sausages, and Alsace wine.
Pork is also used with other meats, such as veal in *tourte de la vallée de Munster*, and lamb and beef in *bäckeoffe* casserole. Over the years, the Jewish population of Alsace has promoted several alternatives to pork, the most successful being goose. The goose meat is smoked, while the liver is relished in the form of *foie gras*. Popular meats with stronger flavors include wild hare and boar, both hunted in the region’s forests.

Fish is also abundant in this white-wine region. Older recipes feature salmon and lampreys from the Rhine and Ill rivers. Today, however, you are more likely to find perch, pike, tench, trout, and eel, which are cooked with fish stock and Riesling to make *matelote* stew.

Whatever the dish, there is a strong likelihood that spices, most notably cinnamon, cumin, caraway, coriander, and nutmeg, will have been used in its preparation. These spices are also used in the desserts and cakes that swell the Alsatian waistline. However, the famous *kugelhopf* cake, an exceptionally light tube cake, owes its flavor instead to raisins and almonds.

**REGIONAL CHEESES**

Given the flavorsome character of Alsace’s wines, it is hardly surprising that the cheeses produced here tend to be pretty pungent, too. Originally, cheese was made by Alsatian monks for their own consumption. Today, inevitably, while there are still plenty of small cheese farms, a great deal of cheese is also made industrially. Factory-made, pasteurized Munster and Gérome, its cousin from Lorraine, have some of the character of the artisanal product, but they are far duller. It is worth seeking out a cheese from one of the few producers who display the fact that they are holders of the diploma of the Syndicat Interprofessionnel du Fromage Munster.

**Tarte Alsacienne**

This traditional dessert can be made using apples, apricots, or cherries, steeped in kirsch and sugar. Custard, flavored with cinnamon, is poured into the crust.

**Porc aux Deux Pommes**

Alsatian chefs have long appreciated and exploited the affinity that apples and the appley flavor of the Riesling grape both have for pork.

**Munster**

Produced in both Alsace and Lorraine, this smooth cheese is immediately recognizable by its pungent smell. In Alsace it is eaten with potatoes.

**Trami d’Alsace**

This soft, slightly creamy cheese is made from unpasteurized cow’s milk and washed in Gewürztraminer. It has a strong smell and is quite spicy.
Arguably the most picturesque of France’s wine regions, Alsace is also one of the best to visit during the cooler months. The hearty food here is certainly welcome after a brisk climb up some of the steeply sloping hills and, during the month of December, Christmas fairs bring even more magic to the fairy-tale villages.

HOTELS & RESTAURANTS
A selection of the region’s best establishments, offering good local food and wine, and notable, characterful places to stay.

COLMAR
Hotel du Parc, 26 Rue de la Sinne.
03 89 66 12 22
FAX 03 89 66 42 44
www.hotelduparc-mulhouse.com
If you want to splurge on a really grand hotel, with food to match, this is the perfect place. Rooms come with reading/sitting areas for when it is too cold to laze in the park.
Winstub Henriette, 9 Rue Henriette.
03 89 46 27 83
FAX 03 89 70 81 02
A good, traditional “wine-pub” with fairly priced and well-prepared traditional dishes.

EGLISHEIM
Auberge du Brand, 8 Grande Rue.
03 89 27 06 10
FAX 03 89 27 55 51
Named after the village’s best vineyard, this is a half-timbered inn of the kind you’ll have been photographing throughout the region. There are only nine rooms, so reserve well in advance. The restaurant is also good.

WINES
Many of the region’s wines are difficult to find back home, so don’t leave without stocking up on your favorites.

HAGUENAU
Vins et Terroirs, 2 Rue Maréchal-Foch.
03 88 07 16 47
Winner of a “Coup de Coeur” from the readers and editors of La Révue du Vin de France.

STRASBOURG
Le Vinophile, 10 Rue d’Obernai.
03 88 22 14 06

Alsace’s restaurants offer some of the best cooking in France.

Eating à l’Alsacienne

TRAVELING IN ALSACE

The chef here learned his craft from Michel Guerard, inventor of Cuisine Minceur. The food here is light, too, but with plenty of flavor. Meals are cheaper than chez Guerard, as is the list of carefully selected local wines.

Alsace’s wine commune that produces a very central location.

EGUISHEIM
Caveau d’Eguisheim, 3 Place du Château St-Léon.
03 89 41 08 8
FAX 03 89 23 79 99
The cooperative that produces much of this commune’s wine also runs a pair of creditable restaurants. For a modern twist on traditional cuisine, go to the first floor. The press room offers more casual fare.

ILHAUSERN
Auberge de l’Il, 2 Rue de Collonges au Mont d’Or.
03 89 71 89 00
This 3-star gastronomic mecca offers traditional and modern takes on Alsace cuisine, alongside a great wine list.

MULHOUSE
Hotel du Parc, 26 Rue de la Sinne.
03 89 66 12 22
FAX 03 89 66 42 44
www.hotelduparc-mulhouse.com
If you want to splurge on a really grand hotel, with food to match, this is the perfect place. Rooms come with reading/sitting areas for when it is too cold to laze in the park.
Winstub Henriette, 9 Rue Henriette.
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03 88 22 14 06

Alsace’s restaurants offer some of the best cooking in France.
Michel Gris is one of France’s very best wine retailers, with a range that covers all of his country’s best vineyards. And he might also be worth asking for advice on concerts, as he doubles as a well-respected music critic.

**MUSEUMS**

Some producers offer vineyard or winery tours. Contact tourist offices (see below) for details.

**KIENTZHEIM**

Le Musée du Vignoble et des Vins d’Alsace, Château de la Confrérie St Etienne, 1 Grande Rue.

03 89 78 21 36
A good little museum in the heart of the wine region.

**LAPOUTROIE**

Le Musée des Eaux de Vie, 85 Rue du Général Dufieux.

03 89 47 50 26
03 89 47 22 24
The focus of this collection is on Alsace’s fruit brandies.

**STRASBOURG**

Musée Alsacien, 23 Quai St-Nicolas.

03 88 35 55 36
Everything about Alsace is brought together in this museum in the regional capital.

**WEBSITES**

The main site for Alsace wines is www.vinsalsace.com, which also provides links to producers; www.ripeauville-riquewihr.com is a good source of local tourist information; alternatively, visit www.tourisme.fr to find out more about a specific town or village.

**OTHER INFORMATION**

Regional Wine Committee
12 Avenue de la Foire au Vin, Colmar.

03 89 20 16 20
Office du Tourisme du Pays de Ribeauvillé et Riquewihr, 1 Grand Rue, Ribeauvillé.

08 20 36 09 22
03 89 49 08 49
info@ribeauville-riquewihr.com

### ANNUAL WINE EVENTS

During the spring, summer, and fall, the villages of Alsace have an enthusiasm for festivals and events of every kind that can only be matched by the efforts of the Rhône Valley. In the few weeks leading up to Christmas, however, nowhere else can compete with the festivities here. Indeed, some people say that December is the ideal time of year to visit Alsace’s picturesque communes—because this is when the region’s usual fairy-tale looks will have been made all the more magical by the addition of plentiful colored lights. Alsace’s winter fairs often go on for several weeks, but the weekends are generally the best times to visit. Check with the Regional Wine Committee (see Other Information) for specific dates of events.

**APRIL**

Ammerschwir wine fair
Osenbach snail fair

**MAY**

Molsheim and Guebwiller wine fairs
Rouffach Eco-Bio bread, wine and cheese fair
Kientzheim St. Urbain fair

**JUNE**

Colmar picnic in the vineyards
Voeglinshofen wine fair

**JULY**

Dambach-la-Ville evening wine fair
Noalten, Hattstatt, Pfaffenheim, Barr, Eguisheim, Ribeauvillé, Rodern, and Blienschwiller wine fairs

**AUGUST**

Blienschwiller, Soultzmatt, Obermorschwihr, Bergheim, Turkheim, Andlau, and Cleebourg wine fairs
Epfig festival of wine, art, folklore, and foie gras
Colmar Alsace wine fair—the region’s main annual wine event
Heiligenstein, Rorschwihr, Bennwihr, Obernai, Dambach-la-Ville, Zellenburg, and Eguisheim wine fairs
Schéwiller festival of Riesling and handicrafts

**SEPTEMBER**

Barr, Bergheim, Boersch, Cleebourg, Marlenheim, Molsheim, Obernai, Ribeauvillé, Strasbourg, Steinseltz, Wintzenheim, and Wissembourg harvest festivals

**OCTOBER**

Barr, Boersch, Steinseltz, Molsheim, Wintzenheim, Obernai, and Marlenheim harvest festivals
Strasbourg La Couronne d’Or harvest festival

**NOVEMBER**

Dachstein winter fair

**NOVEMBER/DECEMBER**

Strasbourg, Kaysersberg, and Colmar winter fairs

**DECEMBER**

Riquewihr, Ribeauvillé, Rosheim, Obernai, Sélestat, and Eguisheim winter fairs
Turckheim New Year’s Eve celebration
**THE TERM “GEWÜRZTRAMINER”** refers to a grape variety that used to be known as “Traminer.” The Alsatians themselves may believe that Riesling makes the finer, longer-lived wines, but even the best of these never begin to compete with this instantly recognizable, pink-skinned grape when it comes to seductiveness and excitement.

The character of Alsace Gewürztraminer varies enormously, depending on the site in which it is grown, the ripeness at which it is picked, and the skills and techniques of the wine-makers. In the hands of careful producers such as Faller, Ostertag, Trimbach, and Zind Humbrecht, using low-cropped grapes that have grown in the soil of the best grands crus vineyards, Gewürztraminer can produce dry and luscious, late-harvested wines that have all the irresistible exotic aroma and appeal of the finest perfumes.

**EDELZWICKER**

Although Alsace wine is commonly thought to be made from a single type of grape, the region has a strong tradition of blending. Blends of basic grape varieties were called *Zwicker* (a German word), while those made up of quality varieties were given the French name *gentil*. In 1871, when the Germans ruled Alsace, they tried to impose the term *Edelwein* in place of *gentil*. The Alsatians agreed only to the two terms *Edelzwicker* and *Zwicker*. In 1972 the French authorities banned the use of *Zwicker*, so that today all blended Alsace wine, regardless of variety, is called *Edelzwicker*. Most of it is such ordinary wine that the more quality-conscious producers label their blends “Gentil,” “Réserve,” or “Côtes du,” followed by the name of the relevant commune. Unfortunately, some downright poor wines are also sold under these labels.

**GEWÜRZTRAMINER**

Visitors Welcome

Many cellars welcome visitors, and in Alsace even the top growers often keep a shop where you can taste and buy wine that is hard to find elsewhere.

This wine is produced throughout the Alsace region.

Traditional, simple, fruity, dry white wine.

Jean-Baptiste Adam, Marcel Deiss, Jean-Pierre Dirler, Hugo, Kreydenweiss, Kuehn, Rolly Gassman, Cave de Ribeauvillé, Schlumberger, Louis Sipp, Pierre Sparr.

Roast haunch of pork with pistachios.


2–3 years.

In typical wine-growing areas of Alsace, the vines cover the often steep slopes while the growers live close at hand in the villages below.
ONE OF THE SURPRISES of Alsace, whose wines are often sweet, is the dryness of its Muscat—a name associated elsewhere with lusciousness. It is, however, inaccurate to refer to Muscat as if it were a single grape variety. Alsatians grow three types: Muscat à Petits Grains (both white and rosé) and Muscat Ottonel. There is little agreement over which of these makes the best wine. Despite the potentially delicious quality of Alsace Muscat, the vines are being uprooted at an alarming rate, and now cover little more land than Chasselas. It takes dedication to keep yields down and pick at the right time to ensure that the finished wine has enough acidity not to taste flabby. Fortunately, there are producers who know this, and who allow Muscat to reveal its grapey, apple, orange-and-mandarin perfume and flavor.

MUSCAT

The Pinot Blanc grape is usually used for everyday wines in Alsace, and at their best they are delicious: creamy, with just a touch of spice.

PINOT BLANC

This cousin of Pinot Gris is nonaromatic—an exception to the Alsace rule. At its best, and when not overcropped, it can produce attractively creamy wines. Many of the Alsace growers use a clone of this variety that is known as Gros Pinot Blanc. This was at one time chiefly used in a blend with Chasselas to make wines labeled as Edelzwicker. Pinot Blanc can have so little character of its own that the appellation contrôlée rules permit wines to be sold as Pinot Blanc, or as the related Klevner or Clevner (see p79), which are made, in whole or in part, from Pinot Gris, Pinot Auxerrois, Chardonnay, and even Pinot Noir. This laxity has given rise to a confusing range of similarly labeled wines, but it also allows some producers to make more interesting wines than pure Pinot Blanc might allow. Pinot Auxerrois, in particular, brings a welcome note of Alsatian spice.

Meyer-Fonné
Delicate, aromatic dry Muscat, like this one from Meyer-Fonné, is best drunk young while it retains all its freshness.

Wayside Shrine
Religious traditions live on in these deep valleys. This cross, overlooking some vines, is situated near the picturesque town of Riquewihr.

Paul Blanc
The Pinot Blanc grape is usually used for everyday wines in Alsace, and at their best they are delicious: creamy, with just a touch of spice.

Grand Cru
The Hengst vineyard, shown here, is one of the best in Alsace, and is entitled to the grand cru designation.
PINOT GRIS
The story of how an Alsation wine came to share a name with a Hungarian wine-making area is full of mystery. According to a local legend, in 1565 Baron Lazare de Schwendi, an Alsatian general, received 4,000 vats of wine and some cuttings of Pinot Gris vines from the town of Tokay in Hungary as a reward for expelling a Turkish force. Today, Pinot Gris is not found in Hungary, but occupies four percent of Alsace’s vineyards, yielding some of the region’s most stylish wines. These take a middle path between the potentially acidic Riesling and the possibly oversweet Gewürztraminer. Alsatians call the grape “the Sultan” and typically drink vendanges tardives and sélection de grains nobles examples of the wine with foie gras. The wines may be labeled Tokay-Pinot Gris or Pinot Gris. The illegal name “Tokay d’Alsace” is also occasionally found.

Trimbach Pinot Gris Réserve
Of all the merchants in Alsace, none is finer than Trimbach, a firm whose Pinot Gris is always reliably well made.

Riquewihr
One of the most enchanting towns in Alsace (indeed, in France), Riquewihr is also home to some of the region’s best merchants and growers. Some great Pinot Gris can also be found here.

PINOT NOIR
If any black grape will produce fine wine in Alsace, this variety is admittedly the one most likely to succeed, but there are plenty of examples to prove how much of a challenge it offers wine-makers. The first problem lies in producing red wine rather than pink. This has been addressed recently by introducing new clones and by the use of rotating fermenters, which extract color at the possible expense of delicacy. The Alsatian ambition to imitate red Burgundy has also led to the enthusiastic use of new oak, which is often as appropriate as a heavy gold frame around a watercolor miniature. In my opinion, it would be better if producers gave up copying Vosne-Romanée (see p158) and turned more attention to their often delicious cherry and raspberryish Rosé d’Alsace, a wine that is also far more fitting to the Alsace flûte bottle than dark, oaky red.

Albert Mann
One of the most ambitious producers of this variety, Albert Mann gives his Pinot Noir a moderate length of time in new oak casks.

The Wine is King
Signs like these are common in Alsace, where small producers and merchants take pride in their vinous heritage.
Riesling

This, the favorite grape of wine merchants and critics, is also the variety of which the Alsatians are most proud. Established here since at least the 15th century, when it was called Rissling or gentil (or noble) aromatique, Riesling has gradually supplanted Sylvaner (see below) to fill more than 20 percent of the vineyards, compared to 13 percent in 1969. While Alsatian Riesling has sometimes suffered from the poor image of cheaper wines from the other side of the Rhine, it has also benefited from being able to make a richer, riper style than Germany's northern regions. The character of the wine varies with the soil. The richest examples come from clay, while the ones produced on granite or limestone take longer to develop—a quality the Alsatians readily acknowledge by selling their wine 18 months after the harvest.

Domaine Weinbach, Cuvée Théo

Laurence Faller makes extraordinarily fine wines, including individual cuvées such as this one, which was named after her father.

Ribeauvillé

Once the official "capital" of Alsace, Ribeauvillé produces some of the region's finest Rieslings from its Geisberg, Kirchberg, and Osterberg grands crus vineyards.

OTHERS

Chasselas is made from a table grape of the same name that covered 16 percent of the vineyard in 1969 but is now heading for extinction; most goes into Edelzwicker (see p76). Crémant d'Alsace is a series of quietly successful sparkling wines made from mixed varieties, the most successful combination being Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir, and Chardonnay; the rosés are particularly recommendable. Klevener de Heiligenstein, both the wine and the grape variety, is unrelated to the Clevner (or Kleverner) grape, but is the local form of Savagnin Rosé, a Jura grape. Pinot Auxerrois is like a cross between Pinots Blanc and Gris, a gently spicy variety that is officially (but wrongly) classed as Pinot Blanc; some producers ignore the legislation and label their wine as Auxerrois. The earthy Sylvaner still covers 15 percent of Alsace’s vineyards (down from 27 percent in 1969) but mostly ends up in Edelzwicker. In Lorraine, the Côtes de Toul, which was recently promoted from VDQS to AC, produces tiny amounts of good light red from Pinots Noir and Meunier, and rosé from these varieties plus Gamay. The red and white Vin de Moselle VDQS from that river’s banks is only worth buying when in the area.

Sierck-les-Bains

Throughout Alsace, the buildings have a decidedly Germanic appearance. This can seem highly appropriate in the case of the region's restaurants, which often serve very Germanic-style dishes.

Gentil Hugel

This wine represents a welcome return to the days when grape varieties were commonly blended in Alsace.
Bordeaux
In their best vintages, the red and white wines produced by the best châteaux of Bordeaux can easily outlive the men who made them.

One key to understanding the wines of Bordeaux, and the reasons for their confusing variation in quality, lies in the vast size of the region. At 280,000 acres (113,000 ha), it is three times the size of Burgundy (see pp.112–159). One consequence of this is that Bordeaux wines of one style or another are made by some 16,000 producers, of which only around 100 have achieved international fame. At least a third of Bordeaux producers bottle and label their wine under the name of their own château, which may be little bigger than a garden shed. As you might expect, the region includes a variety of soils and climates. Some areas, principally the best, including the gravelly-soiled appellations of the Haut-Médoc (see p.97) and Graves (see p.96), favor the production of red wines in which the black-curranty Cabernet Sauvignon grape is supported by Merlot and Cabernet Franc, with an occasional dash of spicy Petit Verdot. In other appellations, especially St Émilion (see p.105) and Pomerol (see p.103), with their heavier clay soils, it is the plummier Merlot grape that holds sway. With the exception of the great sweet wines that are produced in Sauternes (see p.110) and Barsac (see p.92), the white wines of Bordeaux have been traditionally off-dry and mediocre. Recent technological advances, however, have helped to produce a new generation of good dry white wines made from the Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon grape varieties.

Climatically, Bordeaux benefits from its proximity to the Atlantic Ocean to the west, which insulates it from extremes of temperature. Even so, the relatively northern latitude of the region means that the production of really ripe-tasting wine is possible in only around one of every three years. Confusingly, but unsurprisingly, many vintages favor only particular appellations or grape varieties, so that a great year for sweet white wines can be a disastrous one for reds. The guide through all this confusion used to be a classification drawn up in 1855 to rank the best châteaux in the Médoc, Graves, and Sauternes appellations. It is now acknowledged, however, that individual châteaux often over- or underperform, depending on factors such as the luck, skill, and equipment of the wine-maker. So Bordeaux-lovers follow the annual progress of a large number of châteaux, creating their own “running” classification.

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

- 280,000 acres (113,000 ha): 860 million bottles.
- While the entire region is influenced by the Atlantic, the climate varies greatly from one part to the next, with St Émilion and Pomerol enjoying more continental conditions.
- There is both gravel, which suits the Cabernet Sauvignon, and clay, which is better for the Merlot.
- Red: Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Malbec, Petit Verdot.
  White: Sauvignon Blanc, Sémillon, Muscadelle.
The only area in Bordeaux to produce good red and dry white wine is the region of Graves, to the south of the city of Bordeaux.

Water, Water Everywhere

Fringed by forest, it is the Atlantic Ocean as well as the Gironde and Garonne rivers that give Bordeaux a climate that—in its best vintages—is ideal for vine-growing.
The History of Bordeaux

It was only with the 12th-century marriage between the duchess Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Norman Henry Plantagenet, heir to the throne of England, that the wine-producing history of Bordeaux really began in earnest. This alliance not only provided an instant market for the wines of Aquitaine, it also secured a crucial role for the city of Bordeaux as a port.

While the wine industry in most parts of France was developed by what the wine historian Hanneke Wirtjes describes as “patient monks,” in Bordeaux, wine production was driven by merchants looking for products with which to fill the holds of their trading ships. Bordeaux was a medieval version of today’s Hong Kong, and just as the clever businessmen of that island prefer to export clothes rather than cotton, the canny Bordelais soon learned to make money by exporting their wines rather than their grapes.

By the early 14th century, nearly half of all the wine passing through the port of Bordeaux was being exported to the British Isles. Much of it was made in the area known as the Haut Pays, to the east of the modern appellation of Bordeaux, in regions such as Bergerac (see p270) and Gaillac (see p272). Realizing the commercial threat posed by these neighbors, the merchants and producers of Bordeaux were quick to ban the importation of their wines into the city until after November 11, St. Martin’s Day, by which time the new vintage of their own wines was safely shipped. It was this same Bordelais trading mentality that helped to create the first branded wines—that is, wines sold under the name of a single château, rather than under the name of the village in which the grapes were grown. When the English diarist Samuel Pepys broke his vow to give up wine on April 10, 1663, it was with “a sort of French wine, called Ho Bryan.”

Château Haut-Brion, in what is now the appellation of Pessac-Léognan (see p102), enjoys the unusual distinction of naturally well-drained soil. Until the 16th century, however, most of the Médoc (see p99) was swampy woodland, unsuitable for vines. Estates on slightly higher land, such as Château Margaux and Château Lafite, began to make wine...
in the late 17th century. The further development of the vineyards of the Médoc was made possible around this time by skilled Dutch engineers, who installed the drainage ditches that can still be seen today close to châteaux like Beychevelle, and paved the way for the planting of vines in rows that could be worked with an ox-drawn plow.

**THE MODERN APPELLATION**

By the 18th century, much of the wine from the vineyards around the port of Bordeaux was passing through the hands of an increasing number of English, Irish, Dutch, German, and Danish merchants. Between them they developed a lucrative and well-organized wine trade that survived the Revolution of 1789, and of which important elements still exist today. Perhaps the most enduring legacy of these merchants is their classification of the region’s wines by price, known today simply as “The Classification.” Commissioned by the Bordeaux Chamber of Commerce to help with the presentation of the wines of Bordeaux at the 1855 *Exposition Universelle* in Paris, the list includes the best estates of the Médoc and Sauternes (see p110), and Château Haut-Brion in Pessac-Léognan. Though taken increasingly seriously, the 1855 Classification is still in use today.

Since 1945, with the end of World War II, four figures in particular have shaped the *appellation* of Bordeaux as we know it today. The first is the late Philippe de Rothschild, owner of Château Mouton-Rothschild in Pauillac (see pp100–101). Rothschild was one of the first wine-makers to champion the idea of bottling his own wines, rather than selling them young and leaving the task of maturing to the wine merchants. An inspired marketer, Rothschild used the name of his château to sell a mundane wine, produced from grapes grown elsewhere, which he called Mouton Cadet. The tactic proved such a success that, in spite of its mediocrity, Mouton Cadet is now as well known as any Bordeaux wine. A second instrumental figure is Professor Émile Peynaud, celebrated as the father of modern oenology. Of Peynaud’s many great contributions, the most outstanding lies in spelling out the pitfalls of mishandling grapes and wine, and in the revival and popularization of the practice of separating the very best wine of the vintage from the rest, and selling the contents of the lesser vats as “second wine.” Peynaud’s natural successor is a consultant named Michel Rolland, who is credited with, or blamed for, the recent move toward riper and sometimes super-ripe-tasting wines, and the success of the tiny “garage” wineries that produce them. Last but not least, there is the American critic Robert Parker, whose newsletter *Wine Advocate*, launched at the end of the 1970s, used a 50–100 point scale to grade individual wines. Without Parker’s enormously popular point system, many previously little-known Bordeaux estates would not enjoy the international prestige or command the high prices that they do today.

Samuel Pepys

In 1663, the famous London diarist Samuel Pepys drank a bottle of wine from Château Haut-Brion in the Médoc district of Bordeaux. This is the first reference in English to a wine made from the grapes of a single estate.
A Driving Tour of Bordeaux

Unlike Burgundy, where the wine villages are often separated only by a narrow track, the villages of Bordeaux, in general, and the Médoc, in particular, are more widely dispersed. This tour takes in all of the main appellations of the Médoc, as well as some that are less well known.

BORDEAUX

You could spend several days visiting the city of Bordeaux 1, with its art galleries, museums, and wine shops. Whatever else you do, though, make sure you go to the Maison du Vin de Bordeaux to arm yourself with informative leaflets produced by the region’s various vinous associations.

BORDEAUX TO MARGAUX

The first stretch of the road north to the Médoc is of little vinous interest until you get to Ludon-Médoc 2, where you pass Château la Lagune, one of the few Médoc classed estates that lie outside the appellations of Margaux, St Julien, Pauillac, and St Estèphe. The unclassed Château Cantemerle is also here, as well as the good-value Château Mauccamps. In Macau 3, turn right for a brief detour down to the banks of the Gironde, where you will find a couple of cafés and an atmosphere reminiscent of the riverside excursions portrayed by the French Impressionists.

The appellation of Margaux begins some distance to the south of the village from which it takes its name. As you pass through Labarde 4, you are already north of Château Giscours, one of the best-known Margaux estates. I would recommend stopping at Château Prieuré Lichine, a little farther up the road in Cantenac 5. This is one of the estates most geared to welcoming visitors and offers a display of old iron firebacks and a collection of books by the man who created the estate, the Russian-American wine merchant and author Alexis Lichine. At Issan 6, soon after passing the towers of Château Palmer, you can make another detour to the moated, 16th-century Château Issan. Down the road is Château Rauzan Ségla, a rising star whose vineyards and wines are benefiting from heavy investment. At Margaux 7, at the end of an avenue of plane trees, Château Margaux stands behind impressive gates. You can stand on the spot where Thomas Jefferson must have stood around 200 years ago to admire its classical facade.

LAMARQUE AND ST JULIEN-BEYCHEVELLE

If Château Margaux reminds you of 18th-century gentlemen, the château at Lamarque 8 is the kind of fortress that evokes images of knights in armor. Fort Médoc, past Lamarque and not far from battlements that were built in the 17th century to ward off the English, is worth a pause. St Julien-Beychevelle 9 offers a wealth of grand châteaux, with Beychevelle being the first you will encounter. Also worth a look are Château Ducru Beaucaillou and the three Léoville châteaux—Barton, Poyferré and Lascases—the last of which boasts an imperious stone gateway that you pass as you leave the village.
PAUILLAC TO ST ESTÈPHE
On entering the appellation of Pauillac, you will see the rival châteaux of Pichon-Longueville Baron and Pichon-Longueville-Comtesse-de-Lalande, the former proudly showing off its modern extension. To your right is Château Latour’s tower and, a little farther on to your left, before you head into the quiet town of Pauillac, lies Château Lynch-Bages. The road heads north, passing Châteaux Mouton-Rothschild and Lafite-Rothschild before leading you to the oriental facade of Château Cos d’Estournel. The road beside the château goes past Marbuzet and on to St Estèphe.

LISTRAC-MÉDOC AND MOULIS-EN-MÉDOC
On your way back south, pause in Listrac-Médoc, where producers like Châteaux Clarke and Fonréaud are now trying to make softer reds than in the past, and in Moulis-en-Médoc, where Châteaux Poujeaux, Maucaillou, and Chasse-Spleen all offer good-value wines.
The Food of Bordeaux

This region is renowned for producing some of the world’s greatest red and sweet white wines, and its name is often featured on restaurant menus in the form of the Bordelaise wine sauce that is traditionally served with entrecôte steak. However, as visitors to Bordeaux soon discover, many other dishes are also enjoyed in this region, which encompasses fields, rivers and the sea.

I once attended a competition to find the best sommelier in the world, in which an entrant lost marks for failing to propose Pauillac as the ideal partner for lamb. While Mouton Rothschild has nothing to do with mutton or lamb (the “mouton” in fact refers to a small hill), there is no question that the milk-fed lambs of this part of the Médoc produce some of the most tender and tastiest meat.

It is increasingly acknowledged that beef and Bordeaux are rarely an ideal match, as the meat can make a tannic wine seem tough—but the Bordelaise sauce, made with red wine and marrow-bone, undeniably complements a steak. Even so, if I had to recommend a local dish to enjoy with a bottle of Médoc or Graves, I’d opt for grilled wood pigeon sautéed à la bordelaise, with artichokes, onions, and potatoes, and flambéed with fine Bordeaux brandy. Alternatively, I might choose a confit d’oie (preserved goose), possibly with a sorrel purée.
Just as the Burgundians surprise visitors by poaching trout in red wine, chefs in Bordeaux use red wine to cook lampreys, the river fish that, like baby eels, are a delicacy fished in huge nets from the banks of the Gironde River. At one time, there was an industry for Gironde caviar, but sturgeon haven’t been seen in the river for at least 10 years. Another treat, rarely associated with Bordeaux, are cèpes, the brown-capped, fat-stemmed wild mushrooms that are sold at the roadside and prepared à la viande with garlic, ham, parsley, and breadcrumbs. Local truffles are also relished in the form of a ragout stew with red wine, ham, leeks, carrots, celery, and onions. Like the truffles, now brought in from farther inland, foie gras is also enjoyed here as a perfect partner for a glass of Sauternes.

The wines of Bordeaux are inevitably used to make a number of desserts, such as granité, a sherbet made with red wine, or with a sweet white such as Sauternes or Cérons. For those who prefer simple desserts, there are poires au St Émilion, pears poached in red wine with orange juice and cinnamon.

**REGIONAL CHEESES**

Cheeses are produced throughout France, wherever there are cows, sheep or goats. The farmers of Bordeaux, however, have been too busy tending vines to develop a reputation for the quality of their cheeses. Most of the cheese you will see at the markets and in restaurants is likely to have come from the neighboring regions of the southwest. Périgord, Limousin, and Quercy continue to produce great cheeses, including the wonderful goat's milk Cabécou and Rocamadour, and Limousin’s delicious Fourmes, made from ewe's milk.

**Foie Gras**
This pâté is a festive treat in Bordeaux, due to its high price and rich flavor. It is made from duck liver marinated in brandy and served with Sauternes wine.

**Oysters**
Both wild and cultivated oysters are available in Bordeaux. They are usually eaten raw with bread and lemon juice and served with dry white Bordeaux.

**Abbaye de Belloc**
Actually produced in the Pays Basque, this cheese is made from the milk of red-nosed Manech ewes. It has a strong, lingering, well-cooked flavor.

**Tomme de Chèvre Fermier**
Variations of this salty goat's cheese can be found all over France. Often produced in the southwest, it is enjoyed by many in Bordeaux.
Despite its international fame and the numbers of tourists who visit every year, Bordeaux has been less geared up for visitors than many other wine regions. Although large numbers of new hotels, restaurants, and wine shops are now springing up with every season, many of Bordeaux’s secrets still need to be sought out.

TRAVELING IN BORDEAUX

Lurton, whose family owns some of the region’s top estates. Cosily luxurious, it also has a restaurant offering some really fine cooking.

La Tupina, 6 Rue de la Monnaie. 05 56 91 56 37
Offers some of the best-value cuisine in Bordeaux, as well as some very well-priced wines. Roasted meats are a specialty.

BOULIAC, NEAR BORDEAUX

Le BistroY, 3 Place Camille-Hostein. 05 57 97 06 06
Next to the luxurious St James Hotel, and under the same ownership, this bistro offers fine cooking in a casual atmosphere, at more affordable prices.

LANGON

Claude Darroze, 95 Cours du Général Leclerc. 05 56 63 00 48
In a small town in Bordeaux’s southwest, close to Sauternes, this is a country inn of the kind rarely found outside France. The food is of star quality and there is plenty of good-value local wine. The trompe-l’œil decor is something of an acquired taste.

PAUILLAC

Château Cordeillan Bages, Route des Châteaux. 05 56 59 24 24
Under the same ownership as nearby Château Lynch-Bages, this luxurious converted chateau makes an ideal base for exploring the northern Médoc. The ad-hoc wine school here offers tailor-made courses, and the resident sommeliers are always happy to test and expand your knowledge by serving mystery wines for you to attempt to identify.

ST ÉMILION

Hôtel au Logis des Remparts, Rue Guadet. 05 57 24 70 43
05 57 74 47 44
logis-des-remparts@saint-emilion.org
This is a lovely old building in the heart of St Émilion, with terraces, gardens and a swimming pool that you can retreat to after bustling through streets that are often overly full of tourists.

WINE SHOPS

While smaller chateaux are often happy to sell wine to visitors, most larger ones prefer to deal only with merchants. This makes a visit to Bordeaux’s wine shops essential. Most ship overseas, but prices can be high. The following shops, in particular, are worth knowing about.

ARCACHON

Vintage International, Marché Municipal. 05 56 22 59 98
Based in the region’s seaside resort, this retailer has a range of 500 Bordeaux wines dating back to 1898.

HOTELS & RESTAURANTS

The region’s best establishments offer first-class food and wine, and notable places to stay.

ARCINS, NEAR MARGAUX

Le Lion d’Or, Place de la République. 05 56 58 96 79
A favorite with local producers and visiting merchants. Great rustic fare and delicious cep dishes in season. Ask nicely and M Barbier may let you bring your own, though this is a concession usually restricted to regulars.

BORDEAUX

Hôtel des Quatre Soeurs, 6 Cours du 30 Juillet. 05 57 81 19 20
This quirky, inexpensive little hotel in the city center was once popular with Wagner as a place to entertain his mistress. It has no restaurant of its own, but sits above a bustling café and close to a wide range of good eateries.

La Maison Bordeaux, 113 Rue du Docteur-Albert-Barraud. 05 56 44 00 45
A newly converted 17th-century house belonging to Brigitte Lurton, whose family owns some of the region’s top estates. Cosily luxurious, it also has a restaurant offering some really fine cooking.

Le Bistroy, 3 Place Camille-Hostein. 05 57 97 06 06
Next to the luxurious St James Hotel, and under the same ownership, this bistro offers fine cooking in a casual atmosphere, at more affordable prices.

LANGON

Claude Darroze, 95 Cours du Général Leclerc. 05 56 63 00 48
In a small town in Bordeaux’s southwest, close to Sauternes, this is a country inn of the kind rarely found outside France. The food is of star quality and there is plenty of good-value local wine. The trompe-l’œil decor is something of an acquired taste.

Casual Dining in Bordeaux

Even the least formal of Bordeaux’s many restaurants, wine bars, and cafes offer the chance to sample good wines that are hard to find elsewhere.
BORDEAUX
Badie, 62 Allée de Tourny.
05 56 52 23 72
Badie is over a century old and stocks more than 2,000 different wines and spirits.
l’Intendant, 2 Allées de Tourny.
05 56 48 01 29
This shop keeps its 15,000 bottles stacked around a spiral staircase.
STE FOY LA GRANDE
 Cave Larégnère, 10 Boulevard Garrau.
05 57 46 31 23
FAX 05 57 46 36 42
A finalist in the competition for best wine retailer in the world, Michel Baraton has a range of 2,000 wines.
MUSEUMS
Some producers offer vineyard or winery tours. Contact tourist offices (see below) for details.

BORDEAUX
Musée des Vins, 41 Rue Borie.
05 57 87 50 60
FAX 05 57 87 50
Situated in a former merchant’s house in the heart of the old wine-trading area, this museum illustrates the role of foreigners in the history of Bordeaux.
Musée le Vinorama, 10 Cours du Médoc.
05 56 39 39 20
FAX 05 56 39 19 51
This fascinating place traces the region’s history from Roman times to the present and allows visitors to compare a wine made using Roman methods with one produced the 19th-century way.
GRADIGNAN
Ecomusée de la Vigne et du Vin, 238 Cours du Général de Gaulle.
FAX 05 56 89 00 79
A place to find over 500 old wine-maker’s tools in the kind of house he would have lived in.
LONDON
Le Musée de l’Etiquette, Chateau de Mauriac.
05 56 63 39 81
Everything you ever wanted to know about labels.

ANNUAL WINE EVENTS

The city of Bordeaux hosts the biennial Vinexpo trade fair in June of odd-numbered years. This is only open to professionals, but there is a wide range of other events that will keep you amused whatever your expertise.

JANUARY
Médoc Fete of St. Vincent

APRIL
En primeur futures tastings for professionals, run by the Union des Grands Crus (union-grands-crus@vins-bordeaux.fr) and local merchants.
Bordeaux et Bordeaux Superieur “Happy Hour” Medoc and Lalande de Pomerol open cellars

MAY
St Émilion and Côtes de Bourg open cellars
Puisseguin-St Émilion wine rally

JUNE
Satellites de St Émilion spring fair
Premier Côtes de Bordeaux and Cadillac open doors
Médoc Château Mouton-Rothschild Fête des Fleurs (flower festival)

SEPTEMBER
Castillon la Bataille, Bordeaux and Bordeaux Supérieur wine fairs
Médoc Marathon du Médoc

OCTOBER
Graves, Fronsac/Canon Fronsac, St Émilion Satellites and Cérons wine fairs

NOVEMBER
Loupiac wine fair

DECEMBER
Pessac-Léognan wine fair

MOULIS
Musée des Arts et Métiers de la Vigne et du Vin, Château de Maucaillou.
05 56 58 01 23
FAX 05 56 58 00 88
A complete introduction to wine-growing and making, including a piece of apparatus that lets you sample different wine aromas.

PAUILLAC
Musée Privé du Vin dans l’Art, Château Mouton-Rothschild.
05 56 73 21 29
The late Baron Philippe’s creation, this fine international collection spans 3,000 years of wine-related art and artifacts.

OTHER INFORMATION
Bordeaux Maison du Vin and Office du Tourisme, 1 Cours du 30 Juillet.
05 56 00 22 66
www.bordeaux-tourisme.com
This main center in the city of Bordeaux is the best source of information, maps, and leaflets on wine and other activities in the entire region. There are smaller Maisons du Vin in most appellations towns, as well as plenty of local tourist offices.

WEBSITES
The official website at www.bordeaux.com is a good starting point. For more information, try www.bordeaux-news.com, or find specifics on the Bordeaux and Bordeaux Supérieur appellations at www.maisondesbordeaux.com. Many châteaux and merchants also have their own sites—go to www.robertjoseph-onwine.com for links. You can also find details on any town or village in the region at www.tourisme.fr.
BARSAC
SITUATED ON THE LEFT bank of the Garonne and separated from the larger appellation of Sauternes (see p110) to the north by the little Ciron River, the commune of Barsac is entitled to sell its wines either as appellation contrôlée Barsac or as appellation contrôlée Sauternes (see below). The Ciron is crucial to the microclimate of the area. It is the autumnal morning mists lingering over its cool water, followed by warm, sunny afternoons, that combine to create ideal conditions for the development of Botrytis cinerea, or noble rot, which produces the unique sweet wines of Barsac. Richer in sandstone and limestone than neighboring Sauternes, the flat land here produces wines with a natural lightness that sets them apart from all others. As a rule, wines sold as appellation contrôlée Barsac are more reliable than those sold as appellation contrôlée Sauternes.

Château Climens
Les Cypres is the "second wine" of Château Climens—almost as stylish as its big brother, the "grand vin" of this top estate.

Magical Mist
The famous mist, seen here around the vineyards of Château Myrat, is crucial to the development of the noble rot that makes these wines so special.

BARSAC AND THE COMMUNES OF SAUTERNES
A strangely incestuous relationship exists between the neighboring appellations of Sauternes and Barsac, producers of the two most famous sweet wines in Bordeaux. Since the introduction of the appellation contrôlée system in the 1930s, producers in Barsac have been entitled to label their bottles with either the name of their own appellation or that of Sauternes, an indulgence denied to the Sauternais. Alternatively, the vignerons of Barsac can signify their double allegiance by using the increasingly popular name of Sauternes-Barsac. The heterogeneous Sauternes appellation itself currently covers the four communes of Bommes, Fargues, Preignac, and Sauternes, producing sweet wines whose quality ranges from the dire to the sublime. I suspect, however, that as more people throughout the world begin to appreciate truly great sweet wines, as well as the painstaking skill involved in their production, the wine-makers of Barsac, together with those of Bommes, Fargues and Preignac, will be eager to emphasize their own names. If sections of Minervois (see p199), which received its own classification in 1985, are now allowed their own individual appellations, it seems a shame that the same kind of recognition should be denied to the communes listed above.

Natural Star
The village of Barsac may be as quiet and remote as ever, but its wines have made it famous all over the world.
BORDEAUX

Covering 247,000 acres (100,000 ha) of vineyards, the generic Bordeaux classifications listed below are used to label a quarter of all the appellation contrôlée wines of France. Applied to a range of wines that come from different soils and microclimates and are made with varying skills, this is one of the most successful, but unreliable, wine names in the world.

If the marketing gurus responsible for promoting the wines of the region have got it right, the word “Bordeaux” will set you thinking of near-naked or elegantly dressed couples, and bow-ties. These, after all, are the images they have expensively splashed across the pages of glossy magazines. For most people, Bordeaux is inexorably linked to its wealth of great châteaux. The success of Mouton-Cadet, after all, owes much to the erroneous belief that it somehow offers an affordable taste of Château Mouton-Rothschild. Comparison of any vintage of these two wines, however, demonstrates the problem facing anyone trying to make and sell wines under the generic Bordeaux apppellations. In Pauillac (see pp100–101), where Mouton-Rothschild is made, grapes ripen well, thanks to the position of the vineyards. This climatic advantage is the main reason why Pauillac and its châteaux have become famous. In the less favored Bordeaux vineyards, however, the fruit often fails to ripen properly, a problem exacerbated by rules encouraging over-production, and, as the grapes on thirsty vines simply stop ripening, by more rules banning any form of irrigation.

There are, of course, in humbler parts of the region, some ambitious châteaux that consistently produce good, plain appellation contrôlée Bordeaux, as well as Château d’Yquem in Sauternes (see p110) and Château Margaux in the Médoc (see p99), which are forced by quirky appellation rules to sell their wonderful dry white wines as plain appellation contrôlée Bordeaux. These, however, are exceptions to the Bordeaux rule, and the quality of most branded, merchant-bottled wines remains disappointing. One way forward for the Bordeaux region lies in the proposed strengthening of current appellation rules and the introduction of new, more relaxed ones that would facilitate the production of humble wines of better quality.

Caught by the Rules
Producer of some of the best sweet white wines in the world, Château d’Yquem (see p110) is forced by appellation rules to sell its fine dry white wines as plain appellation contrôlée Bordeaux.

If the marketing gurus responsible for promoting the wines of the region have got it right, the word “Bordeaux” will set you thinking of near-naked or elegantly dressed couples, and bow-ties. These, after all, are the images they have expensively splashed across the pages of glossy magazines. For most people, Bordeaux is inexorably linked to its wealth of great châteaux. The success of Mouton-Cadet, after all, owes much to the erroneous belief that it somehow offers an affordable taste of Château Mouton-Rothschild. Comparison of any vintage of these two wines, however, demonstrates the problem facing anyone trying to make and sell wines under the generic Bordeaux apppellations. In Pauillac (see pp100–101), where Mouton-Rothschild is made, grapes ripen well, thanks to the position of the vineyards. This climatic advantage is the main reason why Pauillac and its châteaux have become famous. In the less favored Bordeaux vineyards, however, the fruit often fails to ripen properly, a problem exacerbated by rules encouraging over-production, and, as the grapes on thirsty vines simply stop ripening, by more rules banning any form of irrigation.

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*AC Bordeaux, AC Bordeaux Clairet, AC Bordeaux Sec, AC Bordeaux Rosé, AC Bordeaux Supérieur, AC Bordeaux Supérieur Clairet, AC Bordeaux Supérieur Rosé, AC Crémant de Bordeaux.

Red/rose: Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Malbec.
White: Sémillon, Sauvignon.
Medium- to full-bodied reds. Dry whites. Dry rosés. Sparkling whites.

Barton et Guestier, Ch Bonnet, Dourthe Frères, Maître d’Estournel, Haut Bertinerie, Landereau, Michel Lynch, Tour de Mirambeau, la Raemn, Rauzan-Begagne, Reignac, Reynon, Siaus, Thieuley.

White: Warm potato salad with mussels, celery, onions, and black truffles.


2–5 years.

Château Thieuley
Selling wines as appellation Bordeaux, rather than under the Entre-deux-Mers label to which it is entitled, this memorable château is owned by Francis Courselle.
CADILLAC
STRETCHED ALONG the east bank of the Garonne, and centering around its namesake town, Cadillac has long been the poor relation of its neighbors, Loupiac to the south and Sainte Croix-du-Mont to the east. Despite the appellation rules that demand that wines be made from botrytized (nobly rotten) grapes, there is often little evidence that this has happened. Good examples, however, can be fine, as can reds made by estates here, sold as Premières Côtes de Bordeaux.

Jean du Roy
This wine combines the apricot flavor of noble rot with Barsac-like delicacy.

- AC Cadillac.
- White: Sémillon, Sauvignon Blanc, Muscadelle.
- Sweet whites, which may be made from partially botrytized grapes.
- Carsin, Cayla, Reynon, Jean du Roy, du Juge, Manos, Thieuley.
- Light fruit tart.
- White: 3–8 years.

CÔTES DE BURG
SOMETIMES CALLED THE Switzerland of the Gironde because of its hilly vineyards, this small but heavily cultivated area produces more wine than the much larger Côtes de Blaye to the north. Despite similar soils, it is Bourg that has made the better red wines, and improving wine-making techniques are leading to a higher public profile and the production of wines that offer excellent value. Good use is being made of varieties such as Malbec and Petit Verdot, which play a lesser role elsewhere.

Château Falfas
Among the best wines in the appellation, Château Falfas offers rich, supple flavors.

- AC Côtes de Bourg.
- Red: Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon.
- Medium-bodied reds.
- Chicken with mushrooms.
- Red: 4–8 years.

Château Haut Sociando
One of the best examples of the elegant "new wave" wines from Blaye.

- AC Blaye, AC Côtes de Blaye, AC Premières Côtes de Blaye.
- Red: Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon.
- White: Sauvignon Blanc.
- Medium-bodied dry reds. Dry whites.
- Haut Sociando, Tourtes.
- Grilled lamb.
- Red: 2–6 years.

CÔTES DE CASTILLON
THIS IS THE MOST easterly appellation of the Libournais on the north bank of the Dordogne. Both Merlot and Cabernet Franc are grown here on a mixture of gravel, sand, and clay, producing supple, fruity wines that very often outclass those of the Côtes de Castillon’s pricier neighbor, St Émilion (see p105). Two-thirds of wine production has long been controlled by members of the Coopérative de Castillon, but investment in the area has produced a number of promising new châteaux.

Château Faïfas
Among the best wines in the appellation, Château Faïfas offers rich, supple flavors.

- AC Côtes de Castillon.
- Red: Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon.
- Medium-bodied reds.
- Chicken with mushrooms.
- Red: 4–8 years.

Château Pitray
One of this appellation’s stronger producers, whose wines are worth laying down.

- AC Côtes de Castillon.
- Red: Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon.
- Medium-bodied reds.
- Belcier, Cap de Faugères, Grand Tuillac, Grande Maye, Lapeyronie, Pitray, Poupille, Robin, Vieux Château Champ de Mars.
- Duck breast.
- Red: 2–6 years.
CÔTES DE FRANCS
Also known as Bordeaux Côtes de Francs, this revived appellation lies on the eastern edge of the Libournais, next to the Côtes de Castillon (see p94) and not far from St Émilion (see p105). The soil here is similar to that of Castillon, but with more limestone and a higher altitude, which, together with the lowest rainfall and the most sunshine in the départements, helps to produce wines of great finesse. Top producers now include the Thiénponts of Château Puygueraud.

**Château la Prade**
This château makes a fine, black-curranty example of the appellation.

- AC Côtes de Francs, AC Côtes de Francs Liquoreux.
- Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon.
- Supple, plump, full-flavored reds.
- Charmes-Godard, de Francs, Laclaverie, la Prade, Puygueraud.
- Kidneys with cognac.
- Red: 3–7 years.

**Fronsac and Canon-Fronsac**
Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the vineyards of Fronsac and Canon-Fronsac, to the west of the town of Libourne, were better known than those of nearby Pomerol (see p103). They are now once again producing wines to rival those of their neighbor. The land of Canon-Fronsac, the traditional vine-growing heart of the area, is a large bluff formed by the Dordogne, which protects the vines against frost. Much of the soil in both Fronsac and Canon-Fronsac is clay-limestone over a limestone subsoil, similar to that found on the St Christophe plateau in St Émilion (see p105). Merlot is the most widely planted grape, and these wines, far better made than in the past, combine Merlot’s full-bodied richness with good, firm structure.

**Château Dauphine**
Good Fronsac like this offers plummy, mineral flavors that are very similar to classy—and quite pricey—St Émilion.

- AC Fronsac, AC Canon-Fronsac.
- Red: Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon.
- Deep-colored reds with a powerful bouquet.
- Fronsac: Dallem, la Dauphine, la Fleur Cailleteau, Fontenil, Moulin Haut Larocque, la Rivière, la Rousselle, la Vielle Cure Villars.
- Canon-Fronsac: Barbaque, Canon de Brem, Canon-Moueix, Moulin-Pey-Labrie, Cassagne Haut-Canon.
- Goose breast.
- Red: 5–8 years.

ENTRE-DEUX-MERS
This area produces more dry white wines than any other appellation in Bordeaux apart from the generic AC Bordeaux Blanc. Some reds are made and sold as AC Bordeaux or AC Bordeaux Supérieur, but the emphasis is firmly on white. Although average wine quality is now improving thanks to better equipment and better wine-making techniques in the coopératives, this is a far from ideal place to grow vines, and really good wines are the exception rather than the rule.

**Château Bonnet**
Fresh, flavorsome proof of the quality that can be produced here.

- Sauvignon Blanc, Sémillon, Muscadelle, Ugni Blanc.
- Dry white.
- Bonnet, la Lezardière, Ste-Marie, Thieuley.
- Grilled trout.
- 1–3 years.
The Pessac-Léognan appellation took this and all the other classed growths, leaving a rump with a prestigious name but few distinguished wines.

Historically, reds have been less common than whites. As recent as 1961, the volume of white wine produced was four times that of red, but as tastes grew more sophisticated there was a switch from sweet to dry white, and from white to red. Today, for every bottle of white, there are two of red. Graves rouge can be an attractive, sometimes long-lived, blackcurranty wine, though it often lacks the richness of flavor sought by Anglo-Saxons.

The whites are trickier. If the sweet “ladies’ wines” made here in the 19th and early 20th centuries were poor, so were the dull and over-sulfured dry efforts of the 1960s and 1970s. Quality is now better, thanks to such producers as Denis Dubourdieu, who use specific yeasts that bring out the best flavors from the Sémillon and Sauvignon Blanc. The best white Graves, such as Villa Bel Air, can outclass a Pessac-Léognan.

Sweet white wine—of which 2.25 million often very ordinary bottles are produced annually—is sold, somewhat confusingly, as Graves Supérieur.

Domaine la Grave
Although relatively little-known, this is a modern estate whose wines are remarkably reliable.

The Graves region has been shrinking for a very long time. Before the arrival of phylloxera, its vines covered some 25,000 acres (10,000 ha), compared with less than 7,500 acres (3,000 ha) today. Some of the land simply was not replanted; other land, close to the city, was lost to suburban housing and Bordeaux’s Méridiac airport.

Despite this, until 1987 the Graves appellation extended for nearly 40 miles (60 km) southward from Bordeaux and included châteaux such as Haut-Brion.
HAUT-MÉDOC

The southern part of the Médoc includes Margaux (see p98), Fauillac (see pp100–101), and St Julien (see p108) whose wines are more usually sold under their own sub-appellations. There are also Haut-Médoc crus classés and crus bourgeois, such as Lagune, Beaumont, Cantemerle, Citran, Lanessan, Macaux, and Sociando-Mallet, that do not have another appellation. Wines from vineyards closest to the Gironde have greater finesse, while those from the plateau are fuller-bodied.

Château Sociando-Mallet
This modern, fast-rising, oaky star often outclasses its far pricier neighbors.

LALANDE-DE-POMEROL

Lying north of Pomerol (see p103), this area consists of two communes: Néac and Lalande-de-Pomerol itself. It covers 2,250 acres (900 ha)—far more than Pomerol itself. In Lalande, the vineyards are low-lying, and situated on gravel and sand terraces. Some of those in Néac are on a high, south-facing plateau composed of very good gravel, like that of Pomerol across the Barbanne River. The best wines from this area are Merlot-dominant and compete with pricier Pomerol.

Château de Bel Air
One of the many Bel Airs, this offers Pomerol quality at an affordable price.

LISTRAC-MÉDOC

Traditionally—but erroneously—treated as the partner of Moulis (see p99) to the south, Listrac covers some 1,750 acres (700 ha) of sloping, mainly clay-limestone vineyards, rising to about 1,200 ft (400 m)—among the highest in the Médoc. The wines here have tended to be tougher in style—more like St Estèphe (see p107) than the wines of Moulis or other communes of the Haut-Médoc. More recently, modern wine-making methods have helped to make for much richer flavors.

Château Fourcas Hosten
An example of the richer, more accessible modern wines of Listrac.

LOUPIAC

Loupiac lies on the right bank of the Garonne, opposite Barsac (see p92). It is considered the best of a trio of dessert-wine-making communes, the other two being its neighbors Ste Croix-du-Mont (see p109) and Cadillac (see p94). Its wines are relatively luscious, thanks to the use of botrytized grapes. While Loupiac may tend to be lighter than the best Sauternes (see p110) and Barsac, ambitious Loupiac producers are making wine that is better than many efforts sold under these other labels.

Domaine du Noble
An estate whose wines compete with all but the best efforts from Sauternes.
of the much-vaunted lightness and delicacy for which the whole appellation is known is derived from the light, gravelly soil, and how much comes from the efforts of producers to make wines in a particular style? Brilliant wines made recently at Château Margaux, Château Palmer, and Château Rauzan-Ségla suggest that the answer may sometimes lie with the wine-maker and not with the soil, since these newer wines can combine perfume with an intensity of flavor more usually associated with wines from the nearby communes of Pauillac (see pp100–101) or St Julien (see p108).

With the exceptions mentioned above, many of the wines made here leave one with the feeling of having watched a great actor on a bad day, a fact often blamed on excessive grape yields and on poor wine-making. While there is a lot of truth in this, I also suspect that, even on the best-equipped, most conscientious estates, it may be harder to consistently produce top-class wines here than in other appellations of the Médoc. When Jean-Michel Cazes bought Château Cantenac-Brown here, it took him far longer to achieve a marked improvement in its wines than it did at the châteaux he has acquired in other Bordeaux appellations.

Despite its lower rank in the 1855 Classification of Bordeaux, this beautiful château often manages to produce wines that are as fine as the best in the appellation.
**MOULIS**

**R OLLING COUNTR YSIDE — 1,235 acres (500 acres) of it — makes up the Médoc appellation of Moulis. One of two appellations situated on the Atlantic rather than the Gironde side of the district, Moulis has traditionally been considered, together with its neighbor Listrac (see p97), to be a “must try harder” appellation. In fact, the velvety red wines of Moulis are quite different from the more structured wines of Listrac, with ripe fruit and a rich black-current perfume. The soil here is clay, limestone, and gravel, which, taken together with variations in winemaking skill, makes for some very diverse wines. Many of the best come from vineyards around the village of Grand Poujeaux, where several fine estates, including Château Chasse-Spleen and Château Poujeaux, produce excellent, long-lived, oak-matured wines.

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**MÉDOC**

**COVERING THE MOST important red wine-producing area in Bordeaux, the huge, district-wide appellation of Médoc stretches from Bordeaux city in the south to Soulac-sur-Mer in the north, bordered to the west by the Atlantic Ocean and to the east by the Gironde River. A separate Haut-Médoc appellation (see p97) for the southern half of the area, as well as six individual commune classifications, means that wines sold as appellation Médoc come mainly from the northern half of the region. A mixture of gravel, limestone, and sandy soils here makes for very varied wines, many of which have the underripe, overcropped character of wines sold as generic Bordeaux. Others, however, such as those produced at Château Potensac or Château la Tour de By, are as good as wines from much more prestigious Médoc appellations to the south.

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**Château Rollan de By**

Part of the important wine-producing commune of Bézadan, Jean Guyon makes red wines that are sturdy and satisfying.

**Château la Cardonne**

In the Médoc commune of Blaignan, this château is under the same ownership as Château Lafite-Rothschild in Pauillac.

**Château Poujeaux**

This prestigious estate competes with Château Chasse-Spleen as the producer of the best wines of the appellation.

**Château Chasse-Spleen**

This is an ambitious estate producing superb wines that compete with those of nearby Margaux and help to create the modern reputation of Moulis.
Lynch-Bages, Pontet-Canet, Clerc Milon, Grand-Puy-Lacoste, and d’Armailhac—all of which regularly stroll into the winners’ circle in competitions between wines from throughout the world.

All of this begs the question, why is Pauillac so special? What can explain the intensity of black currant and cigar-box flavors, the combination of velvet and discreetly hidden steel, or the longevity that allows the finest of these wines to taste fresh 50 years after the harvest?

Conventional wisdom says that the answer lies in the combination of the Cabernet Sauvignon grape, the gravel soil, and the gentle hills on which the vines grow. But Pauillac has good proprietors, too. While Margaux (see p98) has château owners who allow great vineyards to yield mediocre wines, here the Rothschild, Borie, Cazes, Tesseron, and de Lencquesaing families have all made the best of their land. Their wines have a suppleness that makes them easy to drink even in their youth. Give them the time in the cellar they deserve, however, and they will develop layers of fruit and animal flavors that—despite the efforts of pretenders across the globe—still remain unmatched anywhere else.
THE GREAT WINES OF PAUILLAC

The Bordeaux classification system was drawn up in 1855, but the vineyards that produce the top wines of Pauillac were already being referred to as *premiers crus* during the 18th century.

CHÂTEAU LAFITE-ROTHSCHILD

While never as powerful as Château Latour, nor as showy as Mouton-Rothschild, Château Lafite-Rothschild is, for many, the finest and most elegant of all the wines of Bordeaux. The château was founded late in the 17th century, and the quality of its output was recognized 150 years later, when the wines regularly fetched the highest prices of all Bordeaux. The château was bought by the banker Baron James de Rothschild (hence the suffix to its name) 13 years after the 1855 classification was issued. Its "second wine" is Les Carruades de Lafite.

CHÂTEAU LAFITE-ROTHSCHILD

Though far from the showiest of wines, Château Lafite-Rothschild remains one of the most stylish. It is also one of the wines most worth laying down in a cellar for a couple of decades, to allow it to develop its unique combination of rich, complex flavors.

CHÂTEAU MOUTON-ROTHSCHILD

Until the middle of the 18th century, the estate that is now known as Château Mouton-Rothschild was part of Château Lafite, but its wines were produced and sold separately. For generations, however, it failed to attain the prestige of either Lafite or Château Latour. This may explain the decision in 1855 to rank Mouton as a *deuxième cru*, though there are claims that anti-Semitism may have been involved, for the estate had been bought by Nathaniel de Rothschild two years earlier. Whatever the explanation, after much lobbying, in 1973, Baron Philippe de Rothschild secured its promotion to *premier cru* status. It was a major coup: no other change to the 1855 classification has ever taken place. Mouton-Rothschild's wines are bigger and more immediately seductive than those of its neighbors but, as the 1945 and 1949 vintages prove, they can age well.

Château Lafite-Rothschild

This has the distinction of being the only château to succeed in challenging the 1855 classification, achieving promotion from *deuxième* to *premier cru* status.
**PESSAC-LÉOGNAN**

One of the youngest *appellations* in France, Pessac-Léognan includes some of the finest red- and dry white-producing vineyards in the world. Just outside the modern city of Bordeaux, these vineyards produced the wines that first won prestige for the entire Bordeaux region, including a famous “Ho Bryan” enjoyed by Samuel Pepys in 1663.

Until the late 1980s, a cluster of illustrious estates, including Château Haut-Brion, Château Pape-Clément, Château Haut-Bailly, and Domaine de Chevalier, belonged to the *appellation* of Graves (see p96), an area of gravelly vineyards extending nearly 40 miles (60 km) south from the city of Bordeaux. In 1987, however, it was decided to separate these northern vineyards from the lower-quality land farther south, classifying them under the new *appellation* of Pessac-Léognan, named after the two *communes* of Pessac and Léognan.

This is not a large *appellation*, producing a total of just over nine million bottles each year, compared to the 22 million bottles of *appellation contrôlée* Graves. It is, however, perfect grape-growing land, with hilly, well-drained gravel vineyards that suit both the Sémillon and the Sauvignon Blanc grapes used to make dry white wines, and the Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot used in the supple reds.

Despite a more sweetly fruity, mineral edge, the red wines of Pessac-Léognan are related in style to the wines of the gravelly Haut-Médoc to the north (see p97). Even the best and slowest-developing red wines, including those from Château Haut-Brion and La Mission Haut-Brion, are approachable in their youth, but take a decade to develop their complex flavors. Some estates, such as Domaine de Chevalier and Château Haut-Brion, have a long tradition of successful white wine making, using Sémillon and Sauvignon Blanc grapes. Others, such as Château Carbonnieux, have recently progressed by giant leaps, and are now making white wines that are complex and exciting.

Château Carbonnieux

Techniques at this Benedictine château, long known for its reliable whites, have improved dramatically in recent years, and wines here are now better than ever.

Techniques at this Benedictine château, long known for its reliable whites, have improved dramatically in recent years, and wines here are now better than ever.

Château Smith-Haut-Lafitte

Recent investment at this estate has resulted in a great improvement in the quality of the wines made here.

Domaine de Chevalier

Both red and white wines from this grand cru classé estate take up to 10 years to mature.

**AC Pessac-Léognan.**

Red: Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot.

White: Sémillon, Sauvignon Blanc.

Supple, earthy, tobacco-scented reds. Medium- to full-bodied whites.


Red: Roast lamb.


Red: 6–25 years.

White: 3–15 years.
POMEROL

Flat and visually unmemorable, the Libournais appellation of Pomerol, on the eastern bank of the Dordogne, failed to receive even a mention in the Bordeaux Classification of 1855 (see p85). This has not prevented the best of the supple, velvety red wines of Pomerol from being among the most magnificent and expensive in the world.

Although the area around Pomerol was first used for vine-growing in the first century BC, it was not until the 1960s that its wines, now exclusively red, achieved international success. During the 18th century, the grapes grown in the flat, iron-rich clay vineyards of Pomerol were used to make mainly white wines. When the white grapes were eventually replaced with black, the quality of the wine they produced was not enhanced by the other food crops that were planted among the vines. For a long time, the vineyards of the area were seen as being second-best to those of St Émilion (see p103), which were themselves considered decidedly second-best to those of the Médoc (see p99). When George Saintsbury wrote his Notes on a Cellar Book in 1920, Pomerol did not even warrant a mention. The only markets for its wines were Belgium and northern France, and even there, reputations were hard to build, given the tiny annual production of most of the estates. There were, and are, no grand châteaux in Pomerol; even Château Pétrus, now the most famous estate in the appellation, producing some of the most expensive wines in the world, is no more than a modest country farmhouse making just 5,000 cases of wine each year.

The credit for changing Pomerol’s fortunes in the 1950s and 1960s must go to wine merchant and producer Jean-Pierre Moueix, who took charge of Château Pétrus, Château Lagrange, Château la Fleur-Pétrus, Château Latour, Château Pomerol, and Château Trotanoy. With his son Christian, Moueix introduced the wines of the region to the British, and, more importantly, to Americans, who were seduced by their rich Dundee cake flavors, the softness of their tannins, and their characteristic hint of minerals.

Most of the wines of Pomerol are made primarily from Merlot grapes, but estates such as Vieux Château Certan demonstrate the essential blending role played by Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon when they are planted on the appropriate soil.

**Surprised by Success**

A newcomer to prosperity, the commune of Pomerol remains one of the sleepiest and most remote in Bordeaux. Lacking a village center, the area counts the church spire as its most important landmark.

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**Vieux Château Certan**

The traditional Merlot is skillfully blended with Cabernet Franc to produce exquisite long-lived wines here.
**PREMIÈRES CôTES DE BORDEAUX**

By around 1000 AD, what is now known as AC Premières Côtes de Bordeaux was already an important wine-producing area. Part of the Entre-Deux-Mers district, the Premières Côtes is a narrow limestone ridge that runs south from Bordeaux 37 miles (for 60 km) along the course of the Garonne, taking in 37 villages, each of which is entitled to add its name to the appellation. Many sunshine hours and a clay-and-gravel soil help to produce fruity, Merlot-dominated reds that can make great drinking at around six years old.

Both sweet and dry whites are made here, too, but dry whites must be sold under the general Bordeaux Blanc appellation. Intended to encourage the production of this region’s generally unexceptional sweet whites, this rule gives little incentive to produce good dry white wines.

**Château Carsin**

This recently developed, Finnish-owned estate uses modern wine-making techniques to get the best out of the Premières Côtes.

**Hillside Vines**

Following a narrow limestone ridge along the north bank of the Garonne, the Premières Côtes de Bordeaux are hilly and picturesque, a marked contrast to the flatter land on the opposite bank.

**THE RISING STARS OF BORDEAUX**

Red wines from estates in a number of previously underperforming Bordeaux appellations have scored some startling recent successes. One of these appellations is the Premières Côtes de Bordeaux (see above), where the lead has been taken by two châteaux in particular. One is Château Reynon, where wines are produced by Professor Denis Dubourdieu of Bordeaux University. The other is the Finnish-owned Château Carsin, where wines are made by the Australian-born Mandy Jones using modern, Australian-designed equipment. Surprisingly, but justifiably, the price of wines from these châteaux is often higher than that of a St Émilion Grand Cru (see p105). Other rising-star appellations include the Côtes de Francs (see p95), and the Côtes de Bourg (see p84), as well as various so-called satellite appellations of St Émilion and Pomerol, such as St Georges-St Émilion (see p106) and Lalande de Pomerol (see p97). The vast improvement in these wines is due mainly to the application of better vine-growing and wine-making techniques, above all the careful selection of only healthy, ripe grapes. Also crucial is the fact that people are now prepared to pay high prices for good wines from what were often considered humble appellations.

**Château Reynon**

Denis Dubourdieu, an important influence on countless Bordeaux producers, produces his own wines at Château Reynon in the Premières Côtes.
Although it is one of the most prestigious red wine appellations in the world, the wines of St-Émilion can be some of the most difficult to buy. The most sublime of all Bordeaux wines are made in the best parts of this appellation, but there are also plenty of very dull wines, sold at high prices thanks to the international prestige of their name.

The vineyards of St-Émilion have been immortalized in Roman mosaics and praised by the Roman poet Ausonius. Despite this illustrious history, the lack of bridges across the Dordogne and the Garonne left St-Émilion isolated from the city of Bordeaux and its wine merchants, and as a consequence, these wines were relatively little-known outside the region until the early 20th century.

Enjoying a huge postwar revival, the glorious fruitcake richness of St-Émilion’s top wines now helps them to sell for some of the highest prices in Bordeaux. In 1958 the wines of St-Émilion were first officially classified under a complex and rather confusing system. The very best vineyards enjoy the status of premiers grands crus classés A and B, and are reevaluated every decade. Next come the often quite ordinary grands crus classés vineyards. Finally, there is a third category, never reevaluated, that includes more than 200 grands crus vineyards, most of which are even more ordinary than those labeled grand cru classé.

Geographically and geologically, there are at least four distinct parts to the St-Émilion appellation. Around and to the south of the town are the clay-limestone mixtures of both the St-Émilion plateau and the slopes of the Côtes St-Émilion, home to many of the premiers grands crus classés vineyards. To the west of the Côtes is the gravel and sandy soil of the Graves-St-Émilion. Finally, farther west is the large area of sandy sables anciennes, where more ordinary St-Émilion is made. In the first three areas, the Merlot grape is blended with as much as 65 percent Cabernet Franc, while on the sables anciennes it is Merlot that dominates.

The roofs of St-Émilion
The small town of St-Émilion nestles comfortably on its high limestone plateau, its warm terra-cotta roofs contrasting with the greens and browns of the priceless vines that surround it.

The vineyards of St-Émilion are home to many of the premmiers grands crus classés vineyards. To the west of the Côtes is the gravel and sandy soil of the Graves-St-Émilion. Finally, farther west is the large area of sandy sables anciennes, where more ordinary St-Émilion is made. In the first three areas, the Merlot grape is blended with as much as 65 percent Cabernet Franc, while on the sables anciennes it is Merlot that dominates.

Château l’Angélus
One of St-Émilion’s rising stars, this estate produces wines that have been growing ever more impressive since the 1980s.

Château Troplong-Mondot
Not the most famous, perhaps, but even in difficult years like 1994, this has been one of the most carefully made and most reliable of all St-Émilion’s wines.
ST ÉMILION SATELLITES

With the establishment in 1935 of the appellation contrôlée system, the villages close to St Émilion were given their own appellations, enabling them to sell their wines under their own names rather than that of St Émilion. Little known, but carefully made, they sometimes offer far better value than many of the wines of St Émilion itself.

Wines of all four villages be classed together in a single appellation as St Émilion-Villages. Wine writer Hugh Johnson, on the other hand, has more recently expressed the view that “these wines make up in satisfying solidity what they lack in finesse.” Far worse than this could very often be said of the wines of St Émilion itself, which sell at much higher prices.

My own opinion is that whatever the failings of the St Émilion satellite appellations, they are due largely to the limited wine-making ambitions of the local coopératives and châteaux, made worse by a tendency for growers to opt for high grape yields at the expense of quality. The exciting results of improvements in wine-making techniques can be seen in the superb wines produced recently at both Château St Georges in St Georges-St Émilion and at Château Faizeau in Montagne-St Émilion. Until more such talented wine makers come to work in this area, it is impossible to guess which of the four appellations has the greatest potential. At the moment, however, it is the wines of St Georges-St Émilion that age the best, and those of Puisseguin-St Émilion that are the simplest and most one-dimensional.

Château Corbin
Part of a rapidly growing group of innovative wine makers that are based in the region of Montagne-St Émilion, Château Corbin makes wines with more finesse than those of many of its neighbors.
ST ESTÈPHE

For traditional claret drinkers, the tannic, slow-maturing style of St Estèphe was everything a Bordeaux ought to be. As international taste in wine has swung increasingly toward more supple reds, this northernmost commune in the Médoc has often seemed unfashionable. However, recent vintages have seen a move toward fruitier, more supple wines.

When the classification of the vineyards of Bordeaux took place in 1855, it was agreed that the wines of St Estèphe were not the best in the Médoc, and the commune was awarded only five cru classés, as compared to 18 in Pauillac and 21 in Margaux (see p98). Forty vineyards, however, were classified as crus bourgeois—below a cinquième cru, but better than an average unclassified cru.

Tough and deeply colored, with a lot of tannin and acidity, the traditional St Estèphe style is the very opposite of the juicy Merlot-rich wines of nearby Pomerol (see p103). More surprising is the fact that the wines of St Estèphe are also very different from those of its neighbor, Pauillac, despite the fact that both the appellations share a gravel soil, and both have traditionally grown mainly Cabernet Sauvignon grapes. The soil of St Estèphe, however, contains a lot of clay as well as gravel, which, in combination with the Cabernet Sauvignon, produces wines that may be a little rough if not extensively matured. The style can sometimes work well, as shown by Château Montrose and Château Cos d’Estournel, where the wines are rich, spicy, and stylish.

A wine-making revolution began in St Estèphe in the late 1980s, when a number of dynamic producers realized that, by growing more Merlot grapes, which are suited to the clay-rich soil here, and by harvesting them later, it was possible to make wines that are gentler and more supple than traditional St Estèphe. Despite this, a high proportion of wines here are still made in bulk at the local coopérative, proof that St Estèphe is still far from being a truly fashionable appellation. However, a trend is emerging, one that has proved unstoppable, for the best of these rich, berry-flavored wines to join company with some of the most sought-after in the Médoc.

Château Haut-Marbuzet
Henri Duboscq uses 50 percent Merlot grapes to make wines that are fruitier and less tannic than traditional St Estèphe.

Château Montrose
One of the two deuxième cru estates in St Estèphe, this estate makes long-maturing wines that reveal the presence of large proportions of Cabernet Sauvignon.

ST ESTÈPHE

The carved-oak doors from the island of Zanzibar and various other non-European influences seen in the design of this unusual, custom-built winery give a strong indication of the exotic, spicy flavor of the wines within.

Château Cos d'Estournel

Quails sautéed with artichoke hearts, onions, and red Bordeaux.

Château Montrouge

5–30 years.

AC St Estèphe.

Red: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot.

Full-bodied, deep-colored, tannic, slow-maturing reds.

Andron Blanquet, Calon-Ségur, Chambert-Marbuzet, Cos d'Estournel, Cos-Labory, Le Crock, Haut-Beauséjour, Haut-Marbuzet, Lafon-Rochet, Lavillotte, Lilian Ladouys, Marbuzet, Meyney, Montrose, les Ormes-de-Pez, Petit-Bocq, de-Pez, Phélan-Ségur, Picard, Tour de Pez, Tronquoy-Lalande.

ST JULIEN

Of all the appellations in Bordeaux, none offers a higher proportion of really fine red wine than St Julien. There may be no premiers crus châteaux here, but the combination of gravelly soil and ambitious wine-makers has resulted in the production of St Julien wines that regularly challenge some of the biggest names in the Bordeaux region.

As anyone who has driven northward through the Médoc region will know, St Julien is a long way from Margaux (see p98), but a very short distance from Pauillac (see p100). In fact, the boundary between St Julien and Pauillac is defined only by the Juillac stream. On one side stands Château Léoville-Las Cases, and on the other its rival Château Pichon-Longueville-Comtesse-Lalande and the premier cru Château Latour. In blind tastings, it is often hard to predict which will be the winner, since this trio share the same gravelly soil and use a similar Cabernet-dominated blend of grapes.

The combination of cedary, cigar-box, and fresh black-currant flavors defines the character of St Julien, which is a touch less powerful than Pauillac, and less austere than St Estèphe (see p107), but more structured than Margaux. Château Léoville-Las Cases’ wines sell for prices close to those of the premiers crus of Pauillac, while its neighbor, the more affordable Château Léoville-Barton, often produces one of the best wines of the vintage. Other high-flyers among the 11 crus classés include Châteaux Branaire, Ducru-Beaucaillou, Lagrange, Léoville-Poyferré and Talbot, while crus bourgeois such as Châteaux Gloria, Moulin de la Rose and St Pierre produce wines that are better than some of the crus classés in other communes. The quality of the wine making here makes “second wines,” such as Château Léoville-Las Cases’ Clos du Marquis and Château Lagrange’s Les Fiefs de Lagrange, well worth buying.

Modern St Julien can be drunk quite young, but in good vintages it can take 10 years for the wines to take on more of the mature cigar-box flavors and lose the black-currant character of their youth.

Château Lagrange

Although not everyone was happy when Japanese buyers took over this château, it has since been restored to its former glory and the wines produced here have regained their former status.

Sautéed fillet of lamb with chicken and parsley mousse.

AC St Julien.

Red: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot.

Rich, full-bodied, long-lived, black-curranty, cedary reds.

Ch Beychevelle, Ch Branaire-Ducru, Ch la Briddane, Ch Ducru-Beaucaillou, Ch du Glana, Ch Gloria, Ch Gruaud-Larose, Ch Hortesie, Ch Lagrange, Ch Langoa-Barton, Ch Léoville-Barton, Ch Léoville-Las Cases, Ch Léoville-Poyferré, Ch Moulin de la Rose, Ch St Pierre, Ch Talbot.


8–25 years.

Château Léoville-Las Cases

Although not a premier cru, the wines produced by this château are unofficially ranked alongside the premiers crus châteaux of the nearby appellation Pauillac.
STE CROIX-DU-MONT

For those who believe that vines grow better on hills, Ste Croix-du-Mont, on the right bank of the Garonne to the south of Loupiac (see p97), might seem more promising sweet wine territory than the flatlands of Sauternes (see p110) or Barsac (see p92). The soil is good and the vineyards face south across the river, with morning mists encouraging the development of botrytis. The wines can have the full, honeyed character associated with good botrytized wines and are often better buys than those sold under more famous appellations like Sauternes and Barsac. Like Loupiac, however, Ste Croix-du-Mont is often lighter in color and body than top Sauternes—probably because its producers can not afford to pick nobly rotten grapes in numerous pickings, and instead do so in a single pass.

Château Croix-du-Mont

The wines of Ste Croix-du-Mont might not be as prestigious as those of Sauternes, but the region does have some truly spectacular châteaux.

Château Loubens

One of the most reliable producers of Ste Croix-du-Mont, this château makes wines that are both luscious and subtle.

Château Croix-du-Mont

The wines of Ste Croix-du-Mont might not be as prestigious as those of Sauternes, but the region does have some truly spectacular châteaux.

NOBLE ROT

The challenge facing the grape-growers of Ste Croix-du-Mont, like makers of fine sweet wine elsewhere, lies in managing the benign fungus known as Botrytis cinerea or noble rot. While the makers of dry wines simply wait for their grapes to ripen, dessert-wine-makers are dependent on the warm, humid weather conditions in which the botrytis develops. Appellations like Sauternes (see p110), Barsac (see p92), Loupiac (see p97), and Ste Croix-du-Mont in Bordeaux, Monbazillac (see p274) and Jurançon (see p272) in the southwest, and Vouvray (see p226), Bonnezeaux (see p214), and Quarts-de-Chaume (see p221) in the Loire, all favor these conditions, with the quality of each vintage ultimately reliant on the weather from year to year. For example, the weather of 1982 was perfect for red Bordeaux, but less than great for Sauternes. Yields per vine are far smaller for botrytized wines than for dry wines, and this, coupled with the risk of poor weather destroying the crop, tends to discourage most producers from taking the risks required to harvest in successive pickings. Money has a part to play, because makers of sweet wines rarely receive the financial rewards their efforts and risks deserve. For example, in 1997, even Château Climens, one of the most famous châteaux in Sauternes and a producer of botrytized wines, charged the same price per bottle as châteaux in the Médoc that produced twice as much wine per acre.

A Strange Beauty

Grapes affected by noble rot are far from pretty, but they are essential to the production of great sweet wines.

Painstaking Harvest

Picking nobly rotten grapes is a demanding task, and a far cry from the mechanized harvesting process often used for dry wines.
SAUTERNES

No other sweet wine has ever come close to achieving the prestige accorded to the produce of this privileged corner of Bordeaux, and indeed the quality of the best of the white wines here has improved noticeably in recent years. Despite this status, the presence of the word Sauternes on a label is no promise of any kind of quality.

The first wines of the Sauternes were almost certainly dry and red. Whites have been made since the 17th century, and the earliest of these were dry. They were also so light that the Dutch merchants who bought them felt the need to fortify them with brandy. In 1787, US President Thomas Jefferson bought some Château d’Yquem and was so impressed that he wrote that Sauternes provided France’s best whites—that is, after Champagne (see pp.160–77) and Hermitage (see p.258). No one is quite certain when the Sauternais began to make sweet wines. At Yquem it is said that a late harvest in 1859 resulted in the grapes being attacked by noble rot. Others fix the date 23 years earlier when a German grower named Focke imported a knowledge of botrytis from the Rhine. In any case, the sweet 1859 Yquem was a hit when drunk at the Russian court, and since then the top wines of Sauternes have never looked back. The best châteaux, Yquem, Rieussec, and Suduiraut, are set atop small hills close to the Ciron River, whose mists help to create the perfect conditions for botrytis. Not only does Yquem enjoy the best site, it has traditionally taken the greatest care over its wines, painstakingly harvesting in successive pickings and even declining to release a vintage when the quality is thought insufficient.

The Sauternes appellation is allowed to include Barsac (see p.92), and on average its quality has improved in recent years: excess use of sulfur dioxide is rarer than it used to be. Even so, generic Sauternes is still usually a label to be avoided, and many smaller châteaux make disappointing wines in all but the best vintages.

The explanation for this may lie in legislation that denies Sauternes producers an entitlement granted to their neighbors in Cérons (see p.111). The latter are allowed to “declassify” their less impressive wines and sell them as Graves (see p.96). The Sauternais have only two options: Sauternes and Bordeaux Blanc—the latter being the appellation under which they sell their (generally overpriced) dry whites.

Château d’Yquem

The high price of the wines of Château d’Yquem is justified by the extreme care taken in the vineyard and cellar.
As red Bordeaux has become richer and deeper in color and flavor, a number of producers have revived rosé and claret (the style that falls between red and rosé). In fact, there is a direct connection between these wines and the darker reds: in many cases they are simply the juices drawn from the vat when still only partly fermented, in order to increase the concentration of color and flavor in the remaining wine.

Created in 1990, the appellation of Crémant de Bordeaux is beginning to prove a source of small quantities—that is, around one million bottles per year—of good-value sparkling white and rosé wine. The principal grape used here is Sémillon, usually with the addition of Muscadelle, Sauvignon, Colombard, and some Cabernet Franc.

The little-known wines of Cérons are produced from vineyards close to Barsac (see p92). Like the wines of that appellation, they tend to be light and delicate in style and—in the case of the Grand Enclos du Château de Cérons—first-class alternatives to other, higher-priced sweet Bordeaux. Curiously, and sensibly, Cérons producers have the option of selling their wine as Graves, unlike their neighbors in Sauternes and Barsac, who can only use their own appellations or Bordeaux Blanc.

Ste Foy de Bordeaux
Reds now dominate in this region because the market for sweet whites is uncertain. Producers still need to make a living, even when there is no noble rot—the fungus crucial for making fine sweet whites. Quite unrelated to the Graves appellation, the reds and whites of Graves de Vayres come from a small area of gravelly soil on the left bank of the Dordogne. Their individuality was appreciated in the 19th century, when their color was mostly white. Today the best examples, such as the wines of Châteaux la Chapelle-Bellevue, Lesparre, and Canteloup, are Merlot-dominated reds.

Ste Foy de Bordeaux, to the east of Entre-Deux-Mers (see p95), is another white wine region that has switched to making reds. Among the most successful wines are the ones now being produced at 18th-century châteaux such as des Chapelains, du Petit Montibeau and l’Enclos.

The wines of two appellations, Bordeaux-Haut-Benauge and Entre-Deux-Mers-Haut-Benauge, both come from the same nine communes, which lie to the west of Entre-Deux-Mers. The second of this pair makes a dry wine that can include Ugni Blanc, Colombard, and Mauzac, and is similar in style to Entre-Deux-Mers.

Bordeaux-Haut-Benauge, on the other hand, can be medium-sweet or sweet, and is produced from Sémillon, Sauvignon Blanc, and Muscadelle, which have to be used at a higher degree of ripeness. The result is more interesting than the semisweet wine of Côtes de Bordeaux-St Macaire, a lesser-known appellation to the south.
BURGUNDY
Burgundy

This is the land of tiny estates, yielding similarly tiny quantities of what are often sublime and extraordinary red and white wines.

First, a confession. I cannot begin to be as level-headed about Burgundy as I would like. This is the region and these are the wines with which I fell most passionately in love. I lived among the vineyards in the heart of Burgundy for nearly six years and I have spent, and misspent, more money on the wines made here than on those produced anywhere else in the world. The relationship has been a tempestuous one. The greatest bottles, some of which have come from the region’s most humble appellations, have been packed with wild fruit, perfume, and indescribable animal appeal. The lesser ones, far too many of which have carried prestigious labels and been undeniably expensive, have been variously dull, watery, acidic, and grubby. The problem is that, without pulling the cork, there is no way to be sure of what you are going to find.

There are several reasons for this notorious unpredictability. First, even the most southerly parts of Burgundy lie too far north to ripen grapes reliably every year. Second, while producers in Bordeaux (see pp80–111), for example, have the flexibility by law to blend grape varieties to produce their best wines, in Burgundy many wines must be made from a single grape variety. In addition, an average Bordeaux château, producing 200–300,000 bottles of wine per harvest, enjoys economies of scale denied to the typically tiny Burgundy estate producing only 30,000 bottles. A final, and crucial, factor is the optimistic readiness of wine-drinkers to place their trust in the name of an appellation, hoping blindly that any bottle labeled Chablis (see pp132–3) or Beaujolais (see pp126–7), Chassagne-Montrachet (see p135) or Pouilly-Fuissé (see p152), is going to live up to their expectations.

So why persevere against all the odds? Because the tiny vineyards in each of Burgundy’s five wine-producing regions, from Chablis in the north to Beaujolais in the south, can produce wines that, at their best, are unequalled anywhere else. There are, for example, many delicious Chardonnays to be found throughout the world, but none that could be mistaken for a traditional unoaked or lightly oaked Chablis. Wine-makers elsewhere make good red wines from the Pinot Noir grape, but none can produce the subtle light and shade of flavors that you discover when you taste the red wines in a good Côte d’Or cellar. Likewise, the Beaujolais region
A fertile plain, the province of Burgundy has long been famous both for its wines and for its food. At its heart are the Côte de Nuits and Côte de Beaune regions, also known collectively as the Côte d’Or, or Golden Slope.

is often justly criticized for producing overpriced and disappointing wines. However, at its best, the combination of the Gamay grape, a granite soil, and the traditional wine-making techniques used here produces cherry and bitter-chocolate flavors that are unlike those of any other wine. So, for me at least, the love affair continues, but I now look for producers whose names I know, such as those listed on the following pages, or buy from a wine merchant I trust.
Burgundy’s period of semi-nationhood provided the region with a strong sense of identity that still endures to this day. It also laid the foundations for a major wine industry in the area. The first evidence of wine production in Burgundy dates from Roman times. The Côte d’Or, or Golden Slope, which lies to the south of the present-day town of Dijon, was being used by wine-makers by the fourth century. In the early days, however, vine-growing there was probably not as rewarding as it is today. According to local legend, the Roman Emperor Constantine was informed in the year 312 that the inhabitants of the area were unable to pay their taxes—the vineyards were full of decrepit vines, and barely accessible by horse and cart thanks to the large number of potholes in the roads. Today, the valuable Côte d’Or vineyards produce some of the very best wines in Burgundy.

Charity Begins at the Hospital
The Hospices de Beaune was founded as a charitable hospital in the 14th century. Today, money raised from the annual auction of its wines is spent on the upkeep of a new hospital.

Burgundy’s period of semi-nationhood provided the region with a strong sense of identity that still endures to this day. It also laid the foundations for a major wine industry in the area. The first evidence of wine production in Burgundy dates from Roman times. The Côte d’Or, or Golden Slope, which lies to the south of the present-day town of Dijon, was being used by wine-makers by the fourth century. In the early days, however, vine-growing there was probably not as rewarding as it is today. According to local legend, the Roman Emperor Constantine was informed in the year 312 that the inhabitants of the area were unable to pay their taxes—the vineyards were full of decrepit vines, and barely accessible by horse and cart thanks to the large number of potholes in the roads. Today, the valuable Côte d’Or vineyards produce some of the very best wines in Burgundy.

A TRADITION OF QUALITY
The proper development of these vineyards came with the Church. In 587, the King of Burgundy, Gontran, donated land to a local abbey, as did the Emperor Charlemagne some 200 years later. Specific Côte d’Or vineyards were already being isolated for their quality and, according to local legend, it was the emperor himself who ordered that vines be planted on one particular hillside, having noticed that the snows always melted earlier there. This, he said, indicated that the slope in question benefited from more sunshine. The hill was the grand cru Corton and the vineyard was what is now known as Corton Charlemagne. In Burgundian patois, the region’s smallest plots of land, the named vineyards within every commune, are still known as climats after their quirky individual microclimates.

By the early 18th century, maps were being drawn up of the Côte d’Or indicating places such as Volnet (now Volnay), Puligny Morachat (now Puligny-Montrachet), Nuys (now Nuits-St Georges) and Chambertin (now Gevrey-Chambertin), where the best wines were made. By this time, it was known that the Pinot Noir was the ideal grape variety for this northern region’s reds and that the Chardonnay was best for its whites. In fact, as early as 1395, the first edict was issued to ban the planting of the Gamay, the Pinot Noir’s easier-to-grow relative.

The French Revolution of 1789 led to the breaking up of the monarchy and aristocratic and ecclesiastical estates, which were less cohesive units than their counterparts in Bordeaux. In 1790 this redistribution of land was accelerated with the introduction of the
Code Napoléon, a law that specified equal inheritance among children, regardless of age and sex.

HYPHENATED NAMES
The result of the Code Napoléon law is visible throughout Burgundy. The patchwork of vines shows the effect of carving up pieces of land between the children of deceased wine-growers. Look at the range of wines offered in any Burgundian cellar and you will see the effect of the marriages between one grower’s son and his neighbor’s daughter. This can also be seen in the hyphenated names of estates like Coche-Boulicault and Coche-Dury.

Exploiting and marketing tiny quantities of several different wines was difficult, especially in a region that was prone to bad weather and poor harvests. The first wine merchants were already buying, blending, and maturing wines by the early 18th century. For the next 200 years, these merchants more or less controlled the Burgundy wine market. It was not until the late 20th century that the owners of estates with an average size of only 15 acres (six ha) began handling their own wine from grape to bottle, making the most of the “small is beautiful” trend of the 1970s and 1980s. Loss of control by the merchants, combined with the introduction of appellation contrôlée legislation, did away with the most obvious falsifications of the Burgundy wine trade, but it also exposed the challenges of small-scale wine-making in what can be a tricky climate. The established hierarchy of grand cru, premier cru, village and regional wines will give you an idea of where to find the best bottles, but in reality a well-made village wine in a good year is often far better than a poorly made grand cru wine that sells at several times the price. So the most important words on a label are the name of the producer.

Chevaliers du Tastevin
Burgundy’s medieval image has been successfully promoted by the Confrérie, the brotherhood of the Chevaliers du Tastevin, which literally means the “knights of the tasting cup.” Founded in 1934, the group now holds banquets for members and their guests at Clos de Vougeot and at overseas “chapters.”
A Driving Tour of Burgundy

This tour covers most of the significant wine-producing villages of the Côte de Beaune as well as the little-known Hautes-Côtes de Beaune. Also included is the hugely ornate Château de la Rochepot, which will delight those with a taste for fairy-tale architecture as well as for wine.

BEAUNE
The medieval town of Beaune ① is home to most of Burgundy’s best-known wine merchants, a well-stocked musée du vin, and the world-famous Hôtel Dieu, a magnificent hospital built during the 15th century and financed through the sale of wine from its vineyards.

BEAUNE TO MEURSAULT
Take the Chalon-sur-Saône road, forking right at the Cave Coopérative des Hautes-Côtes, toward Pommard ②. The Château de Pommard’s cellars are worth a visit, if only because the wine made here is sold nowhere else. Volnay ③ is a slightly larger village, set high enough to allow a panoramic view of the patchwork of vineyards below. There are plenty of excellent producers here, but one of the best is Michel Lafarge. Follow the road toward Auxey-Duresses, past the village of Monthélie ④ and its château on your right. Like Monthélie, Auxey-Duresses ⑤ is a good source of underrated, and consequently affordable, red and white wines. The church here is also worth a visit for its triptych showing the Life of the Virgin. Meursault ⑥ is more of a town than a village; its main square, imposing church and well-kept wine-growers’ homes and cellars reflect the success that its wines enjoy around the world. The Château de Meursault is where the wine makers Paulée hold a day-long lunch in November.

PULIGNY-MONTRACHET TO CHASSAGNE-MONTRACHET
After Meursault, Puligny-Montrachet ⑦ is very quiet. Merchant Olivier Leflaive offers a good range of white wines and a restaurant where they can be tasted with local dishes. There is little of note about Gamay ⑧, except that this is where the grape of the same name was supposedly first planted in Burgundy. St Aubin ⑨ offers some fairly priced white wines from estates like the Domaine Roux. The wine-growers’ track from St Aubin to Chassagne-Montrachet passes the world-famous Le Montrachet ⑩ vineyard, whose stone gateways offer a fine photo opportunity for visiting wine lovers. Sleepy but charming, Chassagne-Montrachet ⑪ is also worth a visit.

SANTENAY TO LA ROCHEPOT
Santenay ⑫ offers a spa bath, a pretty main square, a casino, and some good-value red and white wines. Nolay ⑬ has no wine, but does boast a quaint 14th-century market hall. The wooded hills here make a spectacular backdrop for the Château de la Rochepot ⑭, whose vibrantly colored roof is similar to that of the Hôtel Dieu in Beaune.

LA ROCHEPOT TO SAVIGNY-LÈS-BEAUNE
You are now in the rugged hills of the Hautes-Côtes de Beaune. Pause at the top of the cliffs at Orches ⑮, where
you may see hawks and other wild birds, before continuing on to the village of St Romain, where producer Alain Gras makes and sells some great-value white wines.

SAVIGNY-LÈS-BEAUNE TO BEAUNE
The road to Savigny-lès-Beaune offers a good view of the Château de Savigny, home to a motorcycle museum. Drive on to Aloxe-Corton in the shadow of the hill of Corton, site of some of the best *grands crus* vineyards in the Côte de Beaune. Some of the best wines are made in Pernand-Vergelesses. At Chorey-lès-Beaune the Domaine Tollot-Beaut and the Château de Chorey both make stunning reds.
Burgundy is rich in terms of high-quality ingredients. The town of Bresse claims to produce some of the world’s best poultry, while the famous Charolais beef cattle are prized by chefs all over the world. The Morvan, with its many rivers, produces some of the finest freshwater fish in France, and its forests are home to a variety of game. There is also an abundance of delicate mushrooms, fat, gray snails, and luscious, ripe vegetables and fruit. On top of all that are the region’s wines, which not only enhance the food when drunk with it, but also play a major part in the preparation of many great local dishes.

Red wine is the basis of casserole dishes such as the classic boeuf bourguignon, and of sauces for egg and fish dishes. White Burgundy plays a similar role in chicken and rabbit dishes. The fiery marc de Bourgogne, a liquor distilled from the residue of grapes, is used to wash the rinds of the local cheeses.

Traditionalists used to suggest using the same wine for the dish as would be served with it. Nowadays, however, the

**Charcuterie**

As elsewhere in France, pork meats, including ham, pâté, sausage, and brawn, play a major role in the cuisine of Burgundy. On special occasions, the ham is often served whole.

**Boeuf Bourguignon**

In this classic stew, cuts of beef are marinated, then slowly cooked in Beaujolais or Burgundy wine, to which cubed bacon, onions, and mushrooms are added.
cost of a bottle of Grand Cru Chambertin, for example, is such that only a true purist, or a millionaire, would be prepared to pour half a bottle or more of this great red into the pot. Most modern chefs use a good, full-bodied red Burgundy instead.

Cream is used in many local dishes, often with ham or mushrooms. Ham, which was once the traditional Easter dish, may also be braised in wine or set in a green parsley jelly—this is known as jambon persillé. Other charcuterie, such as sansiot (brawn), saucisson (salami-like sausage), andouillettes, and pâtés, are made throughout Burgundy.

The town of Dijon is famous for its mustard, in which eggs are cooked in the dish oeufs à la dijonnaise, and also for its black currants, used as the basis of the delicious liqueur crème de cassis—which is used to make kir, a white-wine aperitif.

Burgundy is also known for a wide range of baked goods, including pain d’épices (spiced bread). One savory treat traditionally served at wine tastings is the addictive gougère, a choux pastry made with cheese. It is eaten cold or lukewarm and can be served plain, or garnished with mushrooms or vegetables.

**REGIONAL CHEESES**

While Burgundy is not nearly as famous for its dairy produce as it is for its wine, lush pastures and picture-book Charolais cattle make for rich, creamy cheeses that complement the region’s wines perfectly. Even the smallest, most humble restaurants will usually offer a choice of perfectly ripened local cheeses. The distinction of many of the cheeses in this region, though, is the strength of the flavors, which often go far more successfully with the delicate local Pinot Noir grape variety than one might expect.

**Epoisses de Bourgogne**
The orange rind of this strong-smelling cheese is washed with the traditional marc de Bourgogne as it ripens.

**Bleu de Bresse**
This rich, creamy cheese, a classic of southern France, has a soft pâté that is peppered with patches of blue mold. When the cheese has ripened, a white rind forms.

**Escargots à la Bourguignonne**
The Romans brought their large eating snails to France, where they were quickly adopted as a classic.

**Poulet de Bresse**
This appellation contrôlée chicken is cooked in a delicious white Burgundy and cream sauce, with wild morel mushrooms.
TRAVELING IN BURGUNDY

Burgundy begins less than an hour and a half’s drive from Paris—and finishes just short of Lyon, by which time you are well into the southern half of France, with its Roman roofs and more leisurely way of life. Unsurprisingly, this makes for a diverse range of landscapes and moods—and some of France’s most rewarding places to visit.

HOTELS & RESTAURANTS
A selection of the region’s best establishments, offering good local food and drink, and notable, characterful places to stay.

BAGNOLS, NEAR LYON
Château de Bagnols.
04 74 71 40 00
04 74 71 40 09
A magical, turreted, moated castle in the heart of Beaujolais, which was impeccably and very expensively restored by its British-born owners. Quite simply one of the most beautiful hotels in France.

BEAUNE
Au Bon Acceuil, La Montagne de Beaune.
03 80 22 08 80
03 80 22 93 12
Better known as Chez Nono, this rustic cafe-restaurant is tucked away in the hills above the town. Your fellow diners will include the owners of wine companies and their truck drivers.

Le Home, 138 Route de Dijon.
03 80 22 16 43
Just outside town, this courtyard hotel is inexpensive, friendly, and comfortable. Choose between rooms in the old building or a set of motel-style ones.

BISTROT DES GRANDS CRUS, 8-10 Rue Jules Rathier.
03 86 42 19 41
03 86 42 17 11
www.hostellerie-des-clos.fr
Under the same ownership as the more luxurious Hostellerie des Clos, this casual restaurant offers similar-style cooking with subtle modern twists on local tradition.

LAMÈLOISE, 36 Place des Armes.
03 85 87 65 65
03 85 87 03 57
One of the most reliable and quietly unassuming of France’s luxury country hotels, Lameloise is situated between Beaune and Chalon sur Saone and offers some of the finest cuisine in the region. The wine list is great too.

MÂCON
Hôtel-Restaurant Bellevue, 416-420 Quai Lamartine.
03 85 21 04 04
03 85 21 04 02
A slightly fading hotel overlooking the river and the market. Its rooms are very comfortable and the restaurant serves good local fare and wines to match.

PULIGNY-MONTRACHET
Le Montrachet, Place des Maronniers.
03 80 21 30 06
A favorite restaurant among the locals, this is a good place to taste wines that rarely appear elsewhere.

WINE SHOPS
Many Burgundian wines are not readily available back home, so stock up while you’re here.

AUXERRE
Le Cellier des Agapes, Rue de Preuilly.
03 86 52 15 22
Tucked away in Chablis country, Marc Ragaine managed to put together a sufficiently impressive range of wines to win the prize of France’s best wine shop in 2003.

BEAUNE
l’Athenèum, 5 rue de l’Hôtel-Dieu.
03 80 25 08 30
03 80 25 08 31
athenaeum@wanadoo.fr

Burgundy also boasts plenty of cafés that offer lighter fare.

Café life in Burgundy
While it is known for its restaurants serving hearty dishes like coq au vin, Burgundy

While it is known for its restaurants serving hearty dishes like coq au vin, Burgundy
also boasts plenty of cafés that offer lighter fare.
Is this the best wine bookstore in the world? I can’t think of a better one, and I certainly don’t know of one that sells as wide a range of wine-related artifacts.

MUSEUMS
Some producers offer vineyard or winery tours. Contact tourist offices (see below) for details.

BEAUNE
Hôtel-Dieu, Rue de l’Hôtel-Dieu. 03 80 26 21 30
Better-known as the Hospices de Beaune, this 15th century hospices is famous as one of the symbols of the region, and it is a delight to visit. The Salle des Pauvres (Hall of the Poor), the kitchen, and the pharmacy are all highlights.

Le Musée du Vin de Bourgogne, Hôtel des Ducs de Bourgogne, Rue d’Enfer. 03 80 22 08 19
Tucked away behind the cathedral, this museum has everything from medieval presses to Aubusson tapestries and old drinking glasses.

CHAUMONT LE BOIS
Le Musée du Vigneron, Place St Martin. 03 80 81 95 97
This nice little place illustrates the processes of wine growing, sparkling wine production, and coopery in the past and today, with the help of old tools and archaeological relics. It was set up by Sylvain Bouhelier, a young Crémant de Bourgogne producer.

CHENOVE, NEAR DIJON
Pressoirs des Ducs de Bourgogne, 8 Rue Roger Salengro. 03 80 52 82 83
This nice little place illustrates the processes of wine growing, sparkling wine production, and coopery in the past and today, with the help of old tools and archaeological relics. It was set up by Sylvain Bouhelier, a young Crémant de Bourgogne producer.

ANNUAL WINE EVENTS

The annual Hospices de Beaune charity auction and the Trois Glorieuses banquets are always held on the third weekend in November, when there is also a tasting of hundreds of wines from the latest vintage. These events are open to the public, but your best chance of getting tickets is through a friendly Beaune négociant, or through one of his best customers. Contact the tourist office (see below) for the dates of other events listed here.

JANUARY
Côte d’Or (village changes every year) St Vincent festival
Chablis Region St Vincent du Grand Auxerrois festival

MARCH
Chablis Les Vinées Tonnerroises—Montée de Tonnerre wine festival

MAY
Mâcon national wine fair and competition.

JULY/AUGUST
Noyers-sur-Serein, Meursault, Chablis, Cluny, and Gevrey-Chambertin wine festivals

NOVEMBER
Chablis wine fair

OTHER INFORMATION
Office de Tourisme, Place de la Halle, Beaune. 03 80 26 21 30
The region’s main tourist office can provide information on everything from wine-makers to balloon flights over the vineyards.

WEBSITES
ALOXE-CORTON

At the northern end of the Côte de Beaune is the appellation of Aloxe-Corton, home to the famous red and white grands crus Corton vineyards. The rest of the appellation produces almost exclusively red wines and has more in common with the red-wine-producing Côte de Nuits to the north than with some of its more white-oriented neighbors to the south.

Local legend claims not only that comedian Charlie Chaplin considered buying a plot of vines in the commune of Aloxe-Corton, but also that more than a thousand years ago the wines here were a favorite of the Roman Emperor Charlemagne, who has given his name to the white wine-producing grand cru vineyard of Corton-Charlemagne.

Red wines make up 99 percent of the vintage in Aloxe-Corton: they are made, like almost all red Burgundy, from the powerful Pinot Noir grape. In fact, the wines produced here are among the longest-lived and slowest to develop of all the wines of Burgundy. As a result of this early impenetrability, many of the village and premiers crus wines of Aloxe-Corton are less popular than the softer, fruitier and more immediately appealing wines of neighboring Beaune (see p128) and Savigny-lès-Beaune (see p156). After five to 15 years in the bottle, however, these wines develop a rich, meaty fruitiness and offer excellent value. If drunk young, the similarly austere red and white grands crus wines of the commune also tend to compare badly with top-quality wines from nearby appellations such as Puligny-Montrachet (see p153) and Chassagne-Montrachet (see p135) to the south. After around 10 years, however, the red wines are smooth, with deliciously gamey flavors, while the whites are richly concentrated, with sumptuous flavors of butter, cinnamon, and honey.

The attention of many wine-buyers has long been focused on Louis Latour and La Reine Pédauque, two long-established producer-merchant firms with cellars in the town of Aloxe-Corton. Neither of these, unfortunately, produces particularly exciting reds. More recently, however, welcome investment by producers and négociants from other parts of Burgundy, including such illustrious names as Tollot-Beaut in Chorey-lès-Beaune, Bonneau du Martray in Pernand-Vergelesses, and Antonin Guyon in Savigny-lès-Beaune, has resulted in some innovatively made wines with a much less rugged character than is traditional here.

Domaine Latour
The négociant firm of Louis Latour owns vineyards in Aloxe-Corton and makes a specialty of the wines produced from them.

Château Corton-André
With very few small, family-owned estates, the appellation of Aloxe-Corton remains very much the province of big-business merchant firms such as La Reine Pédauque, owner of this spectacular château.

AC Aloxe-Corton, AC Aloxe-Corton Premier Cru, AC Charlemagne Grand Cru, AC Corton Grand Cru, AC Corton-Charlemagne Grand Cru.


Rich, meaty, deep-colored reds. Some full-bodied, slow-developing whites.

Arnoux, Bouchard Père et Fils, Denis Boussey, Champy,

Roast pheasant stuffed with thyme and lemon in a red wine sauce.


Red: 5–15 years.
Between Monthélie (see p146) and Meursault (see p145) in the valley of the Dheune River is the beautiful village of Auxey-Duresses. Two thirds of the wine produced here is red—much of which is sold as Côte de Beaune-Villages. These early-maturing, faintly rustic wines have a tendency toward tartness in all but the warmest years. That said, in good years they are a real bargain. Generally, the white wines are better than the reds, and compare well with many humbler efforts from neighboring Meursault. Well-made examples of red and white wines from the south-facing premiers crus vineyards of Les Duresses and Climat du Val are worth paying more for, as are wines from the area’s best producers, including Olivier Leflaive, Jean-Pierre Diconne, and Jean-François Coche-Dury.
BEAUJOLAIS

In an increasingly fashion-conscious world, where even wines can be seen to conform to worryingly similar styles, Beaujolais still stands apart. And so it should. At its finest, Beaujolais is a refreshing antidote to all the richest, oakiest red wines in the world and is a great companion for all kinds of food, ranging from traditional French to spicy Asian.

There is something deliciously androgynous about Beaujolais that somehow sets it between red and white wine, combining the color of the former with the easy drinkability of the latter. The region’s unique ménage à trois of the Gamay grape (a variety that never performs as well elsewhere), the granite soil, and the macération carbonique process—a technique used by most producers here, in which berries are fermented whole (see p26)—produces wines with vibrant fruit flavors and almost no perceptible tannin.

For most of its history, however, this was little more than a jug wine. A century and a half after Thomas Jefferson’s initials were inscribed on bottles of Château Lafite, Beaujolais was still being served in cafés directly from the cask and from pitchers, in the way of good ale. It was not until the late 1950s and 1960s that Beaujolais found its way into bottles, but all too often the wines that were sold under this name overseas had more to do with North Africa than southern Burgundy.

The man who came to the region’s rescue was a young local grower named Georges Duboeuf, who in the 1960s launched a négociant business that sold only genuine Beaujolais and also packaged and marketed the fresh, cherryish wine in a way that was noticed throughout the world. Duboeuf’s most obvious contribution was his enthusiastic promotion of Beaujolais Nouveau or Beaujolais Primeur. This helped to increase sales of the newly made wine from less than two million bottles a year in the late 1950s to a peak of some 90 million bottles a year in the 1990s and annual bedlam in wine bars and restaurants across the globe.

More recently, as tastes have switched to softer, richer wines from farther south and from the New World, the fever has calmed considerably in most countries. Even in Paris, the arrival of the new wine is greeted with more of a shrug than a cheer. For some reason, the only place where Beaujolais Nouveau still causes real excitement is Japan.

Jean-Paul Brun

Today, while most Beaujolais is made light and fruity for easy drinking, Jean-Paul Brun makes more traditional wines.
Critics of the region’s wines—and there are plenty—blamed the hysteria surrounding Beaujolais Nouveau for allowing producers to sell large quantities of very basic, and sometimes downright poor, wine to people who were too caught up in the moment to notice that they were drinking wine they would find unacceptable under normal circumstances. Others replied that, while rushing the wine to market within just a few weeks of the harvest inevitably led to corners being cut, the experience of drinking newly made wine was one that is as old as civilization.

Whatever the quality of the Nouveau, basic Beaujolais sold during the rest of the year is a pretty mixed bag. Good individual estates and merchants, like Duboeuf and Loron, make decent wines, but the bottles that are produced by unfamiliar estates and sold in supermarkets should be treated with suspicion. Wines labeled Beaujolais Supérieur should be made from ripe grapes, but this is an appellation that is only used for some 13 million bottles out of a potential total production of around 175 million. It is best to head instead for the 38 communes whose harvest is sold under the Beaujolais-Villages appellation or under the name of Beaujolais-Villages plus the name of the village (for example Beaujolais-Villages Lantignié and Beaujolais-Villages Blacé).

Alternatively, take another step up the ladder of quality and opt for one of the 10 Beaujolais crus—Brouilly, Chénas, Chiroubles, Côte de Brouilly, Fleurie, Juliénas, Morgon, Moulin-à-Vent, Régnié and St Amour. Today, rosé and white Beaujolais wine is rare, with much of the white wine produced in this appellation now being sold as St Véran.

Sooner or later when visiting wine-makers in Beaujolais, if you’re lucky and they like you and think that you know a thing or two about wine, one of them will no doubt pull out an obviously old bottle of Beaujolais and challenge you to guess its age. Don’t worry about getting the age wrong; some of the most experienced wine tasters have missed the target by as much as a couple of decades. The point the wine-maker is striving to make is that, despite its reputation as a wine that must be drunk young, good Beaujolais can actually mature and survive in the bottle for a surprisingly long time. Good bottles of Morgon and Moulin-à-Vent (see p.148) can develop complexity with age, but most other wines simply turn into pleasant, but rather anonymous, old red wines that could easily be mistaken for mature, but not very good, red Burgundies. More importantly, the rich flavor they develop with time is gained at the expense of the vibrant character that gives Beaujolais its unique appeal.
BEAUNE

THE UNOFFICIAL CAPITAL OF BURGUNDY and one of the greatest wine towns in the world, Beaune is home to many of the region’s best wine merchants, including such famous names as Joseph Drouhin, Bouchard Père et Fils, and Louis Jadot. Often undervalued, the appellation of Beaune is the source of some of the most delicately appealing of red Burgundies.

Holy Wine
This cuvée, which is exclusive to the firm of Bouchard Père et Fils, recalls the description made 400 years ago of Beaune that it “slipped down the throat like the little Lord Jesus dressed in velvet pantaloons”.

One of the best ways to see the medieval city of Beaune is from one of the hot air balloons that float, full of tourists, above the town every day throughout the summer. From the sky, it is clear that the shape of the city has changed little in the last few hundred years, with even the road bypass that surrounds it hugging the old fortified walls. Wander through the city on a Saturday, as traders compete to sell food, clothes, and other goods, and you will see that Beaune is still the market town that it always has been. Underneath the streets, the cellars in which the city’s wine merchants have traditionally stored their stock form a vast network of tunnels. Wine-selling has long been a major occupation in the city, with merchants traditionally selling wines from throughout the Côte d’Or and farther afield. Today’s wine merchants do the same, but all will also offer local wines from the vineyards that surround the town on three sides. There are no grands crus here, but three-quarters of the vineyards in the appellation have been granted premier cru status. The best of these are Les Avaux, Les Boucherottes, Les Bressandes, Les Cents Vignes, Clos du Roi, Le Clos des Mouches, Les Epenottes, Les Grèves, Les Marconnets, Les Teurons, and Les Vignes-Franches. While there are still a number of individually owned estates here, much of the best land is owned by large merchant firms such as Drouhin, Jadot, and Bouchard Père et Fils. By promoting more expensive wines from other appellations, the merchants of the city have, ironically, contributed to a general underestimation of the wines of Beaune. Known for their softness and their aromas of wild fruit and flowers, some of the great old wines of Beaune smell just like faded roses. As a general rule, a wine from a merchant’s own Beaune vineyards will be some of his best, and some, like those from Drouhin’s Clos des Mouches and Bouchard Père et Fils’ Vigne de l’Enfant Jésus, can be great by any standards. White Beaune is a rarity, but can be as good as many of the wines of Chassagne-Montrachet (see p135).

Joseph Drouhin
Another great wine, delicate but with beautifully concentrated fruit flavors, this one comes from the Clos des Mouches vineyard and is made by merchant Joseph Drouhin.
A major date in the international wine calendar, the sale of wines from the Hospices de Beaune vineyards takes place each year on the third Sunday in November. In 1443, tax collector Nicolas Rolin, anxious to secure himself a place in heaven, built a hospital, or hôtel-Dieu, providing free treatment for the poor of Beaune. He also gave vineyards for the upkeep of the hospital, and these, together with subsequent gifts of land from all over the Côte d’Or, are used to make more than a quarter of a million bottles of wine each year, the proceeds of which are still used to finance a hospital and nursing home in Beaune.

ORIGINS OF THE AUCTION
In 1859 it was decided to sell the wines at an annual charity auction. Although made by a wine-maker employed by the Hospices, the young wines are sold in the cask, and are matured and bottled by the buyer. Some of the 37 cuvées come from individual vineyards, while others are blends from different plots within the same appellation. Initially, each cuvée bore the name of the grower who tended the vines, but this was later replaced by the name of the donor. The prices paid at auction have traditionally been thought to set the tone for the year’s wines as a whole, but auction hysteria has in fact often led to the payment of inflated prices. Wine-making at the Hospices is a high-profile job, and techniques here have been the subject of controversy; indeed, revelations by one wine-maker led to a relaxation on the laws governing the way Burgundy can be acidified.

NATURE VERSUS NURTURE
Almost as important as the vineyard and the wine-making is the way in which the wine is matured. At one memorable blind tasting, experts found little resemblance between various wines that were all from the same cuvée, but bottled by different buyers. One thing that all the wines do have in common is an unusually high price tag, justified, naturally, by thoughts of the contribution being made to a very worthy cause.
parts of the Côte d’Or produce riper grapes, but even so, they rarely make wine of memorable quality. Some of the best basic Burgundy comes from the hillside vineyards of the Côte Chalonnaise and the Côte d’Or.

While red Burgundy made by top producers will be worth holding on to for five years or so, most examples are at their best within three or four years of production. Over time they will develop a more gamey character but this will often develop at the expense of the rich, vibrant, raspberryish flavor that makes Pinot Noir so seductive in its youth. Only the very best of white Burgundy will improve beyond three or four years.

The problem with Burgundy is that, unless you are a student of Burgundian geography and have memorized the names and addresses of the best producers, there is no way to predict the quality or style of wine in a bottle. The same word, Bourgogne or Burgundy, could appear on the label of an uninspiring wine from a merchant who has legally blended Pinot Noir from a combination of undistinguished vineyards, and on a great bottle made in tiny quantities by one of the finest grape-growers in the region. To complicate matters further, while most books quite fairly imply that red Burgundy is made exclusively from Pinot Noir grapes, you might come across a bottle bearing this label that legally has no characteristics of this grape whatsoever. In fact, you could even find that the grapes from which it was produced were not even grown on appellation contrôlée Bourgogne soil and that they are instead Gamay grapes imported from a Beaujolais cru village.

Plain red and white Burgundy can come from vineyards almost anywhere in the appellation. The least promising regions, in all but the best vintages, are the cool Hautes-Côtes de Nuits and the Hautes-Côtes de Beaune, where grapes often fail to ripen fully. Vines grown on the flatter parts of the Côte d’Or produce riper grapes, but even so, they rarely make wine of memorable quality. Some of the best basic Burgundy comes from the hillside vineyards of the Côte Chalonnaise and the Côte d’Or.

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BROUILLY AND CÔTE DE BROUILLY

This is rarely among the first of the Beaujolais crus to spring to mind. While the other crus are all restricted to the use of the Gamay grape in the production of their wines, the wine-makers of Brouilly and the Côte de Brouilly may legally use a range of grape varieties. Brouilly’s list of permitted varieties includes Aligoté, Melon de Bourgogne, and Chardonnay, while in the Côte de Brouilly, Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris are used. The Côte de Brouilly’s vines are grown on the granite and schist slopes of Mont Brouilly, while Brouilly’s vines have been planted on the foothills. This means that the wines of the Côte de Brouilly have more concentrated flavors and more structure, and last longer, than those of Brouilly. Even so, good Brouilly can be worth keeping for a few years.

Far more interesting are the regional Burgundies, such as Bourgogne Moutrecul, that are made in the Côte d’Or and the Yonne. Of the numerous regional red Burgundies from vineyards close to Chablis, the ones to watch for are Bourgogne Irancy (soon to be known simply as Irancy), Bourgogne Epineuil’s rosés, Bourgogne Côtes d’Auxerre, and Bourgogne Coulanges-la-Vineuse. In this last region, as in Bourgogne Chitry, Bourgogne Côtes d’Auxerre, Bourgogne-St Bris, and Bourgogne Vézelay, Pinot Noir is often blended with the local César, also known as “Romain” or “Gros Monsieur.”

OTHER STYLES OF BURGUNDY

Bourgogne Ordinaire and Grand Ordinaire are all-too-honestly named wines that are generally best avoided and are, in any case, rarely found outside the region, except in a few supermarkets. The reds are mainly Gamay or low-class Pinot, while whites tend to be a dull blend of poor Chardonnay and Aligoté, and even some Melon de Bourgogne. Bourgogne Clair et Bourgogne Clair et Grand Ordinaire are even rarer appellations for pale reds that are almost never seen outside the region.

Black pudding.


D 5–8 years.

Château Thivin
This producer makes some of the Côte de Brouilly’s most complex wines.

Mont de Brouilly
Vines planted on the slopes of this hill produce the Côte de Brouilly’s best wines. Brouilly is made from vines grown on much flatter land.
The area is officially part of the province of Burgundy, the cool, unpredictable viticultural conditions of Chablis have, in fact, much more in common, both geographically and climatically, with those of Champagne (see p162), less than 30 miles (50 km) to the northeast, than with those of the rest of Burgundy to the south. Frost is a constant risk here and has, on occasion, been severe enough to wipe out the vineyards completely. One old grape-grower I met can remember times in his childhood when he and his friends were able to toboggan down what are now some of the top grands crus vineyards of the appellation. Today the grapes are protected by windmills, sprinkler systems, and oil burners, lined up every winter at either end of each row of vines. Even these measures, however, are not always sufficient to guarantee the vines' survival in the event of a really cold snap.

The international white Burgundy boom of the 1970s and 1980s, and the consequent pressures to increase production, led to a relaxation of the appellation contrôlée rules. The size of the appellation was increased to include a number of previously abandoned vineyards. Some land previously classified only as village Chablis was classified as AC Petit Chablis, AC Chablis, AC Chablis Premier Cru, AC Chablis Grand Cru.

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then the wines of Chablis are surely some of the most sincerely flattered in the world. Local impostors made the most of the town's prestigious name as early as the 19th century, using it to sell wine made all over the surrounding département of Yonne, which was planted at the time with more than 123,550 acres (50,000 ha) of vines. More recently, wines labeled as Chablis have been produced in locations as far apart as New York State, California, and Australia’s Hunter Valley. The imitation stops with the name, however; just about the only thing these wines have in common is that none of them tastes remotely like the wines made in and around the sleepy Burgundy town of Chablis.

Despite its well-deserved reputation as a source of great white wines, the 7,415-acre (3,000-ha) appellation of Chablis is by no means easy vine-growing land. While the area is officially part of the province of Burgundy, the cool, unpredictable viticultural conditions of Chablis have, in fact, much more in common, both geographically and climatically, with those of Champagne (see p162), less than 30 miles (50 km) to the northeast, than with those of the rest of Burgundy to the south. Frost is a constant risk here and has, on occasion, been severe enough to wipe out the vineyards completely. One old grape-grower I met can remember times in his childhood when he and his friends were able to toboggan down what are now some of the top grands crus vineyards of the appellation. Today the grapes are protected by windmills, sprinkler systems, and oil burners, lined up every winter at either end of each row of vines. Even these measures, however, are not always sufficient to guarantee the vines’ survival in the event of a really cold snap.

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argument in the quiet town of Chablis, with traditionalists claiming that the soil of the newer vineyards does not produce the flinty, mineral flavors for which the best wines are famous. These purists believe that the special character of Chablis is a result of a very particular type of chalk, known as Kimmeridgian, found beneath the best vineyards of the appellation. In contrast, much of the surrounding land is made up of Portlandian chalk, which is geologically similar, but not identical, to the Kimmeridgian variety. In the past, the appellation laws have supported this view, either entirely excluding the Portlandian vineyards from the appellation, or classifying them as Petit Chablis.

Plenty of dull white Burgundy is now sold under the Chablis appellation, a trend that changes to the appellation rules have only exacerbated. Equally significant is commercial pressure to produce big, buttery wines, qualities that have little to do with the traditional, steely wines of Chablis. My advice is to step very carefully when buying wines here. Some of the best buys are the intensely flavored wines from the seven south- and west-facing grands cru vineyards, and the stylish but somewhat more variable wines from the more numerous premiers crus vineyards. A good producer is essential, and some of the best in the area are listed in the box (see p.132). Each of the grands crus vineyards of Chablis produces wines with their own particular character, but all need several years in the bottle to achieve the rich, dry combination of butter, nuts, and minerals that sets the wines of Chablis apart from all of the other Chardonnay wines in the world.

In addition to the argument over where the grapes should be grown, there is another controversy raging in the bars of Chablis. Should the wines be fermented and matured in new oak? A number of producers say yes, arguing that many of today’s wine-drinkers expect and enjoy at least a hint of oaky vanilla in their Burgundy. Others, however, disagree. Putting the wine in oak barrels, they believe, robs it of its unique, steely purity, reducing it to nothing more than an alternative to the wines of Meursault (see p.145). Drinking an unoaked wine from a good producer such as Laroche, and comparing it with overoaked lesser wines that are almost unrecognizable as Chablis, I sympathize with the unoaked school of producers. Then someone will hand me a glass of delicious, buttery, oak barrel-fermented grand cru Chablis from producer Jean-Paul Droin, and my reservations about the oak will fly straight out the window.

Quiet Life
A tributary of the larger Yonne, the appropriately named Serein River flows slowly through the sleepy, serene town of Chablis.

The Vaudevey Vineyard
Together with six other plots, the Vaudevey, or Vau de Vey, vineyard was promoted to premier cru status in 1986, part of a recent relaxation of the appellation contrôlée rules here.
The practice of combining grapes continues today, though the permitted white variety is now Pinot Gris rather than Pinot Blanc, still used in combination with Pinot Noir. Paradoxically, despite the presence of Pinot Gris in the vineyards, the only white wine that can now legally be made in Chambolle-Musigny uses Chardonnay grapes grown on Musigny Grand Cru land. Only tiny quantities of the highly-prized Musigny blanc are produced each year, all at Domaine Comte Georges de Vogüé.

There has, in the past, been an unfortunate tendency for the producers of Chambolle-Musigny to treat the terms “delicate” and “dilute” as though they were synonymous. Proof, however, that an entire appellation can improve the quality of its wines came in the early 1990s, when the growers of Chambolle-Musigny decided to tighten the criteria required for a bottle to carry the village name. The result is consistently fine wines that are delicate but full of substance, with lingering perfumed flavors. As well as the Musigny and Bonnes Mares grands crus, there are also some extremely good premiers crus vineyards. A number of these, most notably Les Amoureuses, often produce wines of a quality to match those of grand cru status.

The wines of the commune of Chambolle-Musigny, which includes the two grands crus vineyards of Musigny and Bonnes Mares, as well as the appellations of Chambolle-Musigny and Chambolle-Musigny Premier Cru, have long been seen as quite distinct from those made in the surrounding villages of the Côte de Nuits. For one 19th-century observer, a Dr. Lavalle, these were the “most delicate wines in the Côte de Nuits.” One possible explanation for the delicacy of Chambolle’s wines lies in the high proportion of limestone in the soil. Another theory credits the traditional use of both Pinot Blanc, used elsewhere for white wine, and the more famous Pinot Noir in the red wines made here.

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CHASSAGNE-MONTRACHET

CHASSAGNE-MONTRACHET produces some of the world’s finest white wines. Traditionally, however, the wines produced here have been red. As recently as 1985, despite the international reputation of white Chassagne, well over half of the vintage was red. By 1997, thanks to the worldwide popularity of the Chardonnay grape, 60 percent of the year’s wines were white.

It is now considered by many people to produce some of the finest dry white wine in the world. The best premiers crus vineyards include Morgeot, Chenevottes, Ruchottes, En Maltroye, and En Cailleret. Wines from Chassagne are generally fuller-bodied and with a slightly more mineral character than those from neighboring Puligny, often developing especially interesting flavors after a decade or so stored in the cellar.

Despite the recent huge popularity of Chassagne’s white wines, there will always be red wine made here. This is simply because much of the soil, similar to the limestone marl of the Côte de Nuits, is better suited to the Pinot Noir grape than to the Chardonnay that is fast replacing it. Unfortunately, however, while a few producers do make fine red Chassagne, most of Chassagne’s red wine has more in common with the simple, fresh wines of Santenay to the southwest (see p.156) than with the delicate wines of Volnay (see p.157) or Beaune (see p.128). Selling their reds is rarely a problem for the wine-growers here, however. The technique seems to be simply to force it on customers who come in search of the world-famous white.

Fruitful Estates
The growers of Chassagne-Montrachet, many of whom have built their homes among the vines, have no difficulty selling the Chardonnay grapes from their sometimes tiny plots.

The traditional (red wine) grapes used in the commune of Chassagne-Montrachet were Gamay for the poorer land and Pinot Noir in areas with richer soil. The Montrachet Grand Cru vineyard, however, shared with the neighboring commune of Puligny-Montrachet (see p.133), is one of the few vineyards in Chassagne-Montrachet that has traditionally been used to grow white grapes. Alongside the neighboring grands crus vineyards of Bâtard-Montrachet (also shared with Puligny) and Criots-Bâtard-Montrachet, it is now considered by many people to produce some of the finest dry white wine in the world. The best premiers crus vineyards include Morgeot, Chenevottes, Ruchottes, En Maltroye, and En Cailleret. Wines from Chassagne are generally fuller-bodied and with a slightly more mineral character than those from neighboring Puligny, often developing especially interesting flavors after a decade or so stored in the cellar.

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Gagnard-Delagrange
In producing their sublime wines, the wine-makers here use grapes grown in one of the least-known of Chassagne’s premiers crus vineyards.

Domaine Ramonet
With grapes from premiers crus and grands crus vineyards, André Ramonet remains one of the very best white wine producers in the world.
**CHÉNAS**

The smallest of the Beaujolais crus, the flat, silty soils of Chénas have kept it way behind the better-known cru villages such as St Amour (see p154), Morgon (see p148), and Fleurie (see p139). When the appellation boundaries were drawn up, Chénas was shortchanged. Steep granite slopes in the west of the appellation produce the best Chénas wines, which are medium-bodied with a hint of oak. The Château de Chénas coopérative produces 45 percent of the wine, and its medieval cellars are worth a visit.

**Château de Chénas**  
Producer of almost half the wine in Chénas, this is a first-class coopérative.

- **AC Chénas.**
- **Red**: Gamay.
- **Gamay.**
- Medium-weight, soft, fruity reds.
- **Louis Champagne, Château de Chénas, Georges Duboeuf, Hubert Lapierre, Bernard Sante.**
- **Chicken stewed with truffles.**
- **2003, 2001, 1997.**
- **Red**: 3–5 years.

**CHIROUBLES**

This is the commune that is said to make the most fragrant wines of the Beaujolais crus. It is also the highest above sea level, forming a natural amphitheater 1,300 ft (400 m) above the Beaujolais plain. The soil is a light, thin, granite-sand that gives these wines a delicate, violet-perfumed character, which, for many, represents the very essence of Beaujolais. Refreshing and fruity, these reds are delicious drunk young, accompanied by a wide variety of charcuterie, ranging from andouillettes to saucisson.

**Château de Raousset**  
Light, fragrant Chiroubles is delicious when drunk young, but can improve with age.

- **AC Chiroubles.**
- **Gamay.**
- **Gamay.**
- Elegant, light, refreshing red.
- **Émile Cheysson, Georges Duboeuf, Hubert Lapierre, Alain Passot, Ch de Raousset.**
- **Andouillettes with mustard.**
- **2003, 2001.**
- **2–4 years.

**CHOREY-LÈS-BEAUNE**

The village of Chorey-lès-Beaune lies on the flat plain to the north of the city of Beaune, its vineyards extending over both sides of the N74, bordering Savigny-lès-Beaune (see p156) to the west, and Aloxe-Corton (see p124) to the north. Chorey’s best wines have more in common with the fruity, raspberry-jam reds of Beaune (see p128) and Savigny-lès-Beaune than with the tough, tannic reds of Aloxe-Corton. Fruity and soft, these wines are best drunk within three years of the harvest. In the past, much of the wine produced in Chorey-lès-Beaune has been sold as generic appellation contrôlée Côte de Beaune-Villages, but the recent success of local producers such as Tollot-Beaut has encouraged both growers and négociants to print the name of the commune proudly on the label.

**Château de Chorey**  
Sister château to the Château de Savigny, the Château de Chorey offers good wine, as well as a place to stay for visitors to the region.

- **AC Chorey-lès-Beaune, AC Côte de Beaune-Villages.**
- **Red**: Pinot Noir.
- **Soft, plump, fruity reds for early drinking.**
- **Charles Allexant, Amoux Père et Fils, Ch de Chorey (François Germain), Doudet-Naudin, Joseph Drouhin, Drouhin Laroze, François Gay, Guyon, Daniel Largeot, Maillard Père et Fils, Tollot-Beaut.**
- **Terrine of ham with parsley.**
- **Red**: 2–5 years.
CLOS DE VOUGEOT AND VOUGEOT

BEGUN AS A PLOT OF JUST A FEW VINES in the 12th century, the Clos de Vougeot is now the largest, and arguably the most famous, grand cru in Burgundy. This walled vineyard is also a wonderful, living illustration of the origins of the region’s wine industry and of the many changes that took place as a result of the French Revolution.

Château du Clos de Vougeot
Set like a ship in an ocean of vines, this château-monastery is now one of Burgundy’s most famous tourist attractions. Inside are medieval wine presses and a grand banqueting hall.

It was a group of Cistercian monks from the nearby monastery that first planted vines here during the 12th century. By the early 14th century, donations of land had swollen the estate to its current size of 125 acres (50 ha), and stone walls, the clos, had been constructed around it. More than 200 years later, following the Revolution of 1789, the vineyard was bought as individual holdings by six merchants. Each holding has been further split over the years, and the vineyard is now shared among more than 80 individuals.

There are several problems caused by the parceling-out of the vineyard. First, there is the question of unequal land quality. The plots at the top of the clos are unquestionably finer than those in the middle, which in turn are better than the frequently waterlogged clay soils at the bottom. The monks solved this problem by bottling the wines from each section separately. Today, however, every bottle of Clos de Vougeot is eligible for the same grand cru status. Even more significant, however, is the tiny scale of the plots and the constraints this places on their owners. Average production per owner is just 200 cases, with a third of the vigneron producing fewer than 75 cases of wine each year. In the absence of specialized micro-vinification equipment, it is very difficult to crush, ferment, and press such a trifling quantity of grapes. Both these points are worth bearing in mind if you encounter a disappointing wine.

The château is the headquarters of the Confrérie des Chevaliers du Tastevin, a fraternity of wine-makers and setting for banquets and an annual wine-tasting.

Beyond the walled vineyard, there are 30 acres (12 ha) of vines, producing 70,000 bottles of red and 10,000 bottles of white Vougeot and Vougeot Premier Cru. These rarities often offer better value than Clos de Vougeot.

Jaffelin
Like many of Burgundy’s best négociants, or wine merchants, the firm of Jaffelin owns Clos de Vougeot vineyards.

AC Clos de Vougeot Grand Cru, AC Vougeot Premier Cru, AC Vougeot.
Red: Pinot Noir.
Plump, full-bodied, spicy red with flavors of red summer fruits, chocolate, and licorice.
Oxtail stewed in red wine.
10–15 years.

Georges Mugneret
Several members of the Mugneret family make good examples of Clos de Vougeot. Georges Mugneret refers to the appellation as Clos-Vougeot.
CÔTE DE BEAUNE AND CÔTE DE BEAUNE-VILLAGES

These two similarly named appellations are in fact quite separate, with the Côte de Beaune label covering a tiny area close to the town of Beaune itself. More confusion is caused by the fact that the Côte de Beaune-Villages appellation is often thought to be the southern counterpart of Côte de Nuits-Villages (see below), when in fact the two appellations operate quite differently. The latter applies to a very limited area, while most of the red wines produced in those parts of the Côte de Beaune entitled to their own appellation may also be sold as Côte de Beaune-Villages. The appellations of St Romain (see p.155), Chorey-les-Beaune (see p.136), Pernand-Vergelesses (see p.150), and Auxey-Duresses (see p.125) all often sell many of their less successful red wines as Côte de Beaune-Villages.

Bouchard Père et Fils
This established merchant specializes in making Côte de Beaune-Villages wines.

St Romain
The hillside town of St Romain sells often very attractive wine under its own name as well as under the appellation of Côte de Beaune-Villages.

CÔTE DE NUITS-VILLAGES

Burgundians have always associated quarries with good vine-growing land. Any wine from a vineyard called “Perrière” will have been grown on the site of a former quarry. The villages of Prissey, Comblanchien, and Corgoloin, whose limestone workings produced the coffee-colored marble used at Orly Airport, are therefore, in theory at least, well-placed to make good wine. They are, however, too small to warrant a single appellation and instead label their wines as Côte de Nuits-Villages. The same designation is also used for some wines from Fixin (see p.139) and Brochon, at the northern end of the Côte de Nuits-Villages. Although it would be legal to blend the wines of the two extremes of the Côte de Nuits-Villages, in practice this is rare. Similarly, while the appellation permits white wine, very little is made.

Jayer-Giles
This estate is one of the few to take the Côte de Nuits-Villages label seriously and to produce long-lived wines under it.

Wood from the Trees
Côte de Nuits-Village wines are aged in barrels. However, they are seldom rich and complex enough to warrant as much new oak as they are sometimes given.
**FLEURIE**

If this Beaujolais cru, located between Moulin à Vent and Chiroubles, were called something completely different, its wines would probably still be associated with fields of spring flowers, because that is exactly what good examples smell like. This, the third largest and often the priciest of the Beaujolais crus, should be the very essence of classic Beaujolais, with its Gamay grapes, grown on large-crystal granite, being made into fresh, light red wines packed with summery flavors. For a panoramic view over this varied commune, climb to the top of the La Madonne chapel. The best, longest-lived wines might well come from the La Madonne and the Point du Jour vineyards, but there are other plots that could stake a reasonable claim to premier cru status if it were ever introduced for Beaujolais.

**Domaine Berrod**
The wines produced by Domaine Berrod have the floral character with which Fleurie is associated.

**Madonna and Vines**
The sloping vineyard of La Madonne produces some of the finest, longest-lived wines in Fleurie.

**FIXIN**

At first glance the vineyards that form a square around the village of Fixin, with the best premiers crus located at the end closest to Gevrey-Chambertin (see p140), look as though they might be a northern continuation of Gevrey-Chambertin. However, the microclimate here is quite different and the grapes ripen over a week later. Fixin’s soil is different, too, with more clay in the flatter land on which the village wines are made. These conditions make for rustic, tannic wines that take years to evolve into rustic, softer ones. It is not surprising, therefore, that much of the wine has been sold as Côte de Nuits-Villages (see p158). Recently, better wine-making has resulted in more approachable wines and more reason to print the village name on the label. White Fixin is rare, but Bruno Clair’s is good.

**Domaine André Geoffrey**
The wines of Fixin can be tough and fruitless, but those produced on this estate are stylish and drinkable.

**The Hard Edge**
The cool microclimate and the clay soil of the small village of Fixin have led to wines that traditionally tended to be quite tannic and unripe.
Chambertin includes nine grands crus and 27 premiers crus vineyards. The very best of the grands crus are the neighboring Clos de Bèze and Chambertin vineyards at the center of a slope of grands crus vineyards to the south of the village. Now divided among 25 owners, the best wines made from these grapes are sublime and long-lived, combining the flavors of plums and cherries with a hint of spice. Of the remaining grands crus, the best are Griottes-Chambertin, Latricières-Chambertin, Ruchottes-Chambertin, and Mazis-Chambertin. More variable are Chapelle-Chambertin and Charmes-Chambertin, often producing wines that are less impressive than those from the best premiers crus vineyards, such as Clos St Jacques and Les Cazetiers. Village wines are of variable quality, too, made from vines extending right down the hillside onto the flat land on the other side of the main road. That said, however, this is an appellation where the skill of the producer is more crucial than the position of the vineyard, and where well-made village wines outclass poorly made wines from supposedly superior land.

Limestone Exposure
This unusually situated vineyard offers a rare chance to see the limestone rock that underlies the appellation of Gevrey-Chambertin. Normally, of course, the chalk is well hidden beneath the topsoil and the vines.

Monks from the Abbaye de Bèze planted vines here in the seventh century, quickly followed by an astute peasant named Bertin. Today, both the monks’ walled Clos de Bèze and Bertin’s field, or Champ Bertin, produce some of the finest red wines in Burgundy. At the northern end of the Côte de Nuits, the appellation of Gevrey-Chambertin is appreciated by Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte in the 19th century, the red wines produced around Gevrey-Chambertin have continued to enjoy great popularity to this day, making it one of the richest villages in the region. The appellation is the largest in the Côtes de Nuits, producing wines that range, predictably, from the truly sublime to the very average.

Clos St Jacques
Although only a premier cru, the Clos St Jacques vineyard is capable of producing wines that—from the right producers—are as good as grand crus.

Denis Mortet
Making rich, concentrated wines, Denis Mortet is a young producer with huge potential.

Denis Bachelet, Bourrée (Vallet), A. Burguet, Champy, Bruno Clair, Pierre Damoy, Joseph Drouhin, Dugat-Py, Faiveley, Leroy, Denis Mortet, Armand Rousseau.

Eggs poached in red wine.


5–25 years.
HAUTES-CÔTES DE BEAUNE AND DE NUITS

GIVRY

The smallest and for many years the least distinguished of the appellations of the Côte Chalonnaise, Givry has experienced something of a renaissance in recent years as a result of careful replanting and better vineyard management. Growing 90 percent Pinot Noir vines, both Givry and Givry Premier Cru are largely red wine appellations, with the best vineyards, such as the premier cru Clos Salomon, facing south and producing medium-bodied, silky wines full of the flavors of cherries and red currants. Chardonnay grapes are used to make small amounts of clean, crisp white wine with a spicy finish. Dynamic growers such as Jean-Marc Joblot and François Lumpp are rapidly gaining a reputation for their wines, many of which are as good as more expensive wines from other parts of the region.

Sun Worshipers

Many growers train their vines high in the exposed, high-altitude vineyards of the Hautes-Côtes de Beaune, allowing the grapes to catch every ray of the sunshine they need for proper ripening.

GIVRY

Clos Salomon

The walled premier cru vineyard of Clos Salomon is one of the very best in Givry, producing wines that are deliciously smooth and fruity.

HAUTES-CÔTES DE BEAUNE AND DE NUITS

Rising to 1,310 ft (400 m) above the western edge of the Côte de Nuits (see p138) and the Côte de Beaune (see p138) are the two mainly red appellations of the Hautes-Côtes de Nuits and the Hautes-Côtes de Beaune. Woodland and pasture among the vines make this some of the most beautiful landscape in Burgundy, but vineyards here are cool and exposed, giving the wines an unripe character in all but warm years. In the 1960s, only 1,235 acres (500 ha) were under vine here, but thanks to dedicated producers, the rapidly improving wines of the area are enjoying a revival. Vineyards have been carefully replanted, and many growers are now embracing a more traditional approach to vineyard management. At their best, these light wines are supple and fruity, and offer good value for money.

Domaine Joblot

This unusually well-made wine from the Clos de la Servoisine vineyard shows the potential of the appellation.

Clos Salomon

The walled premier cru vineyard of Clos Salomon is one of the very best in Givry, producing wines that are deliciously smooth and fruity.

Domaine du Bois Guillaume

Fresh and bone-dry, this white wine is only produced in small amounts in the cool vineyards of the Hautes-Côtes de Beaune.

Sun Worshipers

Many growers train their vines high in the exposed, high-altitude vineyards of the Hautes-Côtes, allowing the grapes to catch every ray of the sunshine they need for proper ripening.

AC Bourgogne Hautes-Côtes de Nuits, AC Bourgogne Hautes-Côtes de Beaune.

Red: Pinot Noir.
White: Chardonnay.

Light reds. Dry whites.


Red: Spicy tripe sausages.
Red: 2–6 years.
JULIÉNAS

The land around Julié纳斯, one of the most northerly of the 10 Beaujolais cru villages, was allegedly some of the first in Beaujolais to be planted with vines. Today, the appellation includes four communes, with well-drained granite soils to the west, and ancient alluvial soils, laid down by the Saône River, to the east. When young, the wines of Julié纳斯 are often underrated, passed over in favor of wines from better-known cru appellations such as Fleurie (see p139) and Moulin-à-Vent (see p148). At their best, however, these are lively wines with powerful, fruity aromas, often developing unusual complexity after a few years in the bottle. One ceremony not to be missed is held here every November, when an artist or writer deemed best taster of the new vintage is awarded his or her weight in wine!

Pascal Granger
Wines from this talented producer often offer a delightful mouthful of fresh cherry and rich chocolate flavors.

Frosty Vines
Midwinter temperatures can be surprisingly low in hilly Julié纳斯, despite its southerly location a few miles beyond the town of Mâcon.

LADOIX

The most northerly appellation in the Côte de Beaune and one of the least well known, Ladoix ends, confusingly, halfway through its namesake village of Ladoix-Serrigny. Despite some promising whites, this is mainly a red wine appellation, producing an unusually wide range of wines. Rugged village wines from the flatter and less well-exposed vineyards are sold mainly as Côte de Beaune-Villages (see p138), while richer, smoother wines are made from grapes grown in the two grands crus and seven premiers crus vineyards to the north of the village. Four of the premiers crus vineyards of the appellation lie on the slopes of the Montagne de Corton, as do the famous grands crus vineyards of Corton and Corton-Charlemagne, which are shared with neighboring appellations Aloxe-Corton (see p124) and Pernand-Vergelesses (see p150).

Claude Maréchal
While many Ladoix village wines are fairly rustic, and sold as Côte de Beaune Villages, this one is an exception to the rule.

Sitting Pretty
The village of Ladoix-Serrigny is seen at its best from the hillside vineyards to the west, rather than from the busy route nationale that runs through its center.
MÂCON AND MÂCON-VILLAGES

Despite the greater prestige enjoyed by the white-wine-producing villages of the Côte d’Or and Chablis, the Mâconnais is the true engine-room of white wine production in Burgundy. Varying in quality from everyday to excellent, a huge quantity of Chardonnay wine, sold as appellations contrôlées Mâcon and Mâcon-Villages, is made here every year.

Somewhere in the ancient wine-producing district of the Mâconnais is the meeting point of northern and southern France. Suddenly, both the climate and the attitude of the people have more to do with the Mediterranean than with the English Channel. The grape harvest here takes place two weeks before that of the more northerly Côte d’Or, and produces wines with richer, riper flavors. Despite a long tradition of red wine production, the Mâconnais today makes three times as much white wine as the rest of Burgundy.

Chardonnay Country
Chardonnay is the grape of this region, flourishing in its limestone soils and ripening well in the southern sunshine.

Mâcon-Lugny
From the village of Lugny, this wine is sold by the prominent négociant firm of Louis Latour.

Domaine de la Bongran
Talented and innovative producer Jean Thevenet makes delicious but controversial late-harvest wines.
MARANGES
This little-known and often overlooked appellation, to the southwest of Santenay, is the result of the amalgamation in 1989 of the even less well-known appellations of Cheilly-lès-Maranges, Dezize-lès-Maranges, and Sampigny-lès-Maranges. Wines from these appellations were sold mainly as Côtes de Beaune Villages. Talented producers such as Vincent Girardin are making a name for Maranges, and their wines offer good value. In less skilled hands, Maranges is still pretty rustic.

Vincent Girardin
A name to look for, Girardin is one of several good Maranges producers.

MARSANNAY
At the northernmost end of the Côte de Nuits, Marsannay is one of the few appellations in Burgundy to produce excellent, rapsberryish rosé. This is some of the best rosé in France, and very little is exported. Marsannay is also developing a reputation for its reds, which are fruity but fairly tannic, offering good value when well made. The tiny quantities of white produced in Marsannay often represent the best buy of all, with buttery, mineral flavors similar to those of Meursault (see p145).

Bruno Clair
Marsannay's appellation status owes much to wines made by Bruno Clair.

MERCUREY
The biggest appellation in the Côte Chaîlonnaise, the region around the village of Mercurey is named after a local Gallo-Roman temple to Mercury, the messenger of the gods. While local négociants have long appreciated Mercurey's affordable red, and more recently white, wines, the harvest from such a large appellation is inevitably of varying quality. Wines from less well-situated vineyards have a tendency to be thin, while in a good year, wines from the top premiers crus vineyards are similar to the best wines of Pommard (see p151). The number of premiers crus here has increased dramatically in the last decade, from five covering 40 acres (15 ha), to 30 with a total area of over 250 acres (100 ha).

Gentle slopes
Like the rest of the Côte Chaîlonnaise region, the commune of Mercurey is made up of a series of small hills, with vineyards planted on many of the region's gentler slopes.
MEURSAULT

FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS CHARDONNAY has been the primary grape of Meursault, where it flourishes in the poor, rocky soil. While the crown for the finest white Burgundy goes to Corton-Charlemagne or the grands crus of Chassagne-Montrachet, the wines of Meursault are deliciously dry and rich, full of the flavors of butter, nuts, and spices.

Considerably cheaper than the white wines of Corton-Charlemagne and Chassagne-Montrachet, the hazelnut and melted butter flavors of white Meursault are popular all over the world and are eagerly copied by California wine-makers. The wines of Meursault fall into a number of categories. First, there are the plain AC Meursault wines, which can be very plain indeed. Next come wines from good, named but non-premiers crus vineyards such as Les Clos de la Barre. Finally, there are many impressive premiers crus vineyards, of which Les Perrières produces some of the finest wines, long-lived though somewhat slow to develop. More easily accessible are wines from the well-named vineyard Les Charmes. The best of these come from Les Charmes-Dessus. Also an excellent choice are wines from Les Genevrières and Les Gouttes d’Or. From La Pièce-sous-le-Bois in the nearby village of Blagny come fine whites, some sold as AC Meursault-Blagny and others as AC Meursault Premier Cru.

Red wines from Blagny are sold under their own appellation, the tiny AC Blagny Premier Cru. Reds from Meursault are made in small quantities each year and are light and fruity, and best drunk young.

Hidden Blagny
Tucked away in the hills behind Meursault, the tiny hamlet of Blagny produces long-lived white wines, sold either as AC Meursault-Blagny or as AC Meursault Premier Cru.

As much as one-third of all the white wine from the Côte d’Or (the département covering both the Côte de Nuits and the Côte de Beaune) comes from the commune of Meursault. In contrast to many white-wine-producing Burgundy communes—such as Chassagne-Montrachet (see p135), where white wines are a fairly recent phenomenon—Meursault has long been linked to the white Chardonnay grape. During the 18th century, former United States president Thomas Jefferson visited the region and noted that “at Meursault only white wines are made, because there is too much stone for the red.”
MONTAGNY

Lying at the southern tip of the Côte Chalonnaise, Montagny is one of the many strange anomalies in the appellation system. For no explicable reason, premier cru status is given to all the wines produced here, as long as their natural alcohol content is at least 11.5 percent. Even odder, another rule states that wines made in Montagny-lès-Buxy, Buxy, St Vallerin, and Jully-lès-Buxy can be labeled as appellation contrôlée Montagny, but only wines from the commune of Montagny-lès-Buxy itself may have a vineyard name printed on the label. When well made, the rich white wines of Montagny are full of hazelnut and gun-flint flavors. In warm years, however, they tend to flabbiness. Some of the best wines are produced by the Cave de Buxy coopérative, which makes some excellent examples, both oaked and unoaked.

MONTHÉLIE

Driving through the small village of Monthélie toward St Romain gives you a panoramic view of the vineyards, some of which face due south, while others face northeast. Most of the 11 premiers crus vineyards of the appellation are situated on the same limestone hillside as those of neighboring Volnay (see p157), producing red wines that, when well made, are rich and ripe with a firm structure and a lingering, silky finish. Although generally considered less good than those of Volnay, wines from top Monthélie producers, such as Monthélie-Douhairet, often disprove this theory. Village wines, however, are made from grapes grown on the flatter land below, and can be dilute and rustic. Fine white wines from the premier cru Les Champs-Fuillot are made by Paul Garaudet and Denis Boussey.

Jean-Philippe Fichet
Based in nearby Meursault, Jean-Philippe Fichet makes firmly structured village Monthélie that can offer excellent value.
MOREY-ST DENIS

OFTEN OVERSHADOWED BY the flair of nearby Vosne-Romanée (see p158) and the opulence of neighboring Gevrey-Chambertin (see p140) and Chambolle-Musigny (see p134), the Côte de Nuits village of Morey-St Denis boasts a range of brilliant vineyards and some excellent producers who make some of the most reliable red wines in Burgundy.

The wine-making history of Morey-St Denis is every bit as impressive as that of its illustrious neighbors, Gevrey-Chambertin, Chambolle-Musigny, and Vosne-Romanée. Walled vineyards were planted here by monks, and were well-regarded as early as the 12th century. Despite this, and despite the presence of several excellent grand cru vineyards, the wines of Morey-St Denis have occasionally missed being included among the very best in Burgundy. Until 1927, when the commune of Morey took the name of one of its two best vineyards, the wines made here were often sold under the names of Gevrey-Chambertin and Chambolle-Musigny.

Despite the decision to adopt the name of the Clos St Denis, probably the finest of the grands crus vineyards in this commune is the large, 42-acre (17-ha) Clos de la Roche. The other grands crus vineyards of the appellation are Clos de Tart, owned exclusively by the merchant firm of Mommessin; Clos des Lambrays, newly promoted to grand cru status, and a tiny 4.5-acre (1.84-ha) slice of the Bonnes-Mares vineyard lying mainly in Chambolle-Musigny. The best premiers crus vineyards are Clos Sorbé, Les Sorbés, Aux Charmes, Clos des Ormes, La Bussière, and Les Fremières. Outstanding village wines are made by producers including Ponsot, Dujac, Lignier, and Groffier, and all are as good as less well-made grands crus wines elsewhere.

Wine writers have always struggled to find the right words to describe the difference between the wines of Morey-St Denis and its neighbors, often falling back on words like “feminine” and “elegant.” For my part, I prefer to describe them as fine late-developers. Much of the unique character of these wines is due to the shallow soil here, which forces the vines to push their roots deep into the limestone beneath.

White wines are, as elsewhere in this part of the Côte d’Or, a true rarity in Morey-St Denis, but those made from grapes grown in the stony soil of the grand cru Monts Luisants vineyard have unusual, wonderfully mineral flavors and are well worth buying when you see them.

Champy Père et Cie

Bottled by the well respected and long-established négociant firm of Champy, this wine comes from the premier cru Clos des Ormes vineyard.

Clos des Lambrays Vineyard

This vineyard was recently elevated from premier to grand cru status, and the quality of the wines produced in recent vintages certainly justifies its promotion.
MORGON

The vineyards of Morgon, one of the largest and best-known of the 10 Beaujolais crus (see pp126-7), cover an area centered on the village of Villié-Morgon. Dominating the area is the Mont du Py, which rises to 985 ft (300 m) above the village and is the source of the appellation’s finest wines. Made up of thin layers of easily-split rock rich in manganese, ferric oxide, and pyrites, or fool’s gold, the unique soils of the slopes are known locally as terre pourrie, or rotting earth, because of the rapid disintegration of the rock. The grapes grown here produce tightly structured wines with a bouquet of cherries and apricots that often mature perfectly for up to two decades. The flatter vineyards of the appellation produce more typical Beaujolais, which, though good, lacks the structure and longevity of wines from the Mont du Py.

Marcel Lapierre
With vineyards on the slopes of the Mont du Py, Marcel Lapierre makes wines that are delightfully sturdy and long-lived.

Château de Foncronne
This modern stained-glass window in the Château de Foncronne shows the wine-growing history of the area.

MOULIN-À-VENT

The appellation of Moulin-à-Vent is known as the “King of Beaujolais,” thanks to the combination of its age, its size, and the concentrated flavors and longevity of its wines. Granted cru status as early as 1936, Moulin-à-Vent covers more than 1,660 acres (670 ha) of acidic, manganese-rich land in the northern part of the Beaujolais district. The manganese in the soil is often credited with giving the wines their rich flavors and deep color, as well as a powerful aroma of flowers and ripe fruits and an unusual capacity for development in the cellar—up to 20 years for the best wines. With a long history of winemaking in the area, local rituals are still in evidence, especially after the grape harvest, when the new wine is blessed in the church of Romanèche-Thorins and carried around the town.

Moulin-à-Vent
The disused windmill from which this appellation takes its name, is one of the most famous landmarks of the region.
NUITS-ST GEORGES

TOUGH AND TANNIC WHEN first made, the magnificent red wines of Nuits-St Georges are some of the most misunderstood in Burgundy. More austere when young than the wines of neighboring appellations such as Vosne-Romanée (see p.158), the sumptuous black-currant and game flavors of these wines often take as long as 20 years to reach their peak.

The site of a Gallo-Roman villa and home during the Middle Ages to a monastic winery, the attractive town of Nuits-St Georges lies toward the southern tip of the Côte de Nuits. Sandwiched between Beaune and Dijon, sleepy Nuits-St Georges feels very much like a place that is driven around and not through. Despite this, several of the region’s most successful négociants, including Boisset, Faiveley, and Labouré-Roi, have their headquarters here.

As in Beaune (see pp.128–9), there are, surprisingly, no grands crus vineyards in Nuits-St Georges. The appellation does, however, boast more than 30 excellent premiers crus vineyards, many of which produce exciting wines that regularly outclass those from grands crus vineyards nearby. Reflecting the various different soil types of the appellation, the character of a premier cru wine from Nuits-St Georges depends very much on the location of its vineyard.

Stony soils to the south of the town are home to premiers crus vineyards including Les Cailles, Les St Georges, and Les Vaucrains, all of which produce classic, full-bodied wines with lots of tannin. To the south around the village of Prémeaux-Prissey are the vineyards of Clos de la Maréchale and Clos Arlot, whose perfectly made wines are the richest in Nuits-St Georges. Softer and more seductive are wines from premiers crus vineyards to the north of the appellation, such as Aux Boudots and Aux Murgers on the boundary with Vosne-Romanée (see p.158).

While arguing over their favorite vineyards, devotees agree that the best wines here share a tight structure and deep, gamey, black-currant flavors. Although softening beautifully after a few years in the cellar, these wines can—and indeed, if typical, should—be quite austere in their youth.

Domaine de l’Arlot
Recently created, this estate in the south of the appellation produces wines that are rich, modern, and impeccably made.

Hospices de Nuits
The charitable Hospices de Nuits raises money by auctioning the wines from its estate. These wines are sold young and can be aged by the buyer.

De l’Arlot, Robert Arnoux, Bertagna, Lucien Boillot, Robert Chevillon, Georges Chicotot, A Chopin, Jean-Jacques Confuron, R Dubois, Faiveley, Forey, Henri Gouges, Jean Grivot, Jayet-Gilles, Laurent, Philippe et

Château Gris
Overlooking its namesake vineyard, one of the best in Nuits-St Georges, Château Gris can be clearly seen from the autoroute running below and is a well-known landmark of the appellation.

AC Nuits-St Georges, AC Nuits-St Georges Premier Cru.
Red: Pinot Noir.
White: Chardonnay.
Full-bodied, even chunky reds.

Domaine de l’Arlot

Hare with red wine.

Hare with red wine.

De l’Arlot, Robert Arnoux, Bertagna, Lucien Boillot, Robert Chevillon, Georges Chicotot, A Chopin, Jean-Jacques Confuron, R Dubois, Faiveley, Forey, Henri Gouges, Jean Grivot, Jayet-Gilles, Laurent, Philippe et


Red: 5–20 years.


Red: 5–20 years.
What’s in a name? If the grand cru vineyard of Corton-Charlemagne, shared between the appellations of Aloxe-Corton (see p124), Ladoix-Serrigny (see p142) and Pernand-Vergelesses, were called Pernand-Charlemagne, I suspect the other wines of this picturesque hillside commune might be better known and more expensive. How many of the wines would justify their higher prices is less certain. The reds are pleasant and softly jammy, but often short of finesse and complexity. The whites, despite a tendency to thinness in cooler years, are better than the reds, with crisp, well-defined fruit and delicate flavors. Wines from the premiers crus vineyards of Les Vergelesses, Île des Vergelesses, and Les Fichots are a good buy, and worth cellaring for five years or so before drinking.

Île des Vergelesses
Although relatively little-known, this premier cru vineyard has given its name to both the village and the appellation.

THE HYPHENATED NAMES OF THE CÔTE D’OR

Many of the villages of the Côte de Beaune and the Côte de Nuits carry names that are hyphenated. The fashion for hyphenated names swept the area during the 1860s, when canny producers realized that, while wines from named vineyards such as Le Corton, Le Chambertin, Le Musigny, and Le Montrachet were famous and therefore easy to sell, those from neighboring vineyards were much less marketable. As a result, many villages, including Gevrey, Aloxe, Chambolle, Puligny, Pernand, and Chassagne, simply adopted the names of their best-known vineyards, giving them names such as Gevrey-Chambertin, Aloxe-Corton, and Chambolle-Musigny. Some already-famous communes, including Beaune, Volnay, Pommard, and Meursault, needed no such help, while others, such as Fixin and Monthélie, had no famous vineyard to call on. The communes of Chorey and Savigny rather cleverly appended the words “lès Beaune” (near Beaune) to their names. The name game has worked well for most, but not all. The village of Ladoix (see p142), for example, has arguably gained little by adding the Serrigny vineyard to its name; its toughish wines are still often hard to sell. Like their villages, the producers of the Côte d’Or often sport hyphenated names, such as Coche-Dury, Coche-Débord, and Millaut-Battault. These are a result of the laws of equal inheritance that became part of French law in the early 19th century. If, for example, Jean Dupont and his sister Marie were to marry their neighbors Hélène and Jacques Durand, their newly combined estates would be called Domaine Dupont-Durand and Domaine Durand-Dupont. Inevitably, given the size of the villages and the frequency of marriages between wine-making families, confusingly similar names are common.
POMMARD

Despite Pommard’s position, between Beaune (see p.128) and Volnay (see p.157), its wines bear little resemblance to the light, delicate wines of either of those two apppellations. Instead, these powerful red offerings are among the richest and most tannic in Burgundy. Although inaccessible in their youth, they are definitely worth waiting for.

A few miles to the south of Beaune, the small village of Pommard has a long history of prosperity and international fame, and has been selling its wines on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean since the 18th century. In recent years, a combination of fame and easy pronunciation has helped to make the wines of Pommard some of the most saleable in the Côte d’Or, especially in the United States. Perhaps inevitably, laziness and greed have taken their toll here, too, often prompting growers and merchants to collude in turning a blind eye to poor wine making and fraud of all sorts. One of the most notorious malpractices has been the regular use of grapes grown in humble appellation contrôlée Bourgogne vineyards to make wines sold as appellation contrôlée Pommard. A partial explanation for the frequent adulteration here lies in the character of the wines themselves. As Lalou Bize-Leroy, possessor of one of the sharpest palates in Burgundy, once famously said, the wines of Pommard are rather like its church: solid, square, and, on first impression, less than inviting.

Like the wines of nearby Aloxe-Corton (see p.124), these are wines with significant amounts of tannin, and definitely need cellaring. Adding so-called inferior grapes to the mixture has often made Pommard much easier to sell young.

Recent years have seen great improvements here, and good Pommard, although still not as drinkable in its youth as the wines of Volnay or Beaune, is as good when mature as the best of both those communes. Without doubt, the top vineyard here is Les Rugiens, but look also for fine wines from Les Fremiers, Les Arvelets, En Largillière, Les Epenots and Les Chanlins.

Domaine Mussey

Typical of Pommard, the powerful premiers crus wines of Domaine Mussey need at least five years to soften in the bottle before drinking.

Tending the Vines

The early spring task of pruning is taking place here in the vineyards of the attractive Château de Pommard, a 50-acre (20-ha) walled estate on flat land to the southeast of the village.

AC Pommard, AC Pommard Premier Cru.

Red: Pinot Noir

Full-bodied, broad wines with prominent black cherry flavors.

POUILLY-FUISSÉ AND ITS SATELLITES

Part of the huge white wine-producing district of the Mâconnais, the appellation of Pouilly-Fuissé produces six million bottles of white wine every year. Made entirely with the Chardonnay grape and varying in quality from the basic to the sublime, the wines of Pouilly-Fuissé are undoubtedly some of the most famous white Burgundies in the world.

Surrounded by Chardonnay vines, at the base of the ancient Rock of Solutré, is the hamlet of Pouilly, which, together with the village of Fuissé to the east, gives its name to the appellation of Pouilly-Fuissé. A large appellation extending over four communes, the wines sold as Pouilly-Fuissé fall into two camps. First, there is the fresh, light, but frankly dull Pouilly-Fuissé available in supermarkets and liquor stores around the world, which is practically indistinguishable from the far less expensive Mâcon-Villages (see p143) produced to the north of Pouilly-Fuissé. Second, and much more important, there is the gloriously complex and long-lived Pouilly-Fuissé made by talented producers such as Vincent et Fils of Château Fuissé, Guffens-Heynen, Verget, and Domaine Cordier, as well as a growing number of younger producers, which regularly puts to shame many a wine from other more illustrious Burgundy appellations, such as Meursault (see p145) and Puligny-Montrachet (see p153).

Differing soils obviously have a part to play in the variable quality of the wines of Pouilly-Fuissé, with the fullest-flavored wines coming from the vineyards around the villages of Vergisson to the northwest and Fuissé to the southeast, in contrast to more complex wines made from grapes grown in the area around Pouilly in the center of the appellation. Much more significant than variations in the soil, however, is the care and skill of the wine-growers, and that of the producers at the large wine-making coopératives that make a high proportion of the wine here. For this reason, it is essential to buy your Pouilly-Fuissé from a good producer or négociant. Failing this, it is not worth buying at all.

The commune of Pouilly adds its name and some of its prestige to two small satellite appellations to the east of Pouilly-Fuissé: Pouilly-Vinzelles and Pouilly-Loché. The wines produced here are said to be lighter and simpler than those of Pouilly-Fuissé, though considering the featherweight character of many poorer examples of Pouilly-Fuissé, this would occasionally be something of an achievement. Besides, there are some excellent wine-makers here who are proving just how good the wines can be. Producers worth looking for are the Cave des Grands Crus Blanc in Vinzelles and the Bret Brothers at La Soufrandière.

Château-Fuissé
Owner of one of the best estates in Pouilly-Fuissé, Monsieur J-J Vincent produces some of the very best of the area’s wines. His vieilles vignes cuvée is as good as many of the greatest white wines in Burgundy.

Prehistoric Hunting Ground
Land around the base of the Rock of Solutré, which towers over the tiny hamlet of Pouilly, is littered with the bones of prehistoric animals.


White: Chardonnay.

Medium- to full-bodied dry whites, some of which are aged in oak barrels.

Skate wings baked in the oven with cheese, lemon juice, and breadcrumbs.


White: 3–6 years.


Auvigue, Daniel et Martine Barraud, Cordier, Corsin, Michel Delorme, Joseph Drouhin, Georges Duboeuf,
PULIGNY-MONTRACHET

Of all the white wines in Burgundy, none are more eagerly sought after than those of Puligny-Montrachet in the Côte de Beaune. Flourishing in the pebbly limestone soils of Puligny-Montrachet, the Chardonnay vine is king here, and this small appellation of gently sloping vineyards is home to four of the greatest dry white grands crus in the world.

Despite the fact that this was one of the first parts of Burgundy to be planted with vines, the potential of Puligny-Montrachet’s finest terroir was not recognized until relatively recently. Records show that, early in the 17th century, part of Le Montrachet, now considered the very best of Puligny’s grands crus vineyards, was sold for an unusually low price, since at this time the wines of Le Montrachet enjoyed only a lowly reputation. Confusion often arises over the differences between the wines of Puligny-Montrachet and those of its neighbor, Chassagne-Montrachet (see p135) to the south. Even though the two appellations share some of their best grand cru land, many of the wines they produce are, in fact, quite different. The primary difference is that only a tiny proportion of the wine produced in Puligny-Montrachet is red, as compared to nearly half of that from Chassagne-Montrachet. Both the white village wines and the white premiers crus wines of Puligny-Montrachet are considered, at their best, to be finer than the white wines of Chassagne-Montrachet, with the best parts of the shared grands crus vineyards of Bâtard-Montrachet and Le Montrachet falling in Puligny.

A number of top négociants and producers own both vines and cellars in Puligny-Montrachet, including Domaine Leflaive and Louis Jadot at the Domaine du Duc de Magenta. In spite of this, enormous international demand has encouraged the sale of substandard and overpriced wine by others. Wines from the four grands crus vineyards, however, are generally a good buy, especially when made by a top producer, as are wines from many of the premiers crus vineyards, including Le Cailleret, Champ Canet, Les Pucelles, and Les Chalumeaux.

Valuable Vines

The Chardonnay vineyards of Puligny-Montrachet are some of the most valuable in the world. Often, the entire vintage is sold in advance, even before the grapes are harvested.

Louis Carillon

Making good, but not too excessive, use of new oak barrels, Louis Carillon is one of the rising talents of Puligny-Montrachet.


Pan-fried salmon steaks.

Domaine Leflaive

A pioneer of biodynamic methods, Vincent Leflaive’s daughter, Anne-Claude, now produces even better wine than her famous father.
The commune of Régnié-Durette became the 10th Beaujolais cru in 1988. There are two styles of wine made here, one light and fragrant, the other full-bodied and well-structured. Most common, though, are wines for early drinking with vibrant, well-defined fruit flavors. After a shaky start, when questions were asked about how deserving it was of promotion, this appellation is now building a good reputation for itself, thanks to the efforts of a number of committed producers.

Domaine Aucoeur
Noël Aucoeur makes Régnié wines that are supple and richly flavored.

- AC Régnié.
- Red: Gamay.
- Light- to medium-weight, fruity reds.
- Noël Aucoeur, René Desplace, Dominique Piron, de Ponchon, Joël Rochette, Georges et Gilles Roux.
- Honey-roast ham.
- 2–4 years.

RULLY

The red wines of Rully, most northerly of the Côte Chalonnaise appellations, often remind me of those from Côte de Beaune appellations such as Volnay (see p157). Sparkling white wines are sold under the Crémant de Bourgogne appellation, and can be some of the best in Burgundy. Still white wines are fresh and appley, while reds are medium-bodied, with wild raspberry and violet aromas. Twenty five premiers crus produce red and white wines with greater complexity and aging potential than the village wines.

Jacques Dury
This producer makes classic Burgundy that competes with Côte d’Or wines.

- AC Rully, AC Rully Premier Cru.
- Elegant, well-structured reds. Oak-aged dry whites.
- Delorme, Joseph Drouhin, Dureuil-Janthial, Dury.
- Red: Eggs poached in wine.
- Red: 3–5 years. White: 2–5 years.

ST AMOUR

Despite the romance of its name, the “amour” in question is in fact St Amator, a martyred Roman soldier turned Christian, whose statue stands in the village of St Amour-Bellevue. The most northerly of the Beaujolais cru, St Amour is an area of geological transition, straddling the granite of Beaujolais to the south and the limestone of the Mâconnais to the north. As a result of the mixed limestone and granite-based gravel soils, the wines of St Amour include some of the lightest and most supple reds of the region, many of them more in the style of the Mâconnais (see p143) than the rest of Beaujolais. For a taste of the landscape as well as the wines, the hillside hamlet of Plâtre-Durand, with a tasting room in the Caveau du Cru St Amour, is worth a visit.

André Poitevin
A fine, juicy example with the perfumed, yet far from lightweight, character typical of the best of St Amour’s wines.

Lovely Spot
The unique combination of subsoils here is responsible for the delicate style of the commune’s best wines.
ST AUBIN

North of the red and white wine-producing appellation of Chassagne-Montrachet (see p135), and east of the world-famous white wine vineyards of Puligny-Montrachet (see p153), is the Côte de Beaune commune of St Aubin. There are 570 acres (230 ha) of vineyards here, just over half of which are planted with Chardonnay and Pinot Blanc vines. Many of the 29 premiers crus vineyards of the appellation also produce whites, with the best including Les Murgers des Dents de Chien and En Remilly. At their best, these hazelnut-tinged wines easily outclass many of the wines of Puligny-Montrachet. With ripe, wild strawberry fruit and more complexity than the village wines, premier cru red wines can offer good value here, but, unlike the whites, they rarely shake off their essentially rustic character.

Hidden Treasure
Tucked away in the hills, St Aubin is often unjustly overlooked by visitors and wine-drinkers drawn by the fame of the nearby villages of Puligny-Montrachet and Meursault.

ST BRIS

One of the enduring mysteries of French wine is why these characterful white wines from the north of Burgundy were for so long entitled to no more than a VDQS classification. Today, the crisp, dry wines with herbaceous, smoky flavors similar to those of Sancerre, a further 60 miles (100 km) to the southwest, are sold under the new Saint Bris appellation, but confusingly, labels are no longer allowed to mention that, unlike other white Burgundies, this is pure Sauvignon Blanc.

Jean-Marc Brocard
J-M Brocard’s wines are very often compared to those of Sancerre.

ST ROMAIN

At an altitude of 1,150 ft (350 m), St Romain is almost Hautes-Côtes de Beaune territory (see p141), with cool conditions that are often unfavorable for ripening grapes. Red wines here are pleasant but rustic, while whites are fresh, minerally, and unoaked—perfect for those who wish to avoid the modern oaky style of appellations such as Puligny-Montrachet (see p153). Thanks to the legendary cooper Jean François, St Romain is best known as the exporter of some of the world’s best oak barrels.

Christophe Buisson
This is a refreshing, minerally wine with a hazelnut richness.
ST VÉRAN
Created in 1971, this appellation lies in both Beaujolais and the Mâconnais, covering white wines from the seven villages of Davayé and Prissé to the north of Pouilly-Fuissé (see p152), and Chané, Chasselas, Leynes, St Amour, and St Vérand to the south. The combination of limestone and Chardonnay produces wines that combine richness with a slight mineral edge. A number of talented and ambitious producers also help St Véran to offer some of the best value in the region.

Jacques Saumaize
Rich, buttery wine with a fresh apple note and a mineral backbone.

- AC St Véran.
- White: Chardonnay.
- Light, dry whites.
- D et M Barraud, Corsin des Deux Roches, Georges Duboeuf, Ch Fuissé, Producteurs de Fuissé, Roger Luquet, J Saumaize.
- Chicken baked with Dijon mustard and crème fraîche.
- 2–4 years.

SANTENAY
Famous since Roman times for its lithium-rich spa waters, Santenay is one of the most southerly wine villages in the Côte de Beaune. White Santenay is worth buying, but all but two percent of the wines made here are red, falling into two basic styles. Santenay from vineyards around and to the south of the village is full-bodied and earthy, while that from the 14 premiers crus vineyards at the northern end of the appellation is light and elegant, similar in style to the wines of Beaune (see pp128–9).

Adrien Belland
The grapes used here come from some of the finest vineyards in Santenay.

- AC Santenay, AC Santenay Premier Cru.
- Red: Pinot Noir.
- Earthy, rustic reds.
- Adrien Belland, Fernand Chevrot, Marc Colin, Vincent Girardin, Olivier Leflaive, Nouveau, Pousse d’Or, Prieur-Brunet.
- Shoulder of Lamb.
- Red: 3–12 years.

SAVIGNY-LÈS-BEAUNE
Tucked away in the valley of the tiny Rhoin River, the appellation of Savigny-lès-Beaune includes 950 acres (385 hectares) of vines, centered around the village of Savigny-lès-Beaune. From the east of the appellation come wines that are well structured but slightly rustic, while wines from vineyards to the north, closer to Pernand-Vergelesses (see p150), are softer, with creamy fruit flavors. Hillside vineyards in this area make up the appellation’s 22 premiers crus, while Savigny-lès-Beaune wines come from the flatter land in between. Around 90 percent of the wine produced here is red, but some white is also made—often, unusually in the Chardonnay-loving Côte de Beaune, using a proportion of the Pinot Blanc grape with its easily recognizable flavors of cream and Brazil nuts.

Simon Bize
This estate produces wines that are unusually long-lived, aging them in its cellars opposite the Château de Savigny.

Varied vineyards
The vineyards of Savigny-lès-Beaune are among the most varied in the region. The best, which include Aux Vergellesses and Les Lavières, are as good as many premiers crus in neighboring Beaune.

- AC Savigny-lès-Beaune, AC Savigny-lès-Beaune Premier Cru.
- Red: Pinot Noir.
- White: Pinot Blanc, Chardonnay.
- Elegant, medium-weight reds.
- Light, spicy whites.
- Arnoux, Bize, Champy, Chandon de Briailles, Bruno Clair, Girard-VOillot, Drouhin, Dubreuil-Fontaine, Maurice Ecard, Pavlet, Tollot-Beaut.
- Fillet of duck
- Red: 6 years.
- White: 2–3 years.
Every lover of the wines of Burgundy has a favorite red wine from the region. Many would probably choose one of the prestigious names of the Côte de Nuits, but my own appellation of choice is Volnay, whose uniquely-perfumed blend of violets, raspberries, and ripe plums has always struck me as both ethereal and utterly seductive.

During the early part of the 20th century, the Volnay name was regularly used by unscrupulous merchants to sell wines made from grapes grown as far away as southern France and Algeria. One Volnay estate owner, the Marquis d'Angerville, responded by helping to lay the foundations of the appellation contrôlée system, leading, in 1932, to the establishment of the Institut National des Appellations d’Origine.

Appropriately, the talents of a number of excellent producers, including the recently deceased son of the Marquis d’Angerville mentioned above, have now helped to make Volnay one of the most reliable appellations in the region. Other factors contributing to the reliability of Volnay’s wines, as well as their smoothness and fragrance, include the shallow, chalky soil and the southeastern exposure of the vineyards. Although there are no grands crus here, more than half of the vineyards are premiers crus, the most impressive of which include Taille Pieds, Les Caillerets, Clos des Ducs, Clos des Chênes, and Bousse d’Or. Volnay is predominantly a red wine appellation, and the tiny amount of white wine produced here is sold as AC Meursault (see p.145).

Marquis d’Angerville
This wine was produced by the Marquis d’Angerville, whose father helped to found the appellation contrôlée system.

Sleepy streets
Tucked away high in the hills above the route nationale and looking down over premiers crus vineyards, the picturesque village of Volnay has a quiet but distinctly prosperous air.

Michel Lafarge
A superb Volnay producer, Michel Lafarge makes wines that manage to combine richness, perfume, and purity.
Among the best of the 17 premiers crus vineyards of the appellation are Les Beaux Monts, Les Brûlées, Les Chaumes, Aux Malconsorts, Les Suchots, Clos des Réas and Cros-Parantoux. In an area blessed with a plethora of excellent producers, Domaine de la Romanée-Conti competes with great wine makers including Lalou Bize-Leroy of Domaine Leroy and René Engel, Anne Gros and Jean-Nicolas Méo of Domaine Méo-Camuzet.

Just beyond the appellation’s northern boundary are the grands crus of Echézeaux and Les Grands Echézeaux. Belonging to the nearby village of Flagey-Echézeaux, the wines here are similar to some of the best examples of Vosne-Romanée, though rarely quite as rich and complex.

Clos des Réas

The premier cru Clos des Réas vineyard is owned by a branch of the famous wine-making Gros family, producing rich, complex, perfumed wines.

One 18th-century source states that Vosne-Romanée produced “pas de vin commun”, or “no wine of ordinary quality”. Today, this village is still unusual in producing red wines of almost uniformly high quality, and there are fewer disappointments among even the most basic wines of Vosne-Romanée than in nearby appellations such as Gevrey-Chambertin (see p140) or Nuits-St Georges (see p149).

The appellation of Vosne-Romanée boasts some brilliant premiers crus and grands crus vineyards. The finest, or at least the most expensive, of the grands crus is the 1.8-ha (4.4-acre) La Romanée-Conti. Taking its name from Roman remains unearthed here and from its 18th-century owner, the Prince de Conti, La Romanée-Conti is now part of the world-famous Domaine de la Romanée-Conti (known to initiates as the DRC), which also includes the neighbouring La Tâche vineyard. The wines produced here are extraordinarily rich, stuffed with plums and with more than a hint of spice. Other great grands crus vineyards here include La Romanée, owned by the négociant-producer firm Bouchard Père et Fils, Romanée-St Vivant, Richebourg and the recently promoted but so far disappointing La Grande Rue.

Divine Intervention

This much-visited crucifix stands close to the tiny grand cru vineyard of La Romanée-Conti, the source of some of the best, and most expensive, red wines in Burgundy.

Lalou Bize-Leroy

Once a partner in the Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, Lalou Bize-Leroy now makes impeccable wines from her own organic vineyards nearby.
Alors que de nombreux producteurs se gardent de le dire, ils préfèrent utiliser un peu plus de Pinot Noir. Des quantités modestes de Bourgogne Passetoutgrains sont produites par un grand nombre de domaines de classe supérieure, et, pleines de saveurs de cassis et de framboise, elles peuvent être bues en tant que remède à la Beaujolais (voir pp126–7).

Crémant de Bourgogne est l’appellation générique des vins blancs et rosés de Bourgogne. L’augmentation du nombre de variétés autorisées à inclure le Pinot Noir, le Chardonnay et le Pinot Blanc, ainsi que les variétés plus traditionnelles Aligoté et Gamay, a conduit à une amélioration significative de ces vins ces dernières années. Aujourd’hui, les exemples de Chardonnay occasionnellement offrent une bonne alternative à des blanc de blancs de Champagne de moyenne classe, tandis que le Crémant de Bourgogne blanc de noirs offre des saveurs de Pinot Noir purement délicates.

Un vin presque disparu à rechercher est celui de la variété traditionnelle César, cultivée dans la région d’Irancy, près de Chablis. La légalité de nommer César sur des bouteilles produites dans les différents vignobles de l’Irancy est incertaine, mais ces vins ont un intérêt étonnant qui se situe quelque part entre celui du Pinot Noir de Bourgogne (voir p130) et de rouge d’Anjou (voir p214) fait de Cabernet Franc.

Mentionnez la variété Aligoté à un amateur de vins et il se souviendra probablement de Kir, la boisson blanche et à base de myrtille inventée par le curé Kir, maire de Dijon. Goûtez les vins d’Aligoté et vous comprendrez pourquoi le bon curé décida de les sucrer. Bien qu’attrayants et pommeaux à leur meilleur, ces vins sont souvent acides. Cependant, des exceptions notables à la règle des vins acides Aligoté sont les vins produits dans la commune de Bouzeron, dans la Côte Chalonnaise. Cette variété réussit assez bien pour que son propre appellation, Bourgogne Aligoté Bouzeron, soit bientôt renommée en simple appellation contrôlée Bouzeron.

Passetoutgrains était autrefois le nom du vin le plus populaire tous les jours en Bourgogne—faisant pregue de variétés de raisins à son gré. Il a maintenant évolué en une traditionnelle mélangue de Gamay et de Pinot Noir. Le ratio officiellement autorisé est deux parts Gamay contre une part Pinot Noir,

Jean-François Coche-Dury

The Aligoté grape variety tends to produce mealy acidic flavors, but may also be made into rich and unusual whites like this example.
Much more than just a wine, Champagne is now synonymous throughout the globe with the notions of quality, luxury, and celebration.

Uncork a great Champagne and you might find yourself drinking something that seems to be much more than a wine. At its best, Champagne can be the most extraordinary drink: dry, yet with some honeyed sweetness; rich, yet fresh; delicate, yet mouth-filling; easy to drink, yet offering layers of different flavors ranging from fruits to nuts and even dark chocolate. Some or all of this is what I hope to find when I hear the pop of the cork. Experience, however, has taught me that, despite the fortune that this region has spent on protecting its name, the mere presence of the word “Champagne” on the label of a wine bottle gives me no reason to expect anything very special at all. So why are some Champagnes so sublime, while others can taste sourly acidic, sugary, or simply dull? The answer lies largely in the geography of this region. Champagne may have had the historic advantage of its close proximity to Paris and the wine-drinkers of neighboring countries to the east, but it has always been a cold, northerly region. In these temperatures, grapes find it impossible to ripen sufficiently to produce still red and white wines that are good enough to compete with the wines of vineyards farther south. Not that this handicap deterred the 16th-century Champenois, who dyed their wine with elderberry juice in an attempt to mimic the richer color of red Burgundy.

Champagne owes its success to a series of human interventions. Dom Pérignon, the 17th-century abbot of Hautvillers, is the man erroneously credited with putting the bubbles into what had previously been still wines. In fact, fizziness was something that he initially sought to avoid, because of the tendency at this time for many bottles of his wine to explode. His greatest contribution to wine-making was in fact the care he took in developing the art of blending wines from various parts of the region, rather than following the example of the Burgundians in keeping them separate.

The combination of better wine, which still tended to fizz, and newly developed, stronger, nonexploding bottles was a great success, first in London, then in Paris. Ever since, most Champagne has been blended—a blend of grapes, of vineyards, and of vintages. And, as Dom Pérignon understood, the quality of the wines that go into that blend is far more important than the bubbles that have given Champagne its worldwide fame.
Palate Pleaser
Unlike other regions, where wines are produced in individual villages, Champagne tends to offer a blend of grapes that have been grown in various parts of the appellation.

Into the Wine
These vineyards near Cramant are planted exclusively with Chardonnay grapes, which produce fine blanc de blanc wines.
The History of Champagne

A glass of a fine Champagne, such as Krug or Dom Pérignon, would be as recognizable to a Champagne enthusiast as a Chanel dress or a Guerlain eau de toilette would be to someone interested in clothes or scent. It is no coincidence that so many Champagne companies now come under the same ownership as couturiers and perfumiers.

Champagne flies wonderfully in the face of the philosophy of most French wines. Elsewhere, the notion that lies at the core of the appellation contrôlée system is that wine should express the character of the specific vineyard in which its grapes were grown. Even the finest Champagne, however, is mostly a blend of wines from different sites. While there are individual vineyard wines, the most illustrious Champagnes, such as Dom Pérignon and Roederer Cristal (see p175), are blends whose success lies in the way they embody the individual house style of their producers. Richard Geoffroy, the man responsible for making the wine named after Dom Pérignon, says that his focus is on “style, style, style.”

Within those house styles, Champagne comes in a number of different colors and flavors. Its color ranges from white to shades of rosé, which can be made either by blending red and white wine or by allowing the skins of the black grapes to tint the juice rather than removing them before they do so. Next, there is sweetness, the scale of which extends from aggressively bone-dry Brut Sauvage, Ultra Brut, or Brut Zéro to lusciously sweet Doux. In fact, the wines at the far ends of the scale are rarely made these days. The driest Champagne you are likely to come across is Brut, which contains up to 15 g of sugar per liter of wine. For the sweeter-toothed, there is the oddly named Extra Sec or Extra Dry, which has 12–20 g, the even more misleading Sec or Dry, which has 17–35 g of sugar, and finally Demi Sec or Rich, with 35–50 g per liter. Sugar hides acidity very effectively, so slightly sweeter Champagnes go down more easily than the cheap dry examples offered in supermarkets.

A MATTER OF STYLE

The style of any wine is determined by the grape variety that it is made from. Most Champagnes, including rosés, are blends of Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier, and Chardonnay, but there are also pure Chardonnays (blancs de blancs) and wines made with no white grapes at all (blancs de noirs). There are vintage Champagnes, made from the fruit of a single harvest and judged by the

Château Chandon
The modern Champagne industry was a 19th-century success story, and the producers soon adopted lifestyles to match. Moët & Chandon is now part of a luxury goods group that also produces perfume and fashion accessories.
Drink of Princes... and Princesses
The major Champagne houses have traditionally used imagery associated with the royal families of Europe.

producer not to require improvement by the addition of older wines, and finally the far more numerous nonvintage blends. To complicate matters even further, there are oddities like “recently disgorged” vintage Champagnes that develop fresh, yet rich, characters of their own through having been left on their yeast for several years longer than usual. And, subject to no rules at all, there are the so-called prestige cuvées that command the highest prices. Any Champagne producer can come up with a fancy name, bottle, and price for one of his vintage or nonvintage wines, but there is no guarantee that the stuff that goes into that bottle is as special as its attractive, upmarket packaging.

Any or all of these styles may be produced by Champagne’s individual estates, coopératives and merchants. Historically, it was merchants such as Moët & Chandon (see p174), Krug (see p173), Roederer, and Bollinger who did the job best. The money they made from their sales across the world gave them numerous advantages. They had the greatest access to good grapes, both from their own vines and from their choice of grands crus vineyards. They had the financial means to keep “reserve” wine from previous years to use in their nonvintage wine, and they had the best wine-making equipment and blending skills.

Coopératives, by contrast, were thought to have the disadvantage of having to rely on grapes grown by their members in the vicinity of the winery. In other words, they had a far smaller palette to blend from. Also, the fact that most of their wines were sold cheaply under various customers’ names did little to encourage them to focus on quality. Small estates, with only limited funds and their own grapes to work with, were believed to suffer from an even greater handicap. More recently, however, the picture has changed as critics have acknowledged the poor quality of some big-name Champagnes. Mumm’s efforts were, at one time, unfavorably compared with the same company’s Californian wines. Coopératives have launched own brands that sometimes compete on level terms with those of the merchants, and a growing number of sophisticated, well-sited, top-quality independent estates have proven that they can defy expectations by making some of the best Champagne of all. In the 21st century, the well-known names face a growing number of challenges. There are new markets opening up around the world and new competitors appearing both in Champagne itself and in other regions. With luck, the winners will be the Champagne-drinkers, who will get an even better wine at a fairer price.
A Driving Tour of Champagne

Despite the international fame of wines made by large producers from a mixture of grapes grown in various parts of the region, Champagne comprises many individual towns and villages. This tour, beginning and ending in the historic city of Reims, takes in a range of the most interesting of these.

REIMS TO BOUZY

In Reims, the unofficial capital of this region, take advantage of the guided cellar tours offered by houses such as Louis Roederer, Pommery, Taittinger, Ruinart, Lanson and Charles Heidsieck, whose cellars have been carved out of the chalk beneath the city. Make sure, too, that you take a break from wine to visit the magnificent cathedral, where Joan of Arc watched the coronation of Charles VII in 1429.

After Sillery, you drive past the so-called Montagne de Reims, a low hill covered by top-class Pinot Noir vines. A century or so ago, Sillery’s wines were sold under the name of this hill. In Mailly-Champagne, you could pause to stock up on a few bottles from the coopérative, one of the region’s best. The villages of Verzenay, Verzy, Ambonnay and Bouzy are all sources of good Pinot Noir, in the form of both Champagne and Bouzy Rouge Coteaux Champenois. For a fine example, visit Paul Bara in Bouzy or Egly-Ouriet in Ambonnay.

LOUVOIS TO AY

Louvois has a château whose garden is said to have been modeled on that of Versailles, while Mareuil-sur-Ay is home to Billecart-Salmon, one of the region’s top firms. In Ay, you can visit Ayala, Bollinger, Deutz, and Gosset, as well as the Musée Champenois, which displays old wine-making implements.

ÉPERNAY TO VERTUS

Épernay is best known for its Avenue de Champagne, where houses such as Mercier and Moët & Chandon are based. Other firms here include Pol Roger, de Castellane, and Perrier Jouët. In Chavot, stop to photograph the landscape from the church atop Mont Félix, before heading southeast to Avize, where you can visit the cellars of Jacques Selosse, one of the region’s best producers, and the Union-Champagne coopérative. In Le Mesnil-sur-Oger, a village in the heart of Chardonnay country, Krug makes single-vineyard blanc de blancs. Not far from here is Vertus, a medieval town with streams, the perfect spot for a picnic.

MONTMORT TO CHÂTILLON-SUR-MARNE

From Montmort, with its 16th-century château, head northwest via the pretty village of Mareuil-en-Brie to Orbais l’Abbaye, whose name refers to its Benedictine abbey. Stop off in Dormans to visit the 13th-century château and park, and to experience a taste of turn-of-the-20th-century riverside vacations. In Châtillon-sur-Marne, take a look at the statue of pope Urban II, on a hill overlooking the town.
HAUTVILLERS TO REIMS

Go through the wine villages of Venteuil and Damery to Hautvillers abbey, where Dom Pérignon carried out his first blending experiments. The abbey is a “must-see” for many, and the village of Hautvillers is also worth exploring. From here, head east to the Royal Champagne in Bellevue, one of France’s top country hotels. The final part of the tour takes you through the villages of Chamery, Sacy and Pargny-lès-Reims, all of which offer opportunities to taste Champagnes made by growers, as opposed to those produced by the bigger companies in the towns.
The Food of Champagne

The region that has given us the world’s most famous sparkling wine can claim surprisingly few traditional dishes that are specifically its own. The inhabitants of this cool, fertile farming region have been blessed with fine raw materials and have always eaten well, but, borrowing extensively from neighboring regions, they have not proved to be particularly inventive cooks.

One unusual feature of the cuisine of the Champagne region is its limited use of beef; this is not a part of France with a rich history of cattle farming. Where beef is used, it is usually as part of a mixture of meats, most memorably in a local version of the Burgundian *pot au feu*, known here as *potée champenoise* or as *potée des vendangeurs* (grape-pickers’ stew). This hearty dish is made from five meats and five vegetables, often salt pork, shin of beef, silverside of beef, chicken, and spicy sausage, together with carrots, leeks, turnips, savoy cabbage, and onions. Another mixed-meat dish is *épaule d’agneau farcie à la Champenoise*, in which a shoulder of lamb is stuffed with chopped pork and tomatoes flavored with juniper and Champagne.

Pork is a staple meat in this region, and pigs, traditionally fattened on acorns, appear in dishes ranging from smoked Ardennes ham and pork chops grilled with sage leaves to spicy tripe-filled

Land of Plenty

A great variety of fruit and vegetables, including peas, onions, tomatoes, asparagus, plums, and cabbages, is grown in the rich farmland of Champagne and sold in shops and markets throughout the region.

Truite Ardennaise

Delicate brown trout are common in the many rivers that run through the entire Champagne region. In this simple but delicious dish, the fish is sautéed in butter before being finished off with a sauce of *crème fraîche* and Ardennes ham.
sausages and *pieds de porc à la Ste-Menehould*, pigs' trotters simmered slowly in a rich stock.

A variety of meats and fish are cooked with the sparkling or still white wines of the region, including pike, eels, ham, chicken, guinea fowl, pheasant, and *sanglier* (wild boar) from the extensive forests of the Ardennes. The local red wines are also used in cooking, and many restaurants offer *poulet sauté au Bouzy*, a variation on the Burgundian *coq au vin*. Oyettes (goose pies) are a specialty here, as are tiny song thrushes, often stewed with juniper berries, *à l'Ardennaise*. Popular river fish dishes include trout fried in butter with a ham and *crème fraîche* sauce, and pike with bacon and gherkins. Accompaniments include potatoes fried with onions and garlic or a salad of dandelion leaves and crispily fried bacon.

To finish the meal there might be a Genoese sponge cake filled with praline cream, or almond meringues, also filled with thick cream. A personal favorite is *fraises Eugénie*, fresh strawberries served with warm *sabayon*.

### REGIONAL CHEESES

In the year 1217, the Comtesse de Champagne sent 200 Brie de Meaux cheeses as a gift to the King of France. One of the oldest and finest of French cheeses, Brie from the village of Meaux was popular with the Emperor Charlemagne as early as the ninth century. Today, Brie is made in huge quantities on farms and in factories all over the Champagne region, and varies from the simple to the sublime. Langres à la Coupe and Chaource are two other regional specialties. Produced in smaller volumes, they are of far more consistent quality.

**Chaource**

This mild cow's-milk cheese does not take long to mature. It quickly forms a tasty, edible white rind and develops a soft, oozingly creamy center.

**Langres à la Coupe**

This cylindrical cheese has a well in the middle into which Champagne or marc is poured. The rind is rubbed with brine and annatto for color.

**Jambon des Ardennes**

Hilly and densely forested, the Ardennes region is famous for its cold-smoked hams, eaten as an appetizer with pickles, and in many traditional local dishes.
TRAVELING IN CHAMPAGNE

One way of looking at Champagne as a region to visit is to think of it as an iceberg. Above the waterline are the big-name producers, Reims Cathedral, and the award-winning Restaurant des Crayères, but just as worthwhile are the host of small villages, individual estates, and charming little bistros that are also to be found here.

HOTELS & RESTAURANTS
A selection of the region’s best establishments, offering good local food and drink, and notable places to stay.

AMBONNAY

Hôtel Auberge St-Vincent,
1 Rue St-Vincent.
03 26 57 01 98
03 26 57 81 48
If you don’t like snails, or can’t imagine a meal without meat, the Auberge St Vincent is not for you. This small country inn specializes in escargots and vegetables, pastas, and salads—and it does so with great skill. The rooms are comfortable, too.

EPERNAY

Le Théatre, 8 Place Mendès-France.
03 26 58 88 19
03 26 58 88 38
As the name suggests, this was once a place of entertainment. Today, it’s still a hot ticket, with fairly high prices, but the cooking deserves the applause it gets.

ETOGES

Château d’Etoges,
4 Rue Richebourg.
03 26 59 30 08
A moated 17th-century château with romantic towers, the perfect place in which to spirit a fine bottle up to your bedroom after a meal of classic local cuisine.

MOUSSEY, NEAR ÉPERNAY

L’Auberge Champenoise,
Le Village.
03 26 54 03 48
A welcoming inn offering good, simple, fairly priced traditional dishes.

OUEILLY NEAR ÉPERNAY

Micheline et Jean-Mary Tarlant,
21 Rue Principale.
03 26 58 30 60
A small family wine estate that offers cozy rooms in converted cottages among the vines.

REIMS

Boyer "les Crayères",
64 Boulevard Vasnier.
03 26 82 80 80
A gastronomic mecca. The food is sublime and the Champagne list is predictably impressive, too, with plenty of older vintages.

Fio,
96 Place Drouet d’Erlon.
03 26 91 40 50
03 26 91 40 54
Worth visiting for the vastness of its wine and Champagne list alone, this restaurant also offers a great terrace and skillfully cooked local dishes.

WINE SHOPS
Many of the wines from smaller local producers are hard to find back home, so it’s a good idea to stock up before you leave.

EPERNAY

Pérardel,
9 Rue Jean Chandon Moët.
03 26 56 97 30
A local outlet of the best wine retailer in France, with an extraordinarily wide and well-chosen range of wines.

REIMS

Marché aux Vins Pérardel,
3 Place Léon Bourgeois.
03 26 40 12 12
This is the Reims branch of the same shop.

La Cave d’Erlon,
40 Place d’Erlon.
03 26 47 44 44
03 26 47 55 12
In the heart of the town, Fabrice Parisot offers wines from all the main Champagne houses as well as examples from 30 individual estates.

VISITING PRODUCERS
Many of the bigger Champagne houses offer tours, for an entry fee that includes tastings. Some require reservations.

EPERNAY

de Castellane,
57 Rue de Verdun.
03 26 51 19 11
Besides the customary visit to underground cellars, de Castellane also offers the chance to climb an ornate tower, from which you can enjoy the view over the town and surrounding vineyards. One of the better places to learn about the minutiae of making Champagne.

Alfred Gratien,
30 Rue Maurice-Cerveaux.
03 26 54 38 20
A small traditional firm that still ferments its wine in barrels, Gratien also offers individual tours by appointment. The wines are some of the region’s best.

Mercier,
68-70 Avenue de Champagne.
03 26 51 22 22
A huge seller in French supermarkets, Mercier also offers one of the most professional tours. No reservation is needed and
the entry fee includes a video presentation and a 12-mile train trip around the cellars. Too bad the wine is so poor. Perrier-Jouët, 28 Avenue de Champagne. 03 26 53 38 00

As you might expect from the Belle Epoque bottle, you can combine a (free) cellar visit with a tour of a fine collection of late 19th and early 20th century glass. Reservations are essential.

LE MESNIL SUR OGER
Launois Père & Fils, 2 Avenue Eugène Guillaume. 03 26 57 50 15

Rivaling the bigger houses, this small family firm based in one of the best Chardonnay villages adds a fine museum to the tour and tasting. Great value, but reservations are essential.

MAILLY
Grand Cru Mailly, 28 Rue de la Libération. 03 26 49 41 10

A cooperative making top-class Champagne, including pure Pinot Noir blanc de noirs. Booking is not necessary and the entry charge is often waived for evidently knowledgeable and/or enthusiastic visitors.

REIMS
Piper-Heidsieck, 51 Boulevard Henry Vasnier. 03 26 84 43 44

Not the most traditional of houses (quirks include a bottle "dressed" by Jean-Paul Gaultier), Piper offers visitors the chance to taste in the ambience of a nightclub. The wines and the tour are both good.

Pommery, 5 Place Du Général Gouraud. 03 26 61 62 63

Descend the 101-step staircase into some 13 miles of cellars cut between over 100 Roman chalkpits and take in the tunnels named after cities that were big customers a century or so ago. There is also a collection of bas-reliefs. No appointment is necessary.

ANNUAL WINE EVENTS

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<tr>
<th>MAY</th>
<th>Mailly Fête de Mailly-Champagne</th>
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<tr>
<td>JULY/AUGUST</td>
<td>Reims music in the open air—150 classical and jazz concerts in venues in and around Reims</td>
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<tr>
<td>AUGUST</td>
<td>Route du Champagne villages along the route offer tastings, concerts, and art exhibitions during August</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEPTEMBER</td>
<td>Bar-sur-Aube wine fair</td>
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Ruinaart, 4 Rue des Crayères. 03 26 77 51 51

One of the region’s very oldest houses, with great cellars. Ruinart charges admission, but it’s worth every penny. By appointment. Veuve Clicquot-Ponsardin 1 place des Droits-de-l’Homme. 03 26 89 54 41

Free tour and tasting leads you through one of Champagne’s biggest cellars. Call ahead.

MUSEUMS

An individual cellar tour is great for getting to know a particular Champagne house, but these offer a more general overview of wine making in the region.

OGER
Le Musée de l’Amour et des Traditions au XIXième Siècle, Champagne Henry de Vauquency, 1 Rue d’Avize. 03 26 57 50 89

Two award-winning museums about domestic life in the 19th and early 20th centuries, with a great collection of labels.

REUIL
Le Musée du Vignoble en Miniature du Domaine Bacchus, 4 Rue Bacchus, L’Échelle. 03 26 58 66 60

A real curiosity: 90 square yards of meticulously miniaturized scenes in which 150 tiny figures bring to life the traditions of village grape-growing, harvesting, and wine-making in Champagne.

VERZENAY
Le Musée de la Vigne et du Vin, Le Phare de Verzenay. 03 26 07 87 87

This wooden building overlooking the vineyards offers a chance to discover every aspect of the Champagne process, using a variety of exhibits and videos.

WEBSITES


OTHER INFORMATION

Office du Tourisme, 7 Avenue de Champagne, Épernay. 03 26 53 33 00

Offers a broad range of information, from producer addresses to maps and festival dates.
BILLECART-SALMON
No consistent pleasure as the wine from this small family firm. The style is generally lighter and more delicate than most, and this is as apparent in the nonvintage as in the individual cuvées: Elisabeth Salmon Rosé, Nicolas-François Billecart, Blanc de Blancs and Grande Cuvée. Billecart-Salmon also arguably produces the finest, most reliable rosé in all of Champagne—a style that nowadays accounts for almost 20 percent of its annual sales.

Cuvée Elisabeth Salmon
The very epitome of pink Champagne, this fine cuvée has lovely raspberry flavors.

| f | Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Meunier. |
| g | Stylish, ultra-reliable Champagnes of all styles, with especially good rosé. |
| j | Cuvée Nicolas-François Billecart, Cuvée Elisabeth Salmon Rosé, Blanc de Blancs, Grande Cuvée. |
| i | None. |

BOLLINGER
The Champagne of James Bond—in the movies, at least (in the novels, he favors another brand)—is also a favorite with wine-makers. The key to this firm’s success lies in owning over 350 acres (140 ha) of top-quality vineyards and in pursuing a style that repays aging and serving with meals. Others offer “recently disgorged” wines (see p.31), but Bollinger’s RD is the classic. Its Vieilles Vignes Françaises (“old French vines”) is a rarity: made from vines that aren’t grafted onto American rootstock.

Bollinger 1990
Vintage Bollinger provides the quintessence of this house’s rich style.

| f | Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Meunier. |
| g | Rich, complex, full-flavored, mouth-fillingly yeasty wines across the board. |
| j | Grande Année, RD (Récemment Dégorgé), Vieilles Vignes Françaises. |
| i | None. |

GOSSET
Founded in 1584, this is one of the oldest wine companies in the world. Indeed, it remained in the hands of the same family for over four centuries until it was bought by Beatrice Cointreau. The Gosset style is decidedly traditional thanks to (old) barrel fermentation and a high proportion of black grapes. All the wines are of high quality, ranging from the nonvintage Grande Excellence to the top wine, the vintage Célebris. The nonvintage Grande Réserve is a wine to drink with food.

Célebris
A prestige cuvée with a Chardonnay character, and well worth cellaring.

| f | Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Meunier. |
| g | Slow-developing Champagne with more biscuity flavor than is often fashionable nowadays. |
| j | Grande Excellence, Grand Rosé, Grande Millésime, Célebris. |
| i | None. |

ALFRED GRATIEN
Under the same ownership as the Loire sparkling-wine producer Gratien & Meyer, this is another traditional house. Wines are fermented in (old) barrels and given unusually lengthy periods of contact with the yeast used to kick off the second fermentation. There is no malolactic fermentation (see p.24). This method provides the richness and freshness associated with “recently disgorged” (see p.31) wines. Mature when sold, they improve with keeping and go particularly well with food.

Cuvée Paradis
This cuvée represents the quintessence of the rich, yeasty Gratien style.

| f | Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Meunier. |
| g | One of the most distinctive, richly old-fashioned, full-flavored, biscuity Champagnes. |
| j | Cuvée Paradis, Vintage Brut. |
| i | Gratien & Meyer (Saumur). |
CHARLES HEIDSIECK

This firm demonstrates the importance of a skilled wine maker, as well as commitment to quality and investment. In the 1970s, wines from Charles Heidsieck were sold in supermarkets and made to the standards that this implies. Under the late Daniel Thibault, quality was transformed and nonvintage wines launched whose labels revealed the year when the *cuvée* was blended. These regularly beat vintage efforts in the International Wine Challenge.

*Brut Réserve Mise en Cave 1992*

This is a nonvintage wine with the quality of a vintage Champagne.

- **Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Meunier.**
- Recently much improved, impeccably-made wines that are richly flavored enough to drink with food.
- *Mis en Cave Non-vintage, Cuvée des Millénaires.*
- *Piper Heidsieck.*

JACQUESSON

This family firm proudly claims Napoléon as one of its most distinguished customers and presents its Champagnes with gorgeous, instantly recognizable labels. The contents of the bottles are creamy yet dry, ranging from the nonvintage (modestly called “Perfection”) to the vintage Blanc de Blancs and the vintage Brut. The “late-disgorged” style (known as *dégorgement tardif*) is Jacquesson’s convincing answer to Bollinger’s RD (see left): a gloriously mature, yet fresh wine.

*Perfection*

This small family firm’s Champagnes are among the richest on the market.

- **Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Meunier.**
- Rich, complex and stylish wines that—especially the Blancs de Blancs—deserve to be far better known.
- *Signature Brut, Blanc de Blancs, Dégorgement Tardif.*
- *None.*

HENRIOT

Reversing the trend that has been prevalent elsewhere in the Champagne region, Henriot recently went back from corporate ownership—under the same umbrella as Veuve Clicquot (see p176)—to belonging to the original family (which also bought and revolutionized the quality of Bouchard Père et Fils in Burgundy). The wines here are marked by Chardonnay—both in the vintage Brut Souverain and in the rich but elegant vintage Blanc de Blancs.

*Blanc de Blans*

This is one of the best examples of pure Chardonnay produced in all Champagne.

- **Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Meunier.**
- Much improved producer with rich, toasty Champagnes and particularly good Blanc de Blancs.
- *Souverain Brut, Blanc de Blancs, Enchantelleurs.*
- *Bouchard Père et Fils.*

KRUG

The rolls-royce of Champagne, and now, like Moët & Chandon and Veuve Clicquot, part of the LVMH group, Krug makes unusually winelike Champagne. This is a Champagne to drink at dinner, but not for refreshment. There is also a long-lived vintage wine and a single-vineyard *blanc de blancs* called Clos de Mesnil, but none of the wines can top Krug’s nonvintage and nonvintage rosé, both of which contain an unusually high proportion of mature wine.

*Grande Cuvée*

This could well be the greatest of all nonvintage Champagnes.

- **Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Meunier.**
- Rich, mouth-filling wines, including dazzling nonvintage.
- *Grande Cuvée, Rosé, Vintage, Clos du Mesnil.*
- *Rommery, Moët & Chandon, Krug, Dom Ruinart, Veuve Clicquot, Mercier.*
LANSON
LANSON’S NAME, BUT NOT its vineyards, was bought in 1991 by Marne et Champagne, the region’s second-biggest producer, which sells under its own and its customers’ labels (and has recently changed its name to Lanson). The non-vintage Lanson remains one of the region’s reliable rather than best examples, but the vintage can be a long-lived wine that is well worth buying. Lanson’s top wine, the Noble Cuvée, is emphatically recommendable, as is the recently revived Demi-Sec.

MOËT & CHANDON
THIS IS THE ONE CHAMPAGNE that everyone has heard of, which is hardly surprising when you consider that over 20 million bottles are sold every year and the contents of large bottles are regularly sprayed around by winners at sports events. While the non-vintage is reliable, the vintage Brut and vintage Rosé are among the best in the region. The brilliant prestige cuvée Dom Pérignon, which is also produced in surprising volumes, is worth leaving in the cellar for a decade or so.

POL ROGER
THE WINES MADE BY this family-owned firm are highly popular with those who like delicate, finely structured, non-vintage and vintage Champagne. Unusually, Pol Roger likes to use the region’s three grapes equally. The strongest overseas link is with the UK, where Pol Roger’s first exports were sent, and where Sir Winston Churchill was one of its greatest fans. The wartime leader is commemorated by the black border around the label of the Cuvée Sir Winston Churchill.
POMMERY

POMMERY BOASTS CELLARS named after the cities to which the biggest shipments were sent in the 19th century, as well as no fewer than 450 acres (300 ha) of great vineyards. Since joining the LVMH group along with Moët & Chandon, Ruinart, and Veuve Clicquot, Pommery has kept its light, delicate style. The Cuvée Spéciale Louise Pommery, named after the daughter of the founder, is among the best of all the prestige cuvée wines. The POP quarter bottles are less impressive.

ROEDERER

ONE OF THE BIG family-owned Champagne houses, Roederer is also quietly one of the most dynamic, having taken over Deutz Champagne and made investments in vintage port, the Rhône Valley, and Bordeaux, not to mention a winery producing top-class sparkling wine in California. Roederer’s flagship is Cristal, whose reputation—and clear glass bottle—date back to the days when the Czar of Russia was a customer. The excellent Brut Premier is worth leaving in a cellar for 5–10 years.

RUINART

THE OLDEST CHAMPAGNE house, Ruinart was founded in 1729 by a priest called Dom Ruinart. It has grown enormously since it was bought in the 1960s by Moët & Chandon but continues to enjoy great independence. The style of the wines is full-flavored and old-fashioned, and the emphasis is on Chardonnay, much of which comes from Ruinart’s vineyards. The blanc de blancs (grown on the Montagne de Reims as well as the Côte des Blancs) is especially recommendable.

SALON

THE ADJECTIVE “UNIQUE” is far too easily used these days, but it genuinely does apply to this subsidiary of Laurent-Perrier that sells only one wine: a vintage cuvée made only in the finest years. Less unusually, Salon normally chooses not to allow its wine to go through malolactic fermentation (see p27). The resulting leanness leads to the wine being released long after other houses’ wines of the same vintages have sold out. Buy Salon’s wines when you see them: they are among the best Champagne of all.

Blanc de Blancs

Leaner than most, the flavor of this Champagne lingers fascinatingly on the palate.

Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Meunier.

Fast improving, subtle non-vintage wines, Chardonnay-influenced Royal Apanage, rich Cuvée Louise.

Louise, Royal Apanage.

Krug, Mercier, Moët & Chandon, Ruinart, Veuve Clicquot.


Cristal Brut

An ultra-rich, Pinot Noir-influenced wine. The rare Cristal Rosé is great, too.

Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Meunier.

Richly approachable when young, this house’s non-vintage wines develop great complexity with time. Also a frequent success in unfashionable vintages.

Blanc de Blancs, Cristal.

Deutz, Roederer Estate/Quartet (California).


Brut

This is a first-class Champagne with rich, nutty, applepy flavor, revealing the influence of the Chardonnay.

Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Meunier.

Full-bodied but stylish Champagnes.

Blanc de Blancs, R de Ruinart, Dom Ruinart Rosé.

Moët & Chandon, Mercier, Pommery, Veuve Clicquot, Canard Duchêne, Krug.


Blanc de Blancs

Unusually austere, slow-evolving wine that is not usually sold until ready to drink.

The vintage cuvée is the only wine produced.

De Castellane, Delamotte, Lemoine, Laurent-Perrier, Joseph Perrier.


Louise

A lovely, rich and classily complex wine, Louise will certainly improve with time.

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Louise, Royal Apanage.

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Unusually austere, slow-evolving wine that is not usually sold until ready to drink.

The vintage cuvée is the only wine produced.

De Castellane, Delamotte, Lemoine, Laurent-Perrier, Joseph Perrier.


Louise

A lovely, rich and classily complex wine, Louise will certainly improve with time.
THE STILL WINES OF CHAMPAGNE

For most people, apart from those who like to use a swizzle stick to remove the bubbles from their Champagne, this region’s wines will always be sparkling whites or rosés. Bubble-free red, rosé, and white wine is, however, what this region used to produce, and is still the style of wine obstinately being made by some small estates and bigger companies under the labels of Bouzy Rouge, Rosé des Riceys, and Coteaux Champenois. The two things these wines have in common are their generally high prices and the fact that they are only worth buying in warmer vintages. Bouzy Rouge from a cool year, for example, tastes like the most aggressively unripe red Burgundy, while Coteaux Champenois made in cool conditions is more like extra-green Chablis. Unfortunately, a good vintage rarely occurs in the same village more than once in 10 years. Those who are curious to taste these wines should seek out a white wine from Lilbert-Fils and Egly-Ouriet, who also make an excellent red, and Alexandre Bonnet’s Rosé des Riceys. An interesting trend, championed by producers like Maurice Vesselle and Herbert Beaufort, is still blanc de noirs, a still white wine that is made in a way similar to Champagne, from black grapes.

Seeing Red
The village of Bouzy provides Pinot Noir grapes for top-quality Champagne, and for still red wine.
OTHERS

While a small number of “big name,” or grande marque, Champagne houses generally tend to hog the limelight, the Champagne region boasts a plethora of other producers, ranging from big coopératives to tiny family estates. The quality of their wines varies enormously, ranging from acidic and dull examples to subtle and sublime ones.

Eagle-eyed readers scanning the alphabetically organized entries of the previous pages will have noticed the absence of a number of well-known Champagne houses. Where, they might wonder, are Mumm and Mercier and Perrier-Jouet, to name three brands whose names are widely seen in glossy advertisements prior to New Year’s Eve? I make no apology for consigning these, and several other big names, to the “Others” category for the simple reason that, in my and many other critics’ opinions, their Champagnes—though, in the cases of Mumm and Perrier-Jouet, recently much improved—are just not as good as those of the producers I have covered in individual detail. Nor, significantly, are they better than some of the coopératives and smaller producers that I felt it was appropriate to include in this section.

Among the firms worth mentioning here is Groupe Lanson International, a company that is often left out of wine books because its Champagne is sold under hundreds of different labels. Not only does Groupe Lanson International own Lanson and the generally decent Besserat de Bellefon, it also sells Champagne under the Alfred Rothschild label, which is rarely seen outside France. Another firm that has swallowed other Champagne houses is Vranken, which now produces wines under its own name and others’, including Heidsieck Monopole and Demoiselle. Bruno Paillard is an up-and-coming merchant worth watching, both for its own wines and for those made by its subsidiaries Delbeck and Boizel. Ayala (recently bought by Bollinger) and de Cazanove are older firms that have improved the quality of their wines recently, as have De Venoge and Canard Duchêne, which is a subsidiary of Veuve Clicquot. De Castellane and Deutz belong respectively to Laurent-Perrier and Roederer and make reliable, good-value wines, as do some of the smaller firms such as Charles Ellner, Delamotte, Duval-Leroy, Drappier, Forget-Brimont, Hamm, Harlin, Joseph Perrier, Alexandre, and Bonnet. Coopératives that I’d recommend include the cuvée Orpale wines from the Union Champagne and wines sold under their own names by Beaumont de Crayères, Jacquart, Mailly Grand Cru, Pannier, Palmer, and Nicolas Feuillatte. Of the smaller estates, I’d choose Paul Bara, Jacques Beaufort, Chartogne-Taillat, Egly-Ouriet, Gimonnet, Margaine, Pierre Moncuit, Jacques Selosse, Jean Vesselle, and Vilmart.
Two of the most overlooked wine regions in France, Jura and Savoie offer unique flavors and styles that are not to be found anywhere else on earth.

Arbois deserves a place in the history of wine. It was here, in the late 19th century, that Louis Pasteur carried out his experiments on why grape juice turned into wine and, more specifically, why that wine so often turned into vinegar. Pasteur, who grew up here, must have been influenced by the way in which the yeast that formed on the surface of Jura and Savoie’s vins jaunes had the same effect on them as it does on fino sherry. These “yellow wines” take their name from the color they develop after they have been purposefully oxidized under a yeast flor.

Today, while the Juraciens still tend to claim that vins jaunes is their finest wine, I’d vote for the equally unusual vin de paille, a sweet white wine named after the ancient method of drying the grapes out on straw mats before fermenting their juice. Today, this wine is made in the same way as the Amarone of the Veneto region in Italy—the bunches of grapes being either hung from the rafters of huts or laid out on racks.

The Jura now focuses on producing far greater quantities of red wine, from Pinot Noir and the local Trousseau and Poulsard varieties, and dry white wine, from Savagnin and Chardonnay. However, the Jura vineyards now occupy a fraction of the 50,000 acres (20,000 ha) they covered before the arrival of phylloxera. As recently as the 1960s, this region, whose wines were praised over 2,000 years ago by Pliny, seemed in danger of giving up wine-making altogether. Rescue came in the form of a clever marketer named Henri Maire, whose firm now owns the vineyard where Pasteur conducted his experiments.

If it weren’t for the readiness of vacationers in nearby ski resorts such as Val d’Isère to be overcharged for the wines of Savoie, it is quite possible that they might also have disappeared. These light, berryish reds and rosés, made from Mondeuse, and fresh whites, which are largely produced from a variety confusingly known both as Roussette and as Altesse, are ideal après-ski fare and go perfectly with the local cheeses. They are generally quite short-lived, however, and outside Savoie they have a hard time competing with fuller-flavored wines from other French wine regions.

Unlike in most places in France, there is little variation in the quality produced in Savoie from one vintage to the next. Your best bet is to buy the most recent vintage, rather than one that has been stored for too long and allowed to lose its fruit flavor.
Château d’Arlay
This estate in Arbois produces some of the best vins de paille to be found in Jura and Savoie. These very sweet “straw wines” are made from grapes that were traditionally dried on straw mats.
TRAVELING IN JURA AND SAVOIE

Although Savoie is familiar enough to skiers, its wines and vineyards remain largely undiscovered. Jura is, if anything, even less well known. Indeed, it often feels like a hidden region tucked away between the well-trodden paths of Burgundy and Alsace. But for those adventurous enough to take the detour here, there are delights aplenty.

HOTELS & RESTAURANTS
A selection of the region’s best establishments, combining good local food and wine with notable, characterful places to stay.

JURA

ARBOIS
Hotel des Messageries, 2 Rue de Courcelles.
03 84 66 13 43
FAX 03 84 37 41 09
hotel.desmessageries@wanadoo.fr
A modestly comfortable, friendly old post house in the heart of this charming town. There is no restaurant, but there is a pleasant terrace on which to enjoy an aperitif before walking to La Balance—Mets et Vins (see below)

La Balance—Mets et Vins, 47 Rue de Courcelles.
03 84 37 45 00
As the name suggests, this is a great place to explore the way local Jura wines go with a wide range of dishes—and the role they can play in the kitchen. Try one of the menus dégustations.

Jean-Paul Jeunet, Le Paris, 9 Rue de l’Hotel de Ville.
03 84 66 05 67
Competes with Château de Germigney (see below) for the prize of top restaurant in this region. Terrific local cooking is served alongside a very impressive range of wines.

PORT-LESNEY
Château de Germigney, Rue Edgar Faure.
03 84 73 85 85
FAX 03 84 73 88 88
germigney@relaischateaux.com
An 18th-century manor house surrounded by lakes and woodland (watch out for falling chestnuts in the fall), this lovely country hotel is decorated in a way that is at once traditional and modern. The restaurant similarly boasts both lighter modern dishes and traditional examples prepared with the local vin jaune.

SAVOIE

ANNECY
Hôtel du Palais de l’Isle, 13 Rue Perrière.
04 50 45 86 87
FAX 04 50 51 87 15
A handsome 18th-century private house on the Thiou River and close to the Palace. The best rooms are furnished with furniture by Philippe Starck.

CHAMBERY
Hôtel de la Banche, Place de l’Hôtel de Ville.
04 79 33 15 62
Located on a pedestrianized square close to the old town, this friendly, inexpensive hotel serves as an ideal base for visitors to the Savoie region. The restaurant is good, too, especially if you like frog legs.

Le Bourget-du-Lac
Ombremont, Le Bourget-du-Lac.
04 79 25 00 23
FAX 04 79 25 25 77
ombremont@relaischateaux.com
As its name suggests, this cozy 1900’s villa overlooks the Lac du Bourget, and is close to both Chambéry and Aix-les-Bains. There are only 12 rooms, so booking is definitely advisable if you’re planning to stay. The highlights of the restaurant menu are the fish dishes, which offer perfect accompaniments to a wide range of local wines.

WINE SHOPS
Many of the wines you will taste while in the Jura and Savoie region are difficult to find at home, so it’s a good idea to stock up on your favorites while you’re here.

JURA

ARBOIS
Les Jardins de St-Vincent, 49 Grande Rue.
03 84 66 21 75
This retailer has an impressive range of wines from across the Jura region, to suit all tastes and budgets.

VILLARD DE LANS
Le Tonnelle, 18 Rue du Camp-d’Ambel.
04 76 95 19 05
Le Tonnelle is well-stocked shop with over 200 wines, including a good range of Savoies.

MUSEUMS

Some producers in this region offer vineyard or winery tours. Local tourist offices (see below) can provide details of these.
Of all France’s regions, Jura and Savoie are indisputably among the most worth visiting—for the simple reason that their wines are very hard to find elsewhere in France, let alone overseas. One particularity of Arbois is the opportunity to sample wines that have been left to mature in the cellars of their producers.

**FEBRUARY**

Poligny La Percée du Vin Jaune—annual tasting of the latest release (after six years in the barrel) of *vins jaunes* made by some 75 producers in 50 cellars

**JULY**

Arbois Les Festi’caves—an annual festival, held in Arbois, celebrating food and music

Arbois Les Petites Fetes de Dyonisos—a gastronomic and literary fair held in Arbois, focusing on mythology

**SEPTEMBER**

Arbois, Pupillin and Vadans Fete du Biou—a series of picturesque fairs held in the wine-producing communes; the highlight of the colorful parades is a huge bunch of grapes called the “biou”

Arbois Vendezanges à l’Ancienne—a harvest festival set around the Château Pécauld

Montmélian Qu’ara Bara—a 700-year-old festival of farming, local crafts, gastronomy, and wine

**OCTOBER**

Belley Entretiens de Belley—another harvest festival

### ANNUAL WINE EVENTS

**OTHER INFORMATION**

**JURA**

Comité Interprofessionnel des Vins du Jura, Château Pécauld, BP 41, 39600 Arbois.

Office de Tourisme Val de la Cuisance, 10 Rue de l’Hôtel de Ville, Arbois.

**SAVOIE**

Comité Régional du Tourisme Rhône-Alpes, 104 Route de Paris, Charbonnières-les-Bains.

### WEBSITES

The website of the local wine producers’ association of Jura is at www.jura-vins.com. There is also a very comprehensive site representing a cooperative close to Château-Chalon—www.fruitiere-vinicole-voiteur.fr—although this does provide much more information in French than in English. The local tourist association also has a very well-laid-out and informative website at www.arbois.com.

For information about the wine producers of the Savoie region, the best place to start is www.chez.com/vinsavoie/institutions.htm. For general tourist information, there are also two excellent local websites provided by Savoie’s tourist offices: www.france-rhonealps-tourism.com and www.haute-savoie-tourism.com.

Alternatively, you can log on to the tourist website for the whole of France at www.tourisme.fr and type in the name of any town or village in Jura or Savoie about which you would like to learn more.
A Hidden Treasure
Tucked away in the hills, the small town of Arbois is surrounded by sloping vineyards. Grape varieties are grown here that are found almost nowhere else in France.

This once-important wine-making region enjoys a climate of its own that is less sheltered than that of Alsace and more continental than that of nearby Burgundy, the region to which it was once attached. Winter is bitterly cold here, and although summer and fall can be warm, grapes often have a tough time ripening. Wine-making is also often much poorer than it ought to be, with heaviness and staleness being all too easy to find. While it is generally believed that the best wines of the region are to be found within the appellations of Château Chalon (see p185) and L’Étoile (see p186), similar wines made by good estates in Arbois can be of a very similar quality. The red and rosé wines that are made from the Pinot Noir grape variety compete with red Burgundy (see pp130–131), while those made from the local Poulsard and Trousseau grapes can, when allowed to maintain their freshness, be quite berryish and spicy. White wines made from Savagnin, a local grape variety that is both unrelated to and quite unlike Sauvignon Blanc, come in three styles: the very sherrylike, intentionally oxidized vin jaune, the somewhat sherrylike, unintentionally oxidized white Arbois, and the Recioto-like, raisiny vin de paille that is made from grapes that have been dried to concentrate their juice, before being aged for up to four years in wood. Wines from the village of Pupillin fall under Arbois’ own supposedly, though often unconvincingly, superior villages appellation. Good producers of Arbois, such as the Fruitière Vinicole d’Arbois and the Domaines Rolet and Puffeney, are leading a trend toward fresher-tasting reds and whites. However, there are plenty of bottles, including the large number offered by the dynamic merchant Henri Maire, credited with rescuing this region from near extinction, which, unfortunately, show no such spark.
Named after the hilltop village rather than an estate, Château Chalon's vins jaunes are produced from Savagnin grapes grown on limestone and marl soil. Wines bearing the Château Chalon label must be aged for at least 75 months in sealed, partially filled casks, during which time they develop their yeasty flavor and a sherrylike character. The special 62-cl "clavelin" bottle used for all Château Chalon supposedly represents the amount of vin jaune produced from one liter of base wine.

**CHÂTEAU CHALON**

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**CÔTES DU JURA**

THIS ISOLATED REGION has retained traditional grape varieties and methods of wine-making in its use of Poulard, Trousseau, and Pinot Noir for red wines and Savagnin and Chardonnay for its whites. Styles include lightly fruity reds and rosés, nutty dry whites, sparkling wines, and sherrylike vins jaunes. The most interesting wines are probably the sweet vins de paille that are made from grapes dried to concentrate their juice, before being aged for up to four years in wooden casks.

**BUGEY**

The vineyards of Bugey are scattered from Bourg-en-Bresse to Ambérieu, and along the eastern bank of the Rhône River from Seyssel to Lagnieu. The vines are planted on limestone soil, with red, white, and rosé wines being made under the Vin du Bugey VDQS or, in the case of Virieu-le-Grand, Manicole, Montagnieu, Machuraz, and Cerdon, with the name of the village. Of the varietal wines, the Gamay produces vibrant, easy-going reds, while Pinot Noir yields a pale imitation of Burgundy. The most interesting Bugey wines are the deeply colored, slightly bitter reds made from the Mondeuse. The rosés, made mainly from the Gamay or Pinot Noir, are light and fresh, while the whites are light, fresh, and off-dry. The VDQS can also be used for sparkling wines.

Underrated vineyards

The region of Bugey produces attractive, light VDQS wines that can be better than appellation contrôlée wines from elsewhere.
CRÉPY
Like many of the wines produced in neighboring Switzerland, the wines of Crépy are made from Chasselas Roux and Vert. They are light, floral, and slightly spritzy. Liked by skiers, they carry price tags to match. There is much debate as to whether these wines should be allowed to go through malolactic fermentation (see p.27). Those that don’t are dry, crisp, and fruity, with a slight spritz. Those that do are fuller-bodied and almondy, and can be kept for a year or two.

Grande Cave de Crépy
This is a crisp, dry wine with a touch of fizz and a slightly almondy note.

L’ÉTOILE
This tiny appellation lies in the centre of the Jura, just north of Lons-le-Saunier and beside a little village called Le Pin—which, given the success of the Bordeaux château of that name, ought to help sales. Most of the wine from the appellation’s 175 acres (70 ha) is made by the local coopérative. There is potentially good vin jaune, light, herbal whites made from Chardonnay, Savagnin, or Poulard, and a Côtes du Jura méthode traditionelle made from the same three grape varieties.

Château l’Étoile
This is a light, dry white whose aromas reveal notes of herbs and bracken.

VIN DE SAVOIE
The vin de savoie appellation is made up of a diverse series of separate areas, mostly on scree slopes or glacial moraine. Some villages are allowed to add their name to the appellation for their red, white, or rosé wines, which can be made from a range of grapes. In general, whites whose labels don’t refer to Roussette, Altesse, or Bergeron will be made from Jacquère, a late-ripening variety that makes Savoie’s lightest wine. This does not apply to the villages of Marignan, Marin, and Ripaille, where the Chasselas is used. Altesse is also known as Roussette and used for its own appellation, Roussette de Savoie. The Mondeuse grape is used for reds in the communes of Chautagne, Cruet, Jongieux, and St Jean de la Porte. The Vin de Savoie appellation can also be applied to a number of sparkling wines.

Louis Magnin
This Chignin Bergeron, made from the Jacquère grape, is one of the most refreshing light white wines in France.

Mountain Fresh
The light white wines produced in this vineyard next to the Lac St André are ideal après-ski fare.
SEYSSEL

OF ALL THE SAVOIE APPELLATIONS, this is arguably the most interesting, offering quite different still and sparkling whites from vineyards between the villages of Anglefort and Chanay. The still wines are made largely from Chasselas, but are given an extra floral character by the presence of at least 10 percent of Roussette, whose origins are said to be in this area. The sparkling wines of the appellation, in which Chasselas and Roussette are used as supporting actors to the local Molette variety, are far better known than the still wines. Examples include the vintage Royal Seyssel Cuvée Privée, which is at once elegant and biscuity—like fine Champagne, but with more flowers and less fruit. Both the sparkling and the still styles of Seyssel make excellent accompaniments to the local specialty, raclette.

Maison Mollex
A fresh example of the Roussette grape from one of the most reliable producers in the region.

Source of Bubbles
Many of the best grapes from these vineyards will probably be used for sparkling wine.

OTHERS

THE CRÉMANT DU JURA SPARKLING WINE, made from a mixture of Savagnin, Pinot Blanc, and Chardonnay, is potentially delicious and good value if you pick a producer such as Grand Frères. The most distinctive “other” wine of the region has to be the Macvin de Jura, which stands firmly apart from all of France’s red and white wines as a historic curiosity. Like Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise, Banyuls, and Rasteau, it counts as a vin doux naturel—but it lacks the rich, fruity appeal of those wines, and offers instead a taste (an acquired taste, one might say) of the distant past. Its production process involves the cooking of the juice of Savagnin grapes until half or more of the liquid has evaporated. The boiled and unfermented juice is then fortified with local brandy and flavored with herbs and spices. The result, which is technically questionable as “wine” because of the lack of fermentation, is left to mature in a cask for six years and tastes a little like vermouth. This truly original method is believed to have been devised by the nuns of the abbey of Château Chalon in the 9th century. The Domaine Bourdy, which makes the best examples of Macvin, uses a recipe from 1579.
LANGUEDOC-ROUSSILLON
Languedoc-Roussillon

Until recently the sleeping giant of the wine world, this region—the largest area of vineyards on the planet—is now producing some really great wines.

The first thing to mention about this region is its size. The vineyards cover over 740,300 acres (300,000 ha), three times as much as those of Bordeaux. This is the source of one in 10 bottles of the world’s wine, and one in three bottles of French wine.

Until recently, however, Languedoc-Roussillon was rarely mentioned in wine books. The explanation is simple: very little of the wine produced here carried the essential words *appellation contrôlée* on its labels. In fact, much of the annual harvest was either sold in returnable bottles or dispatched direct to the subsidized European wine lake.

French and Euro-bureaucrats would gladly have seen most of the non-*appellation* vineyards being converted into orchards, but a few dynamic individuals had other plans. Men like Robert Skalli of Fortant de France and an Englishman called James Herrick, who had made his fortune in wine in Australia, realized that Languedoc-Roussillon had a good climate and plentiful land. What it lacked were internationally popular grape varieties and the skills required to turn them into commercial wines. So thousands of hectares of Chardonnay, Merlot, Sauvignon Blanc, Viognier, Syrah, and Cabernet Sauvignon were planted, while overseas buyers sent wine-makers into the *coopératives* to oversee the harvest and fermentation processes. The effect was superficially dramatic. Within a few years, the shelves were filled with varietal *vins de pays* that competed directly with their counterparts from the New World.

Unfortunately, while the best of these wines were good, far too many were unimpressive, lacking both the fruity intensity of the New World and the complexity traditionally associated with France. The biggest handicap here probably lies in the limited aspirations of the region’s wine-growers—even some of the most important ones. While the outsider Aimé Guibert of Mas de Daumas Gassac had the temerity to try to make a *Vin de Pays de l’Hérault* that would sell for the price of a good Bordeaux, many of his neighbors still fail to make the most of either their vines or their grapes.

Among the *appellations*, matters are just as confused. Some areas, like Banyuls (see p194), Collioure (see p194), Maury (see p198), Faugères (see p197), St Chinian (see p201), and Pic-St Loup in the Coteaux du Languedoc (see p196), have proven that they can make wines of great quality. Elsewhere,
Land of Promise
After centuries of being regarded as a source of cheap bulk wine, to be served from jugs or blended with products of other parts of France, Languedoc-Roussillon, the largest single wine region in the world, is finally beginning to develop its potential.

though, big appellations such as Corbières (see p195) and Minervois (see p199) cover land whose potential ranges from fine to decidedly ordinary. If Languedoc-Roussillon had received the same attention as, say, Bordeaux and Burgundy, the best sub-regions would have been far more clearly identified a long time ago. As it is, you are far better off buying a vin de pays from a good producer than trusting an appellation.

Heading to Port
Mas Amiel’s rich, darkly luscious Maury is one of France’s most impressive fortified wines, and one that easily stands up to comparisons with many vintage ports.
Well known as a perfect destination for those who appreciate the combination of sun, sea, and savage landscapes, this vast southern region is also a great place to go wine exploring, for the simple reason that it is packed full of unexpected and exciting wines—both traditional and novel—just waiting to be discovered.

TRAVELING IN LANGUEDOC-ROUSSILLON

HOTELS & RESTAURANTS
A selection of the region's best establishments, offering good local food and wine, and notable, characterful places to stay.

AGDE
Le Numero Vin,
2 Place de la Marine.
0 4 67 00 20 20
As the name suggests, wine is the focus at this restaurant close to one of the Languedoc's leading seaside resorts, and its list is among the best in the area. But the food is definitely up to snuff, too, with plenty of imaginatively prepared dishes using local seafood and herbs.

AIGUES-MORTES
les Arcades,
23 Boulevard Gambetta.
0 4 66 53 81 13
FAX 0 4 66 53 75 46
www.les-arcades.com
Within the city walls, but on a quieter (everything is relative in tourist season here) street, this is a very chic hotel whose decor makes great use of Provençal colors. The food is some of the best—and most innovative—in town (try the zucchini flowers stuffed with seafood) and the rooftop pool and terrace offer a welcome haven from the camera-toting masses.

BANYULS-DELS-ASPRES
Domaine de Nidolières.
0 4 68 05 81 47
FAX 0 4 68 05 85 80
A very well-kept secret among the wine fraternity, this is an unprepossessing country inn tucked away in the vineyards, serving absurdly generous portions of authentic local food. Plan to take a very long walk after your meal.

BIZE-MINERVois
La Bastide de Cabezac,
18 Hameau Cabezac.
0 4 68 46 66 10
FAX 0 4 68 46 66 29
www.labastidecabezac.com
A tastefully modernized 18th-century coaching inn with a very tranquil feel and a restaurant whose chef makes inventive use of the local seafood and herbs. This is a good place to explore new-wave Minervois wines.

Carcassonne
Hotel du Donjon–les Remparts,
2 Rue du Comte-Roger.
0 4 68 71 08 80
FAX 0 4 68 25 06 60
www.hotel-donjon.fr
An impeccably converted medieval building, right in the heart of this walled city that looks precisely like the set of a Hollywood movie. The restaurant is recommendable, too. A place to enjoy out of season.

COLLIouRE
Hostellerie des Templiers,
Quai de l'Amirauté.
0 4 68 82 98 31
FAX 0 4 68 98 01 24
www.hotel-templiers.com
Part hotel, part art gallery, the Hostellerie boasts an extraordinary collection of over 2,000 works of art by the likes of Dufy, Picasso, Dali, and Matisse, who all paid their bills in kind. The decor is comfortable rather than luxurious, and prices are very affordable—especially when you consider that you may be spending the night with a masterpiece. Enjoy the seafood on the terrace overlooking the pretty little port.

Cucugnan
l'Auberge de Cucugnan,
2 Place de la Fontaine.
0 4 68 45 40 84
FAX 0 4 68 45 01 52
An old inn in a village surrounded by Cathar (see below) castles. Comfortable rooms and hearty local cooking.

Montpellier – les Beaux-Arts
Le Jardin des Sens,
11 Avenue St Lazare.
0 4 99 58 38 38
www.jardindessens.com
Affordable Delights
Often far less extravagantly priced than their counterparts in Provence, the restaurants of Languedoc-Roussillon are often every bit as fine.

Many regions
One of the most famous gastronomic meccas in the region. Reserve early, especially if you want to stay in one of the dozen rooms. The food is impeccably and imaginatively cooked in ways that introduce North African and Asian influences far more successfully than is often the case in “fusion” cuisine.

**MONTSÉGUR**

Hotel-Restaurant Costes, 52 Rue Principale.

05 61 01 10 24

montsegur.com/costes.htm

If you liked *The Da Vinci Code*, pack a copy of Sophy Burnham’s *The Treasure of Montségur* when you come here. It’s a great novel about a treasure that was said—by the Cathars, a medieval religious sect who died for this kind of belief—to prove that Christ did not die on the cross but traveled with Magdelen, his wife (and mother of his child), to Languedoc. The hotel is a friendly, modest country inn, offering basic accommodation and simple food at fair prices.

**SÉTE**

Le Grand Hotel, 17 Quai de Tassigny.

04 67 74 71 77

04 67 74 29 27


With views of the main canal in this too-often overlooked town, this attractive old building is less of a “Grand Hotel” than it sounds. But it is a great base to use when touring the region. Eat in local seafood restaurants, but enjoy breakfast in the covered courtyard.

**WINE SHOPS**

Many of the wines from this region are hard to find at home, so stock up while you’re here.

**BÉZIERS**

Clos St–Gabriel, Avenue Joseph Lazare.

04 67 62 54 12

Philippe Catusse is an enthusiast for the wines of this region—and most other parts of France.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>ANNUAL WINE EVENTS</strong></th>
<th><strong>SEPTMBER</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As this region’s wines gain in prestige and visitors discover the previously often-overlooked appeal of its villages and towns, Languedoc-Roussillon has developed a growing number of fairs and festivals. Recent additions as these are, most of them happily retain their local character.</td>
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<td><strong>OCTOBER</strong></td>
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<td>Banyuls harvest festival—improbably, perhaps, the annual celebration of this rich, sweet wine includes a giant barbecue on the beach; the alcoholic strength of the Banyuls may prove welcome if the weather is chilly</td>
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**MONTPELLIER**

La Cave des Arceaux, 7 Rue Marigoë.

04 67 92 44 84

Frédéric Jeanjean’s recently launched shop offers over 400 wines from this region and some well-chosen examples from other parts of southern France.

Les Caves Notre Dame, 41 Rue de l’Aiguillerie.

04 67 60 56 76

A chain of three shops in Montpellier (the others are at 961 Rue de la Croix de Lavit and 1348 Avenue de la Mer) that offer a good range of local wines.

**MUSEUMS**

Some producers offer vineyard or winery tours. Contact tourist offices (see below) for details.

**LÉZIGNAN-CORBIÈRES**

Le Musée de la Vigne et du Vin, 3 rue de Turgot.

04 68 27 07 57

In the heart of Corbières, this 30-year-old museum offers an insight into the way wine used to be made in this region, and the often very different way it is produced today.

**NARBONNE**

Musée de la Vigne et du Vin à Narbonne.

Domaine de l’Hospitalet, Route Narbonne Plage.

04 68 45 34 47.

04 68 45 23 49

An impressive exhibition in a cellar carved into the rock. The focus here is on the “golden age” of Languedoc wine-making that ended in 1907 with riots by the region’s producers. The old photographs are fascinating.

**WEBSITES**


**OTHER INFORMATION**

The Comité Régional du Tourisme Languedoc Roussillon—“La Septimanie”—Le Milléniaire II, 417 Rue Samuel Morse, Montpellier.

04 67 22 81 00

04 67 64 47 48
BANYULS

If patriotic Frenchmen drink vin jaune as a Gallic alternative to sherry, they can also enjoy Banyuls’ wine instead of tawny port. The four communes of Banyuls-sur-Mer, Cerbère, Collioure, and Port Vendres form Banyuls, France’s most southern appellation. The grape that grows best on the thin, acidic soil here is Grenache, which must make up at least 75 percent of all Banyuls Grand Cru. Banyuls’ red, white, rosé, and tawny wines are all vins doux naturels, with the reds being the most famous. Aged in oak for 30 months, red Banyuls smells of raisins, coffee, stewed fruit, and almonds and can last for 40 years. While some Banyuls wines take on an oxidized, rancio character, others, protected from the air to preserve their fruitiness, are known as rimages.

Domaine du Mas Blanc

Domaine du Mas Blanc’s Cuvée de la St Martin is one of the finest examples of Banyuls’ famous fortified wines.

Sunbathing in Banyuls

Like many of the world’s best fortified wines, Banyuls wine benefits from being warmed by the sun during production.

CABARDÈS

Every year, millions of vacationers pass this recently recognized appellation as they drive along the freeway north of Carcassonne. There are plenty of ambitious producers, but defining the style of Cabardès is tricky, because this is a schizophrenic appellation. Some wines are Bordeaux-like and based on Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot (and sometimes labeled “Vent d’Ouest”), while others (possibly labeled Vent d’Est) lean more toward the Rhône. Try before you buy.

Château Constance

The quality of this wine is higher than that of many others found in Cabardès.

COLLIoure

Collioure is unfortified Banyuls, or vice versa. These two appellations share the same steep, narrow terraces around the pretty seaside town and artists’ colony of Collioure and the villages of Port-Vendres, Banyuls-sur-Mer, and Cerbère. Most Collioure is full-bodied red, made from Grenache Noir and Mourvèdre, blended with Carignan, Cinsault, and Syrah. As the Carignan is phased out and less well-situated vineyards are replaced with orchards, the quality of Collioure is improving.

Dominne la Tour Vieille

The Cuvée Puig Oriol from this estate is a powerful, long-lived red wine.
11 separate unofficial vineyard zones have been identified. Following the success of the La Livinière subregion in Minervois, it is likely that some of these will be officially recognized. Unfortunately, even within these zones there can be huge variations in both altitude and climate. To date, some of the region’s best wines have been produced in Lézignan and Alaric in the north of the region, in Boutenac in the center, and on the hills of Termenes in the southwest. Sigean, located on the Mediterranean coast, also produces good wines, although this hilly area is probably the most varied of all the 11 zones.

Skilled producers, who focus on using the grapes from the Syrah and old Carignan vines planted on limestone soil (especially in Boutenac), make wines with rich, ripe, fruity flavors and enough structure to make them worth keeping for a few years. It has, however, been too easy to sell dull examples of Corbières to those who have not yet tasted the better Vins de Pays d’Oc (see p279) from the same region. Today, over 90 percent of Corbières is red, but some of its better-made dry whites, made from grapes including Muscat, Vermentino, Marsanne and Roussanne, are worth trying.

Château d’Aguilhar
The rugged countryside that surrounds Château d’Aguilhar has changed little over the years.
COSTIÈRES DE NÎMES
Wines from the pebbly vineyards of Costières de Nîmes, located between the Rhône and Languedoc regions, have had a good reputation since Roman times. In the last century, most of the area’s predominantly Carignan grapes were used to make basic red wines. Then, in the 1980s, ambitious estate owners fought to attain promotion from VDQS to appellation status, and changed the name of the appellation from Costières du Gard to Costières de Nîmes. Today, Costières de Nîmes covers 24 communes from Beaucaire to Vauvert along the Rhône, and, although a token amount of white wine is made, most of the wines made here are red or rosé. Carignan still contributes up to 40 percent of the blend, but the Grenache and Syrah, which form at least 25 percent of the blend, are increasingly prevalent.

Rich Costières de Nîmes wine like this is a good alternative to the pricier wines of the Rhône’s Crozes-Hermitage and St Joseph.

Ready for the Harvest
Rain is fortunately not often a problem in this southern region of France, but it pays to be prepared.

COTEAUX DU LANGUEDOC
These vineyards on the hills and the great plain of the Languedoc had already been established by the Greeks by the time Julius Caesar conquered Gaul. In fact, wine-makers back in Rome were so impressed by the wines of this area that they unsuccessfully attempted to curtail competition from them. In the 18th century, Languedoc’s wines flourished once again, before being struck by phylloxera in the 1880s. Today, Languedoc is seen as one of the most exciting wine-making areas in France, with its whites and rosés, which rely on technical wine-making, often providing better value than wines from Provence. One commune which is showing great potential is Pic St Loup, where wine-makers like l’Hortus are making wines that outclass many a Châteauneuf-du-Pape (see p251).
**Mediterranean Vines**

Many of Fitou’s vineyards are near the sea, but the best wines are made from grapes grown on slopes farther inland. The oldest appellation in Languedoc-Roussillon, Fitou is divided into two zones that both border Corbières (see p.195). The smaller zone lies around the coastal town of Fitou, while the larger’s vineyards dominate the land between Villeneuve-les-Corbières and Tuchan. Although the communes here can produce Rivesaltes vins doux naturels, most of the wines are reds, made mainly from Carignan blended with Grenache, Lladoner Pelut, Mourvèdre and Syrah. However, Carignan tends to produce dull wines unless the vines are old and yields are modest. Recently, wine production has been a problem here, with many producers coasting along on the success they enjoyed in the 1980s. These wines should be herb-flavored, taking on a wild, spicy character after four or five years, but Fitou that is worth aging is a rare find now.

**Faugères**

Until about 20 years ago, despite being one of the areas of southern France with the greatest potential for making great red wine, Faugères was surprisingly sidelined into producing Muscats and eaux-de-vie. Today, the steeply sloping foothills of the Cévennes, a mountainous corner of the Herault between St Chinian and Cabrières, are planted with Carignan, Cinsault, Grenache, Lladoner Pelut, Mourvèdre and Syrah vines. Apart from a small amount of dry rosé, almost all of the wine produced here is red. The best examples, like those of the well-established Domaine Alquier and the relative newcomer Michel Louison’s Château des Estanilles, are rich, full-bodied and spicy, with enough structure to reward several years of bottle aging. For those on a tighter budget, Cave Coopérative de Laurens produces good, inexpensive wines.

**Well-Sited Vineyards**

Faugères’ sloping vineyards offer the perfect location for grapes to ripen and develop rich, deep flavors.

**Gilbert Alquier**

One of the pioneers of modern Faugères, the Domaine Alquier makes some of the finest reds of the appellation.

**Faugères**

AC Faugères.

Red: Carignan, Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre.

Full-bodied, spicy, often rustic reds.

Ch des Adouzes, Gilbert Alquier, Ch Chenaie, Ch des Estanilles, Ch Grézan, Cave Coopérative de Laurens, la Liquière, de Météore, Moulin Coudere, des Peyregran, du Rouge Gorge, St Antonin.

Gamme pâté.


2–4 years.

**Fitou**

The oldest appellation in Languedoc-Roussillon, Fitou is divided into two zones that both border Corbières (see p.195). The smaller zone lies around the coastal town of Fitou, while the larger’s vineyards dominate the land between Villeneuve-les-Corbières and Tuchan. Although the communes here can produce Rivesaltes vins doux naturels, most of the wines are reds, made mainly from Carignan blended with Grenache, Lladoner Pelut, and Syrah. However, Carignan tends to produce dull wines unless the wines are old and yields are modest. Recently, wine production has been a problem here, with many producers coasting along on the success they enjoyed in the 1980s. These wines should be herb-flavored, taking on a wild, spicy character after four or five years, but Fitou that is worth aging is a rare find now.

**Château L’Espigne**

This Fitou has an unusually rich flavor and a level of complexity that is seldom found in this appellation.

**Mediterranean Vines**

Many of Fitou’s vineyards are near the sea, but the best wines are made from grapes grown on slopes farther inland.

**Fitou**

AC Fitou.

Red: Carignan, Grenache, Mourvèdre, Syrah.

Medium- to full-bodied reds.

Ch l’Espigne, Lepaumier, Lerys, Ch de Nouvelles, Maîtres Vignerons de Cascastel, Cave Pilote de Villeneuve-les-Corbières, Mont Tauch, de la Rochelierre, de Rolland, Val d’Orbieu (Vignerons de la Méditerranée).

Pigeon simmered with onions.


3–4 years.
LIMOUX

According to the Limouxins, Limoux has been producing sparkling wine since 1531, long before Dom Pérignon in Champagne. Today, three styles are produced: Blanquette Méthode Ancestrale is made from the dull Mauzac grape, while Blanquette de Limoux and Crémant de Limoux are both blends of Mauzac and Chardonnay or Chenin Blanc, with more Mauzac being used for the Blanquette. Recently, Limoux has also earned a reputation—and an appellation—for its still Chardonnay, especially the Tocques et Clochers range from the Sieur d’Arques coopérative, and fast-improving modern reds, including Baron d’Arques, a joint venture between this winery and Château Mouton-Rothschild.

MAURY

Unlike Banyuls (see p194), which appears on most French wine lists, the wines of Maury, to the south of Corbières (see p195), remain fairly unknown. This is somewhat surprising given the prestige this town’s wines enjoyed in the second century BC and the potential quality of its climate and soil. Perhaps one of the reasons for Maury’s recent fall from grace is the reliance the appellation traditionally placed on the Macabéo and Carignan grapes, which tend to produce dull wines. However, this began to change in 2000, as regulations raised the proportion of the more flavorsome Grenache to 75 percent. Like Banyuls, Maury can be fresh and light or in the form of tangy rancio, and as an aperitif or with dessert. For a taste of fine Maury, try a mature bottle from Mas Amiel.
MINERVOIS

Although often seen as Corbières’ sibling, this region, stretching across the south-facing limestone hills between St Chinian (see p201) and Carcassonne, has a character of its own. Like Corbières (see p195), Minervois has a range of environments. In the cool, rainy western area, Syrah and Grenache grow well, while in the arid heartland it is Mourvèdre that excels. The best Minervois is made in Minervois la Livinière, to the north, but elsewhere, too, quality tends to be higher than in Corbières. This is thanks to the lower proportion of Carignan, and the skill of producers such as Domaine Piccinini. Although 95 percent of Minervois is red, whites are made from Rhône and Mediterranean grape varieties.

MUSCAT APPELLATIONS

While France’s best-known fortified Muscat is from Beaumes-de-Venise, nine out of 10 bottles of vin doux naturel come from Languedoc-Roussillon’s five Muscat appellations. Of Frontignan and Mireval, coastal neighbors near Sète, Frontignan has the greater fame, thanks partly to legends citing Hercules and Thomas Jefferson as enjoying its vins doux naturels and vins de liqueurs. The wines of Mireval, however, made from Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, are often more elegant, as are the rare Muscats de Lunel. More run-of-the-mill, Muscat de Rivesaltes, made from Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains or Muscat d’Alexandrie, differs greatly from the blended wines of Rivesaltes. Also look for the appealing, apricoty Muscat de St Jean-de-Minervois.

Domaine Piccinini

This estate has been one of the pioneers of the “La Livinière” region.

Gorge de la Cesse

The landscape in this large region, ranging from hot, limestone slopes in the heartland to rugged mountains in the west, is among the most varied in southern France.

MUSCAT APPELLATIONS

Muscat

Fortified Muscat, like this Muscat de Rivesaltes, should taste like a mixture of fresh grapes and marmalade.

Château de la Peyrade

Most of France’s fortified Muscats are made by coopératives, but some estates, like Château de la Peyrade, also produce top-class Muscat.

AC Minervois.

Red: Carignan, Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre.
White/rose: Grenache Blanc, Bourboulenc, Macabéo.

Full-bodied, dry reds. Dry whites. Dry, fruity rosés.

Ch Domerque, Fabas, Ch de Gourguaud, Ch de Lariou, Ch Maris, Ch les Ollieux, d’Oupia, Ch les Palais, Paraza, Piccinini, Ste Eulalie, la Tour-Boïste, Ch Villemontbert-Julien.

Ragout of veal.

Red: 3–5 years.
White/rose: 1 year.

AC Muscat de Frontignan, AC Muscat de St Jean-de-Minervois, AC Muscat de Lunel, AC Muscat de Mireval, AC Muscat de Rivesaltes.

White: Muscats Blanc et Rosé à Petits Grains, Muscat Doré de Frontignan, Muscat d’Alexandrie.

White vins doux naturels.

Cazes, de Cornella, Delteur-Grousset, Força Real, de Jau, Lacoste, Mas Llara, Nouvelles, Ch de la Peyrade, Sarda-Malet.

Lemon and raisin cheesecake.

Mainly non vintage.

1–3 years.
ROUSSILLON

Best-known as half of Languedoc-Roussillon, this large area has yet to create an independent identity for itself—despite the proven potential of some of its vineyards. However, new grape varieties are being introduced, wine-making is improving dramatically, and the quality of some individual communes is steadily being established.

Wine-making in Roussillon probably dates back to the 7th century BC, when vines were imported by Greeks who were attracted to the area by the minerals to be found on the Catalan coast. The vines continued to thrive during the Middle Ages, when the sweet wine they produced was known as “Vin d’Espagne.” The mountain ranges on three sides of the vineyards form a natural amphitheater that shelters the vines. To the north there are Les Corbières, and to the west Le Canigou and Les Albères, which form the frontier with Spain. With more than 2,550 hours of sunshine a year, this is France’s sunniest region, and the ripening of grapes is not the problem it is elsewhere. Vintages of Roussillon rarely vary, since the climate is generally fairly consistent.

Although Roussillon has a longer history of vine growing than neighboring Languedoc, it still somehow seems to be striving for its own regional identity. The area’s two main appellations for still, dry wines are the Côtes du Roussillon and the Côtes du Roussillon-Villages. The Côtes du Roussillon covers an area of about 12,350 acres (5,000 ha) for red, white, and rosé wines, while the Côtes du Roussillon-Villages is limited to red wines from 25 villages located along the Agly River (of which Caramany and Latour-de-France are allowed to add their names to the wine’s label). While Carignan is still the dominant grape, quality has improved in the area as the percentage of the Syrah and Mourvèdre varieties has been increased. Either of these grapes must now comprise 20 percent of the final blend. As for Carignan, this often performs best when producers use the macération carbonique process to extract as much fruitiness as possible from this potentially dull grape.

White wines are still forced by regulations to use a high percentage of the Maccabéo and Malvoisie varieties, while no more than 50 percent of the more flavorsome Grenache Blanc, Roussanne, Marsanne, or Vermentino grapes may be used. Luckily for the consumer, wine-makers sometimes find that their hands slip while they are preparing the blends.

Domaine Gauby

Domaine Gauby is an excellent estate whose wines prove that subtle, elegant wines can be produced in this region.
ST CHINIAN

ST CHINIAN gained its appellation status in 1982, although its potential to produce great red wine was recognized as early as 1300. Located in the Hérault, north of Narbonne and northwest of Béziers, St Chinian encompasses 20 villages. The high altitude here and the schistous and gravelly, chalky soil help to make wines that are lighter and more elegant, but often less interesting than those of neighboring Faugères (see p.197). However, producers like Domaine Canet-Valette, the Châteaux Cazal-Viel, and Coujan and the coopérative at Roquebrun are making interesting cherryish wines while preserving the appellation’s natural finesse. Both the reds and the rosés are made primarily from Syrah, Carignan, Grenache, Cinsault, and Mourvèdre.

Clos Bagatelle
This estate produces spicy wines that develop well after four or five years in the cellar.

Autumn Gold
One of the best times to visit St Chinian is in the few weeks following the harvest, when the vines’ leaves have turned to shades of copper and gold.

OTHERS

Of the other appellations of Languedoc-Roussillon, two that deserve to be left on the shelf are Clairette de Bellegarde and Clairette du Languedoc. Made, as their name suggests, from the Clairette grape, the best that can be said for these wines is that they offer a taste of the past. Unfortunately, the past was a time when people enjoyed drinking white wines that had little flavor in their youth and a tremendous propensity for oxidation. Although it is only the existence of appellations like these that prevents the Clairette grape from becoming an endangered species, I can see no good reason why anyone would actually choose to use it in the production of classic, dry white wines like Clairette de Bellegarde. The sweet, dry, fortified, and unfortified Clairette du Languedoc rancio wines are much more interesting alternatives.

Typically, while the dull white Clairettes have appellation status, the light but pleasantly flavored reds of the Côtes de la Malepère and the Côtes de Millau all still have only VDQS status. Of these, the former taste like a cross between Côtes du Rhône (see pp.254–5) and basic Bordeaux (see p.93), while the latter are more like a blend of Côtes du Rhône and Beaujolais (see pp.126–7).

Château Malviès
This château is one of the leaders in a move to produce more fruity Côtes de la Malepère wines.

Clairette de Bellegarde
Coopératives such as this one are happy to promote and sell their wines on-site.
The Loire Valley
The Loire Valley

Of all the wine regions in France, none offers a wider variety of dry, sweet, and sparkling wines to enjoy on a warm summer day than the Loire.

When it comes to marketing wine, a river can be very useful. Every year, thousands of tourists follow the Loire River as it stretches across France. As they stop for a meal and choose a local wine, though, unless they have a helpful sommelier to hand, they could find the choice a little confusing.

At the western, maritime end of the river, there are the dry, nonaromatic white wines of Muscadet (see p219). When well made, these crisply refreshing wines are the perfect partners to all kinds of seafood. Nowadays, however, wine drinkers tend to demand more flavor than the grapes used to make Muscadet are able to deliver.

Move eastward along the river and you will reach Anjou (see p214) and Saumur (see p223)—the first of which is usually associated with sugary rosé; the second, with inexpensive sparkling wine. But take a moment to look at the wine lists in restaurants here and you will see that both these appellations produce a number of much more interesting, bubble-free styles. A little farther to the east, Haut-Poitou (see p217) and Touraine (see p225) offer the chance to taste a range of wines made from Sauvignon Blanc, the variety with which the Loire Valley is most often associated. At their best, these wines have the fresh, light appeal of gooseberries, black currants, and crunchy raw vegetables. Too many of them, however, taste green and unripe. An excess of green flavors can also be a feature of the red wines of Chinon (see p216), Bourgueil, and St Nicolas de Bourgueil (see p215). However, in ripe
vintages and in the hands of skilled wine-makers, these can offer a great counterpoint to red Bordeaux.

Unfortunately, Vouvray (see p226), which showcases the versatility and longevity of Chenin Blanc, is suffering from the current lack of interest in this grape variety. Hopefully, the growing interest in sweet Chennins will bring it back into the spotlight.

At the end of our journey, we hit true Sauvignon country in the shape of Sancerre (see p222), Pouilly Fumé (see p220), Quincy (see p221), and Menetou-Salon (see p218). But even here, the Loire Valley holds surprises — like the red and rosé wines of Sancerre, made from Pinot Noir.
No one knows for sure how wine-making first began in the Loire Valley, but it seems very likely that grape vines were brought here from the areas now known as Bordeaux to the south and Burgundy to the east. The Romans occupied the area for the first four centuries AD, leaving their mark in the form of place names such as Pouilly-sur-Loire (see p220), derived from the words Paulica villa, or the villa of Paulus. Likewise, the red wine appellation of Saumur-Champigny (see p223) may take its name from the Latin campus ignis, or the fiery field, while the Porte César in Sancerre (see p222) is named after the Roman emperor Julius Caesar. Evidence that the Romans brought their wine-making technology here exists in the form of excavated kilns (used for firing terra-cotta wine amphorae) dating from the first century. By 591 AD, wine making was sufficiently established here for Bishop Gregory of Tours, in his book The History of the Franks, to describe a successful harvest and to complain that the marauding Bretons were occupying vineyards in the region we now know as Muscadet (see p219). By the 12th century, the red wine of Anjou was being shipped to England by the merchants of Angers, while large quantities of red and white wines were also exported from various parts of the region to the prosperous independent principality of Flanders. A vigorous Loire Valley wine trade continued until the middle of the 20th century, boosted by the region’s proximity to Paris, as well as to the Atlantic coast and overseas markets.

GRAPE VARIETIES
Cabernet Franc and Sauvignon Blanc vines arrived in the Loire Valley from Bordeaux between 1000 and 1500. Sauvignon Blanc, however, was not widely planted here until the 16th century, when it was introduced to what are now the appellations of Pouilly-sur-Loire, Sancerre, Quincy (see p221), and Reuilly (see p221). Despite its apparently invincible position in these appellations today, Sauvignon Blanc was, until the 18th century, less favored to the now almost-forgotten Chasselas grape, which was popular with growers because of its higher yields. It was only after the vineyards were replanted following their 19th-century...
devastation by phylloxera that Sauvignon Blanc was established as the major grape of these communes.

Also popular in the region is Melon de Bourgogne, sometimes known as Muscadet, which arrived in Anjou during the Middle Ages. By the 17th century, although banned in Burgundy, it was planted as a hardy white grape to replace existing black vines in what now corresponds to the appellation of Muscadet. With the exception of California, Melon de Bourgogne is now grown nowhere else.

Just as closely linked with the Loire Valley is Chenin Blanc. This grape is little-known elsewhere in Europe, and no one is sure of its origins, though one theory, supported by Jancis Robinson in her book *Grapes, Vines and Wines*, suggests that Chenin Blanc is native to the Loire Valley region. Whether this is true or not, it has been used to make wine here since the 15th century, and probably far longer.

**INTO THE 21ST CENTURY**

Until quite recently, the Loire was one of the few places in the world where fresh white wines could be produced with any reliability. Since then, however, the invention of equipment to control temperature during transportation and the planting of superior grape varieties in regions enjoying more favorable climates have dealt the region a hefty body blow. Although the best wines of the Loire are improving in quality, far too many are poorly made and come from over-cropped, underripe grapes. It makes little sense to buy a watery, acidic Loire Sauvignon Blanc when similarly priced, more flavorsome wines are made from the same grape in southern France, elsewhere in Europe, and in the New World. Those who have studied the recent history of the Loire Valley know that its wine regions are liable to shrink as well as grow. The vines of the once-famous wine-producing Côtes d’Auvergne district, for example, now cover only one-fiftieth of the 148,260 acres (60,000 ha) they occupied before the arrival of phylloxera.
A Driving Tour of the Loire Valley

Beginning at the city of Tours, this route takes you along various tributaries of the middle reaches of the Loire, through Vouvray, famous for its rich Chenin Blanc wines, down to Azay-le-Rideau with its elegant château and through the Cabernet Franc red wine vineyards of Chinon and Bourgueil.

TOURS

No wine lover’s visit to the Loire Valley is complete without a visit to the Musée des Vins de Touraine beneath the Église de St Juliet in Tours. Take the time, too, to explore the cathedral and to stroll around the narrow streets of the city center, which is full of well-preserved Renaissance buildings.

VOUVRAY TO CHINON

Home of the Chenin Blanc grape, Vouvray is, for many people, the quintessential town of Touraine. Here you can see many comfortable homes and well-equipped wine cellars dug by their troglodytic inhabitants from the chalk hills. Among many great producers here, I particularly recommend Philippe Foreau, Domaine Huët, and Domaine des Aubuisières. Take a break from wine to visit the extravagantly beautiful Renaissance château of Chenonceaux. Here you can imagine chivalrous interludes on the three-story bridge that straddles the Cher River, a tributary of the Loire, and ponder the unashamed acres of cellulite in the Rubens’ paintings that hang inside. Rejoin the Loire at the richly historical town of Amboise, home to, among other things, the 18th-century Pagode de Chanteloup and a chapel said to be the final resting place of Leonardo da Vinci. Heading westward along the bank of the Loire, you will come to Montlouis-sur-Loire. For a taste of the dry, sweet, still and sparkling wines made here, visit Jacky Blot’s Domaine de la Taille aux Loups in nearby Husseau. My choice for lunch or an overnight stay is the sleepy town of Chinon, which you can reach by following the road to Esvres, Saché and Azay-le-Rideau, with its island château. From here the D757 leads to Chinon. The Domaine Couly-Dutheil is one of the largest estates in the region and its cellars here offer the chance to try wines from a variety of vineyards.

BOURGUEIL AND ST NICOLAS-DE-BOURGUEIL

The D749 will take you out of Chinon, across the Loire, and up to the villages that give their names to the red wine appellations of Bourgueil and St Nicolas-de-Bourgueil. Following a narrow road northward out of Bourgueil to the village of Chevrette, you will find a wine museum and tasting room at the Cave Touristique de la Dive Bouteille. Producer Max Cognard, who also has cellars in Chevrette, makes wines labeled variously as appellation contrôlée St...
Nicolas-de-Bourgueil or as appellation contrôlée Bourgueil, and will gladly explain the sometimes subtle differences between the two.

LANGEAIS TO LUYNES

From Bourgueil, head east to Langeais (10), where there is an unspoiled 15th-century château. Then take the D57 out of the village for half a mile or so to take advantage of a panoramic view over the river and vineyards of Bourgueil. In Cinq-Mars-la-Pile (11) is a ruined château and, at Luynes (12), the château that was once home to 17th-century churchman Cardinal Richelieu.

Historic Amboise
The Pagode de Chanteloup in the town of Amboise is all that remains of an 18th-century château. An earlier château still stands in the town, complete with the hooks used to hang political prisoners.

Dig for Victory
Like many buildings in Vouvray, this wine cellar is dug from the town’s chalky rock.
The foods that you will come across vary as you follow the Loire River toward the sea. At the eastern end of the river you will find pike stuffed with pork, and the goat's cheese that has been produced near Sancerre since the Moors brought goats here in the eighth century.

In Touraine, as elsewhere in France, meat and fish are traditionally combined in ways that might surprise modern diners. The *vol au vent d'Amboise*, for example, has little in common with the small mouthfuls bearing this name that are passed around at cocktail parties. This one measures 10 in (25 cm) across and is made with pike, scallops, veal sweetbread, morel mushrooms, truffles, cream, and eggs. Sweetbreads, a local specialty, also feature in *la beauchelle*, a pie whose ingredients also include white wine and mushrooms. Veal is often mixed with cream and mushrooms to make stuffed artichokes.

Game is also popular: partridge, pheasant, duck, and quail appear on most menus. One of the tastiest game dishes, *magrets à la Clavelière*, is a fillet of duck cooked with shallots, grapes, and Armagnac.

Fish in Abundance
Salmon, trout, carp, and pike are all caught fresh from the Loire River. In addition, the Atlantic Ocean provides local residents with a range of other fish.

Fruits de Mer
The Atlantic Ocean and the Loire River are perfect sources for a wide range of fresh shellfish. One of the best ways to serve them is simply piled high on a large platter with a slice of lemon and a glass of chilled Muscadet.
Armagnac, and Muscadet. Lièvre à la royale, an even richer dish, unites hare with foie gras, red wine, and four cloves of garlic and four shallots per person.

Among the fish dishes that you might encounter in the Loire are bass grilled in a salt crust, shad cooked with sorrel, salmon in a beurre blanc, or beurre nantais (butter, shallots and wine) sauce, and carp stuffed with mushrooms. There could also be monkfish, sole meunière, whitebait (known here as petite friture, or buisson de goujon), and chaudrée, a soup that combines fish and garlic. Often treated as delicacies elsewhere, lobster, mussels, and oysters are featured on the menus of some quite humble restaurants in and around Nantes. The wine, parsley, and mussels all go into the same pot for moules marinières, while oysters are sometimes served hot with cream and leeks.

To accompany one of the Loire’s sweet wines, try tarte tatin, a caramelized, upside-down apple tart, tarte aux poires (pear tart), gâteau nantais, made with almonds and rum, or méli-mélo de fruits rouges, a dessert of strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, black currants, red currants, Muscadet, and sugar.

### REGIONAL CHEESES

Historically, most of the cheese to be found in this region, especially around Anjou, was made from cow’s milk. However, goat’s cheeses such as the Crottin de Chavignol are found close to the border with Burgundy and can be traced back as far as 1573. During the maturing and ripening process, as different molds form and flavors strengthen, the surfaces of many of these cheeses become pungent rinds. Even today, cheese is sent to the market wrapped in hay or rolled in ash, as was the tradition 300 years ago.

**Crottin de Chavignol**

When fresh, this goat’s cheese has a white surface that hardens and blackens with age. When fully ripe, it is strong and has a meaty texture.

**Tomme de Chèvre**

Varieties of this cheese can be found throughout France. In the Loire, it is rubbed during the ripening process with a cloth that has been soaked in Muscadet.
TRAVELING IN THE LOIRE VALLEY

A long region that offers varied landscapes and human habitations ranging from the caves cut into the chalk hills of Vouvray to the spectacular châteaux that line theLoire River and its tributaries. Take your time and follow the river, or focus on exploring one of the major appellations in the west, center, or east.

HOTELS & RESTAURANTS

A selection of the region’s best establishments, offering good local food and wine, and some characterful places to stay.

ANGERS

\*\* Auberge d’Eventard, Route de Paris. 
02 41 43 74 25
One of the best places to sample traditional dishes made from local fish and accompanied by the best of the region’s wines.

CHENONCEAUX

\*\* Hôtel du Bon Laboureur et du Château, 6 Rue du Dr Bretonneau. 
02 47 23 90 04
An affordable, but simple, place to stay after visiting the nearby chateau. Good traditional food.

CHINON

\*\* Hostellerie Gargantua, 73 Rue Voltaire. 
02 47 93 04 71
In the heart of beautiful Chinon, with great views of the river, this quaint, turreted hotel is an ideal base from which to explore.

\*\* Au Plaisir Gourmand, 2 Rue Parmentier. 
02 47 93 20 48
A lovely country restaurant in the center of Chinon, offering a long list of wines from this appellation.

ROCHECORBON

\*\* Domaine des Hautes Roches, 86 Quai de la Loire. 
02 47 52 88 88
Great food and wine in an unforgettable setting. Rooms carved into the chalk give you a taste of the “troglodyte” existence still enjoyed by many in this region.

ROMORANTIN–LANTHENAY

\*\* Le Lion d’Or, 69 Rue Georges Clemenceau. 
02 54 94 15 15
A very luxurious Renaissance mansion serving great food. Prices are appropriately high.

SAINT-EMILION

\*\* Auberge de la Pomme d’Or, 1 Rue Panneterie. 
02 48 54 13 30
A magnificent Belle Époque hotel with furniture to match. Ask for the room used by Winston Churchill.

TOURS

\*\* Hotel de l’Univers, 5 Boulevard Heurteloup. 
02 47 05 37 12
A magnificent Belle Époque house decorated with furniture. Ask for the room used by Winston Churchill.

WINE SHOPS

Many Loire wines are difficult to find back home, so it’s a good idea to visit a wine shop here.

ORLÉANS

Cave Marc et Sébastien, 7 Place du Chatelet. 
02 38 62 94 11
A truly recommendable shop whose owners are passionate about a wide range of wines, and eager to share their enthusiasm.

MUSEUMS

Some producers offer vineyard or winery tours. Contact tourist offices (see below) for details.

CHINON

Musée Animé du Vin et de la Tonnellerie, 4 Impasse du Docteur Gendron. 
02 47 93 25 63
02 47 93 01 34
An inventive museum covering wine making and coopery.

ST LAMBERT DU LATTAY

Le Musée du Vignoble Nantais, 82 Rue Abelard. 
02 40 80 90 13
02 40 80 48 81
In the heart of Muscadet country, this museum boasts 1,000 wine-making tools, including some used nearly 500 years ago.

SAUMUR

Le Musée Maxime Mabileau, Route de la Coudraye, Place des Vignerons. 
02 41 78 42 75
The daily life of wine-makers over the years—and an exhibit called “L’Imaginaire du Vin,” which uses smells and poetry.

SAUMUR

Le Musée Maxime Mabileau, Route de Montsoreau. 
02 41 83 13 32
02 41 83 13 49
02 41 83 13 49
phc@gratienmeyer.com
A museum devoted to sparkling wine producer Gratien et Mayer, and Maxime Mabileau, who rose from the humblest ranks at the age of 13 to run the firm.
TOURS
Le Musée des Vins de Touraine, Cellier St-Julien, 16 Rue Nationale.

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<th>Phone</th>
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<td>02 47 61 07 93</td>
<td>02 47 21 68 90</td>
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In the cellars of the 13th century Abbey of St-Julien, this is one of the most interesting and most wide-ranging wine museums in France. It is especially useful in revealing the historic importance of wine to this region—and vice versa.

OTHER LOCAL WINE MUSEUMS
Ecomusée du Pays de Vouvray, 30 Rue Victor Hérault, Vouvray.

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<tr>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Website</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>02 47 52 60 61</td>
<td><a href="http://www.vouvray.com">www.vouvray.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02 43 44 43 62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02 47 52 65 50</td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@moncontour.com">info@moncontour.com</a></td>
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Musée de la Vigne et du Vin, 3 Rue Gustave Marc, Onzain.

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<th>Phone</th>
<th>Website</th>
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<tr>
<td>02 54 20 78 52</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ville-onzain.fr">www.ville-onzain.fr</a></td>
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Musée de la Vigne et du Viticulteur, Château de Moncontour, Vouvray.

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<tr>
<td>02 47 52 60 77</td>
<td><a href="http://www.moncontour.com">www.moncontour.com</a></td>
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WEBSITES
A few canny Loire Valley wine producers have registered their own private websites under generic-sounding appellation names. There is a(n excellent) site, for example, at www.vouvray.com, but it belongs to (and promotes) Château Moncontour. The following sites are also good, and independent: www.vins-valdeloire.com, www.sancerre.net, www.producteurs-de-saumur-champigny.fr, www.visaloire.com, www.saumurbrut.com, www.paysdelaloire.fr. If you are looking for more general tourist information, log on to www.tourisme.fr and type in the name of any town or village about which you would like to learn more.

ANNUAL WINE EVENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Events</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JUNE</td>
<td>Sancerre and Blois wine fairs</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amboise wine fair in the Parc des Mini-Châteaux—tastings in a park full of miniature châteaux</td>
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<td>JULY</td>
<td>Puy-Notre-Dame wine and food festival</td>
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<td></td>
<td>St-Aubin-de-Luigne festival of wine and eels</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pouilly-sur-Loire, St-Nicolas-de-Bourgueil and Verdigny wine fairs</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sancerre wine and jazz</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>St Lambert du Lattay wine and andouillette fair</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>St Lambert du Lattay promenade in the Coteaux du Layon</td>
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<tr>
<td>AUGUST</td>
<td>Quincy sea and wine fair</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Menetou-Salon open doors</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Saumur wine fair</td>
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<td>Vouvray festival</td>
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<td>Thouracé Touraine-Amboise festival</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Aubigne-sur-Layon festival of art, wine, and music</td>
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<td>Bué en Sancerre sorcerer’s fair (folklore galore)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sancerre French wine festival</td>
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<td></td>
<td>St-Pourçain-sur-Sioule wine fair</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEPTEMBER</td>
<td>Saumur, Chacé, and Varrains Fête du Champigny</td>
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<tr>
<td>OCTOBER</td>
<td>Château de Martigne-Briand Belle Epoque harvest festival</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Romorantin Journées Gastronomiques—food days</td>
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<tr>
<td>NOVEMBER</td>
<td>Montrichard Saumur-Champigny wine fair</td>
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<tr>
<td>NOVEMBER/DECEMBER</td>
<td>Coteaux du Guinnois Fouté Avaloue du St Père wine fair</td>
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OTHER INFORMATION
Office de Tourisme, 78 Rue Bernard-Palissey, Tours.

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<tr>
<th>Phone</th>
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<td>02 47 70 37 37</td>
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The region's main tourist office can help with a range of local information, whether you want wine tastings or a place to stay.

Comité Interprofessionnel de Touraine, 19 Square Prosper-Mérimée, Tours.

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Maisons du Vin across the region offer local guidance, but this is the place to come for wine information on the area as a whole.

OTHER INFORMATION
ANJOU

**Rosé d’Anjou**

The commercial wine sold cheaply in supermarkets throughout the world, may represent nearly half of the wine produced in Anjou, but it is not the wine by which the *appellation* should be judged. For fine examples of rosé wines, try the Cabernet d’Anjou, arguably the longest-lived rosé in the world, or the Rosé de Loire. Anjou’s white wines are traditionally made from Chenin Blanc, to which Chardonnay or Sauvignon Blanc may now be added. This blending, plus a little aging in new oak, has brought some welcome roundness to what, in cool years, can be green wines. Anjou Coteaux de la Loire can provide an affordable taste of late-harvest Chenin Blanc, with Anjou-Gamay being a generally feeble alternative to Beaujolais (see pp126–7). For superior reds, try Anjou Villages, whose reds offer rich, black-curranty flavors.

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**BONNEZEAUX**

The vineyards of this Coteaux du Layon grand cru face south on La Montagne, Beauregard, and des Fesles, three steep schist slopes bordering the Layon River. The only grape variety grown here is Chenin Blanc, which is often harvested in numerous pickings when botrytized. Yields here are low, with the minimum required ripeness for the grapes at harvest being higher than that of Sauternes (see p110). In fact, grape-growers here have been known to pick absurdly ripe grapes with sugars equivalent to an alcoholic strength of up to 40 percent. At its best, Bonnezeaux is intensely sweet, with flavors of pineapple and licorice when young and a honeyed-vanilla complexity that develops with age. In recent years, many vines that were once abandoned have been replanted, expanding the *appellation* from 94 acres (38 ha) in 1979 to 198 acres (80 ha).

---

**Château de la Genaiserie**

Yves Soulez, the producer of this wine, is one of the best wine-makers in the Loire.

---

**A Touch of Ceremony**

The wine-makers in this part of the Loire Valley still make the most of every opportunity to celebrate their traditions.

---

**Thouarcé**

This fine windmill, overlooking the vines of Thouarcé, is the most recognized landmark in this region of France.

---

**Mark Angeli**

Not only is this one of the richest, sweetest, and most luscious wines of the Loire, it is also one of the world’s best white wines.

---

**AC Bonnezeaux Grand Cru.**

White: Chenin Blanc.

Lusciously sweet, long-lived, ideally botrytized.


Grilled foie gras with truffles.


5–15 years.
BOURGUEIL AND ST NICOLAS-DE-BOURGUEIL

The appellations of Bourgueil and St Nicolas-de-Bourgueil, located between Tours and Saumur, both claim that their wines have individual qualities. Renowned as some of the finest Cabernet Franc–based reds in the Loire, the difference between the two can be hard to discern. Bourgueil's wines are grown on either a sand and gravel plateau or on clay and tufa slopes, and its wines have a fruity character. On the higher slopes, the grapes ripen up to 10 days earlier than on the plateau, resulting in more complex wines. St Nicolas-de-Bourgueil's soil is sandier than that of Bourgueil and although its wines are lighter, they are just as good. A co-operative controls one third of the communes here, but methods vary, with some producers placing greater reliance than others on aging in wood.

Ingrandes de Touraine
As is the case almost everywhere in the Loire Valley, Bourgueil has a wealth of prosperous châteaux and farms.

CHÂTEAUMEILLANT

This area covers about 247 acres (100 ha) in the middle of France, around the town of Châteaumeillant and between St Pourçain and Touraine. The volcanic soil explains why, as in Beaujolais (see pp126–7), Gamay is the most widely planted vine and why white wine is no longer made here. Other grapes used for red and rosé wines are Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris. The reds, though tannic, are fresh and best drunk young, but it is the light, fresh rosés that stand out.

CHEVERNY AND COUR-CHEVERNY

These are two of the first appellations heading west from Orléans to Blois. Cour-Cheverny's whites are made from Romorantin, which produces light, dry wines with a delicate, floral aroma. Cheverny's white wines, on the other hand, are made from Sauvignon, and have lively fruit and good balance. Both these and the region's red wines, made mainly from Gamay, are best drunk young.
THE LOIRE VALLEY

COTEaux DU LAYON

THE COTEAUX DU LAYON borders the Layon River from Neuil to Chalonnes and has been famous for its sweet white wines since the fourth century. While the Coteaux du Layon appellation covers whites made in 25 communes that overlap Anjou Coteaux de la Loire (see p214) and Saumur (see p223), the area's best wines are made to tight regulations in Beaulieu, Faye, Lambert, Rabelay, Rochefort, St Aubin, and St Lambert, seven villages that make up the appellation of Coteaux du Layon-Villages. These communes each have characters of their own, with Beaulieu making more delicate wines than Rabelay. All Coteaux du Layon wines are produced from ultra-ripe grapes, harvested in numerous pickings. The best are produced by the one-village appellation of Coteaux du Layon-Chaume.

Domaine des Forges
Claude Branchereau, the owner of this estate, is one of the most quality-conscious producers in the Coteaux du Layon.

Château la Genaiserie
With its numerous châteaux and grand hotels, the Coteaux du Layon is a beautiful region of France to visit.

Olga Raffault
There are several members of the Raffault family living in Chinon. The two names to look for are Olga and Jean-Maurice.

Château la Genaiserie

AC Coteaux du Layon, AC Coteaux du Layon-Chaume, AC Coteaux du Layon-Villages.
White: Chenin Blanc.
Medium and sweet whites.
Sweet: 10–20 years.

AC Chinon.
Red/rose: Cabernet Franc.
White: Chenin Blanc.

Clos de l’Echo
This vineyard, situated next door to the ruins of the Château de Chinon, produces some of the best wine in the appellation.

Clos de l’Echo

AC Chinon.
Red/rose: Cabernet Franc.
White: Chenin Blanc.

Olga Raffault
There are several members of the Raffault family living in Chinon. The two names to look for are Olga and Jean-Maurice.

AC Chinon.
Red/rose: Cabernet Franc.
White: Chenin Blanc.

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White: Chenin Blanc.

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Red/rose: Cabernet Franc.
White: Chenin Blanc.

Domaine des Forges
Claude Branchereau, the owner of this estate, is one of the most quality-conscious producers in the Coteaux du Layon.

Clos de l’Echo

AC Chinon.
Red/rose: Cabernet Franc.
White: Chenin Blanc.

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There are several members of the Raffault family living in Chinon. The two names to look for are Olga and Jean-Maurice.

AC Chinon.
Red/rose: Cabernet Franc.
White: Chenin Blanc.

Domaine des Forges
Claude Branchereau, the owner of this estate, is one of the most quality-conscious producers in the Coteaux du Layon.

Clos de l’Echo

AC Chinon.
Red/rose: Cabernet Franc.
White: Chenin Blanc.

Olga Raffault
There are several members of the Raffault family living in Chinon. The two names to look for are Olga and Jean-Maurice.
HAUT-POITOU

If the coopérative at Neuville had not successfully promoted Diane de Poitiers, a méthode traditionelle wine, this VDQS might be almost unknown. Haut-Poitou covers about 1,730 acres (700 ha) of vineyards scattered across a wide, flat plain stretching south of Saumur (see p223), down to Poitiers itself. In this dry, hot appellation, vines grow on limestone and marl soil and produce wines that in warm years are often characterized by their fruity flavors. Among the white wines produced here, Sauvignon Blanc was the first to attract attention. Today, its wines continue to be produced in the original floral style, with a light, crisp acidity. Haut-Poitou also makes reds and rosés from Pinot Noir, Gamay, Merlot, Malbec, and Cabernet Sauvignon.

JASNIÈRES

Like Savennières (see p224) and Vouvray (see p226), this small, 119-acre (48-ha) appellation that lies within the Coteaux du Loire provides the perfect example of how the Chenin Blanc grape can be affected by the marginal climate of the Loire. In cooler years, its dry white wines are acidic enough to threaten to remove the enamel from your teeth. However, when the climate allows, the flavor of Jasnières’ dry white wine can be a combination of flowers, nuts, honey, and apples, but with a steely, acidic backbone. Since the early 1990s, the wine-makers here have been making sweet, and even dry, botrytized wines in good years. These botrytized wines have a more instant appeal than more traditional Jasnières and have helped to maintain interest in this appellation.
MENETOU-SALON

The vineyards of Menetou-Salon lie between the city of Bourges and the vineyards of Sancerre (see p222) to the east. In just 40 years, the grape-growers of Menetou-Salon have expanded their vineyards from 50 acres (20 ha) in 1959 to 500 acres (200 ha) today. Menetou-Salon’s wines (especially those from vineyards around Morogues) are often good alternatives to the average and lesser-quality wines of neighboring Sancerre. Most Menetou-Salon red wines are light, fruity, and best drunk young. Some of the best, however, are matured in oak barrels and age well. Menetou-Salon’s white wines, on the other hand, are typical of Sauvignon Blanc, but tend to lose their initial floral appeal quite quickly, replacing it with an earthiness that makes fine, delicate whites a rare find.

Limestone Soil

The Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir grapes grown in Menetou-Salon, near Morogues, owe their flavor to the limestone soil that is found here.

Olivier Delétang

This producer makes some of the best and longest-lived examples of the subtly appealing Montlouis wines.

MONTLOUIS

Montlouis lies on the west bank of the Loire, directly opposite the appellation of Vouvray (see p226) and only a few miles east of the center of Tours. The vineyards of Montlouis slope south toward the Cher River and include the villages of Montlouis, Lussault, and St Martin-le-Beau. Once sold under the name of Vouvray, the white wines of Montlouis can be dry, medium-dry, or sweet. The only grape variety used here is Chenin Blanc, known as Pineau de la Loire. In this area, the soils are rich in flinty clays and are quite sandy, resulting in light wines with mineral overtones. As in Vouvray, the best wines produced in Montlouis are the sweet wines that are sold as AC Montlouis Moelleux and the slightly sparkling wines that are sold as AC Montlouis Pétillant.
MUSCADET

One of the best-known white wines in the world, Muscadet entered the 21st century confronting the very real prospect of being unfashionable and unwanted. Unlike wines such as the Chardonnays and Sauvignons that, for the moment, tend to occupy the spotlight, this is not a fruity or oaky white wine, but is instead fairly neutral in flavor.

Muscadet, like the oysters with which I like to drink it, comes my way all too rarely. The producers in this frost-prone region make their wine from Melon de Bourgogne, a relatively flavorless grape variety that bears none of the muskiness implied by the name Muscadet. This grape, of which the wine growers of Muscadet are so proud, is actually relatively new to the area. In the 17th century the wines made here would have been mostly thin, weedy, and acidic reds. However, when the vineyards were almost wiped out by frost in 1709, the Dutch merchants, who were the grape-growers’ biggest customers, encouraged them to plant a second-rate variety from Burgundy. Known as Melon de Bourgogne, this variety could survive the cold weather. The neutral flavor of the wines made from the Melon de Bourgogne was of little concern to the producers. Initially, it was only ever going to be used to make cheap brandy.

Muscadet did, however, have one important distinction. The tradition of being bottled sur lie, while still in contact with its sediment, kept the wine fresh and gave it a slight spritz and yeasty roundness. In the mid-20th century, before the world became awash with good Chardonnay and Sauvignon, this tradition gave Muscadet a brief heyday of international popularity. Today, the availability of Chardonnay, Pinot Grigio, and Viognier from warmer regions has led to a Muscadet surplus—and the uprooting of vineyards here.

Muscadet should be bought sur lie. Of the four appellations available, basic Muscadet (not to be recommended) represents less than a fifth of the total production, the Coteaux de la Loire’s wines are generally green and unripe, and the Côtes de Grandlieu, which was created in 1994, covers most of the wine that used to be sold as basic Muscadet. The one to look for is Sèvre-et-Maine—ideally from one of the producers listed below.

Château l’Oiselinière de la Ramée
One of a range of excellent wines produced by Domaines Chéreau-Carré, this is a great example of how Muscadet ought to taste: dry, with a refreshing slight fizz and some richness.
POUILLY-FUMÉ AND POUILLY-SUR-LOIRE

Firmly identified with the Sauvignon Blanc grape, the "fumé" in Pouilly-Fumé describes the wine's somewhat elusive, smoky, gun-flint flavor, brought out by the flinty chalk of the best vineyards in the appellation. Wines sold under the less prestigious Pouilly-sur-Loire label are made from the Chasselas grape.

An area of gently sloping vineyards situated on the eastern bank of the Loire, today the appellation of Pouilly-Fumé is most strongly associated with the Sauvignon Blanc grape. Surprisingly, however, it was not until the late 19th century, when widespread replanting of vines became necessary as a result of damage caused by the phylloxera louse, that this variety was grown here at all. Until then, the vineyards here were planted almost exclusively with Chasselas, a popular, sweet table grape traditionally considered to have a great affinity with the soils of the area. With floral aromas and low acidity, the still and sparkling wines made from these grapes are often tired and flabby, and as a result are fast becoming an endangered species. In 1997, only 300,000 bottles of Chasselas wine were produced here, compared to the 7.75 million bottles made from Sauvignon Blanc. Wines made here from Chasselas are sold as appellation contrôlée Pouilly-sur-Loire, which covers the same geographical area as the exclusively Sauvignon Blanc appellation of Pouilly-Fumé.

The much-vaunted smoky flavor of the wines of Pouilly-Fumé is, in truth, a characteristic specifically associated with wines made from grapes grown in the flinty soil of the appellation's best vineyards. Another arguable piece of received wisdom is that the best wines here have more depth and structure than those of Sancerre (see p222) on the opposite bank of the Loire. This may occasionally be true, but more often the wines of the two appellations are hard to tell apart.

Some of Pouilly's best examples are made by the innovative producer Didier Dagueneau. By fermenting in new oak, he produces crisp wines with a hint of vanilla, many of which age extremely well. His experimental, late-harvest wines are also fine, but, needless to say, they are not well regarded by the narrow-minded local authorities.

Château de Ladoucette

This may not be the best wine in Pouilly-Fumé, but it is one of the most reliable. The same estate's Baron de L is finer—and both rarer and decidedly pricier.

Château du Nozet de Ladoucette

The fairy-tale towers of the Château du Nozet de Ladoucette provide a dramatic contrast to the humble appearance of many other domaines in the appellation of Pouilly-Fumé.

Des Berthiers, Bouchié-Chatellier, Henri Bourgeois, Calibourdin, Chatelain, Patrick Coulbois, Didier Dagueneau, Jean-Claude Dagueneau, Marc Deschamps, Ch Favray, des Fines Cailottes, Pascal Jolivet, Masson-Blondelet, Joseph Mellot, Ch du Nozet, Roger Pabiot, Caves de Pouilly-sur-Loire, Raimbault-Pineau, Guy Saget, Yvon et Pascal Tabordet, Thibault, Ch de Tracy.

Trout grilled with lemon juice and toasted almonds.


1–4 years.
QUARTS-DE-CHAUME

The great, sweet white wine appellation of Quarts-de-Chaume, on the banks of the Layon tributary, is a tiny plateau of vines in the middle of the much larger Coteaux du Layon appellation (see p216). Occupying around 100 acres (40 ha) of gravelly clay slopes around the village of Chaume, only 100,000 bottles of Quarts-de-Chaume are produced here each year, from very ripe, mainly botrytized, Chenin Blanc grapes. The southern exposure of the vineyards, combined with careful harvesting and a high proportion of old vines, produces low yields of extremely high quality. Lighter and slightly dryer than the wines of nearby Bonnezeaux (see p214), the wines of Quarts-de-Chaume make attractive drinking when young, but after 10 years in the cellar they will develop inimitable and gloriously complex flavors of beeswax, honey, and spice.

Château Bellerive
This is a serious wine that is a pleasure to drink young, but will be even better after a decade of maturation in the cellar.

Waiting Game
Producers in Quarts-de-Chaume must wait patiently for the late-harvest, often botrytized Chenin Blanc grapes that give their rich, sweet flavors to the wines of the appellation.

QUINCY

Unlike in neighboring Reuilly (see right) and Menetou-Salon (see p218), the vineyards of Quincy, on the western bank of the Auron tributary, are planted exclusively with Sauvignon Blanc. This is a white-only appellation and its wines can offer a good-value alternative to those of Sancerre (see p222) or Pouilly-Fumé (see left). Despite promising sandy-flint soils, wines here can be green and acidic. Good examples, however, made from old, low-yielding vines, are well worth buying.

Jean-Michel Sorbe
This producer's wines are often similar to those of Sancerre, and just as good.

REUILLY

All three styles of wine, red, white, and rosé, are produced from grapes grown on the 75 acres (30 ha) of limestone-rich soils that make up the appellation of Reuilly. Whites, made from Sauvignon Blanc, are dry with flavors of grass and nettles. Rosés are distinctive and dry, made from Pinot Gris, while light, fruity reds are made from a blend of Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris. There are bargains here, especially among the reds and rosés, but poorly made efforts tend to be overly acidic.

Jean-Michel Sorbe
This producer's wines are often similar to those of Sancerre, and just as good.
THE LOIRE VALLEY

SANCERRE

Set on a rocky outcrop, the ancient town of Sancerre keeps watch over the vineyards of the appellation below. Stretching along the western bank of the Loire to the north of its confluence with the Allier, Sancerre is now world-famous for its dry, aromatic white wines, but the area was well known for excellent red wines as early as the 12th century.

Wine has been made in the area around the town of Sancerre for many hundreds of years. One local legend suggests that when the church of St. Martin was rebuilt during a drought in 1040, the mortar was mixed with wine rather than water. By the 13th century, the wine of Sancerre was being praised in poetry as worthy of the royal table. Three hundred years later, King Henri IV declared that the wine of the village of Chavignol, a few miles northwest of Sancerre, was the best he had ever drunk and that its general consumption would bring an end to the currently raging religious wars. This method of pacification is sadly untestable today, however, as the Sancerre enjoyed by Henri IV was almost certainly a deeply colored red, made from a combination of Pinot Noir and Gamay grapes, very different from the much lighter red wines produced in Sancerre today. The first written reference to white Sancerre appears as late as 1816, and the preferred grape for white wine at that time was the sweet-tasting but undistinguished Chasselas. Sancerre as we know it today, made from Sauvignon Blanc, is a product of the appellation contrôlée system established in 1935. It was not until 1959 that red wines made from Pinot Noir were included in the appellation.

Today the limestone and gravel vineyards of the appellation are used to produce some of the finest examples of Sauvignon Blanc in the world. Unfortunately, overcropping and under-ripening also result in large amounts of thin, miserable white wine that is sold far too easily throughout the world. With 16 villages and 440 producers, sorting the good wines from the bad would be easier if Sancerre were to name its best villages and vineyards with a crus classés system similar to that in place in Beaujolais (see pp. 126–7). As in the neighboring appellation of Pouilly-Fumé (see pp. 220), some interesting experiments have been made here with sweet, late-harvest white wines. Red and rosé Sancerre wines sell well, especially in classy restaurants, but rarely stand comparison with good Pinot Noir produced elsewhere.

Vincent Pinard

The reliable and innovative producer Vincent Pinard offers characterful individual cuvées of the wines he makes in Sancerre.
The cool climate and chalky soils of the appellation make this ideal sparkling-wine territory. The white and rosé sparkling wines of Saumur are far better known than the region’s reds, and are a popular, if not always reliable, alternative to Champagne, which is invariably pricier. The wines of the two appellations contrôlées, Saumur Mousseux and Saumur Pétillant, are made largely from the Chenin Blanc, giving them an aromatic flavor of apples and nuts. This differs from the yeasty flavors of the Chardonnay- and Pinot Noir-dominated wines of Champagne, though the recent addition of Chardonnay grapes to Saumur’s sparkling wines has given them a much more Champagne-like flavor. The popularity of both appellations is diminishing, however, as producers turn to making wines sold under the generic but more prestigious Crémant de Loire appellation.

Made, like the sparkling wines, mainly from Chenin Blanc grapes, the still whites of Saumur are often decidedly undistinguished, with a tendency to taste thin and acidic. A notable exception to this are the semisweet appellation contrôlée Coteaux de Saumur late-harvest wines. Full-bodied and deliciously rich, these wines are rare but, at their best, well worth seeking out.

Keeping warm
Oil burners are a necessary feature of the vineyards in Saumur, protecting the vines against hazardous frost.

SAUMUR

PART OF THE LARGER APPELLATION of Anjou, Saumur, also known as the “pearl of Anjou,” produces still red, white, and rosé wines, as well as sparkling whites and rosés. Much less well known than sparkling Saumur, the red wines of the appellation range from light, fruity Saumur rouge to full-bodied, fragrant Saumur-Champigny, the hidden treasure of the appellation.
SAVENNIÈRES

Famous since the 18th and 19th centuries, when it was a popular sweet white wine, Savennières is now one of the world’s most extraordinary dry whites. It is also one of the best examples of the ability of the Chenin Blanc grape to be both ripe and fiercely acidic at the same time. The vineyards of Savennières face southeast across the Loire River to Rochefort, just south of Angers. The mineral intensity of Savennières’ wines is attributed to the volcanic debris that lies beneath the soil, while the concentration of their flavor is due to the low yield, one of the smallest of any appellation. When young, the combination of honey and tart cooking apples in Savennières deters many modern drinkers, but drink it with creamy food after five years or so and it will live up to its reputation as the world’s greatest Chenin Blanc.

Coulée-de-Serrant

Nicolas Joly uses biodynamic methods (see below) to farm his vines in this beautiful riverside site, where he produces some of the region’s best wines.

SAVENNIÈRES GRANDS CRUS

These two small grands crus within the appellation of Savennières have attracted a cult following for lovers of Chenin Blanc. The three producers all battle against naturally low yields that are further jeopardized by the risk of frost. Nicolas Joly, who owns Coulée-de-Serrant (see above) and vineyards in Roche-aux-Moines, is raising the odds by tending his vines and producing his wines according to the strictest biodynamic rules. The procedures, which include timing vineyard work in accordance with phases of the moon and treating the soil with small doses of manure that has been stored in a cow’s horn, are, predictably, often mocked. However, this has not deterred Joly and his fellow believers, like Lalou Bize-Leroy of Domaine Leroy in Burgundy, whose wines are good enough to silence the mockery.

Château de Chamboureau

At its finest, grand cru Savennières like this is one of the most complex, long-lived white wines in the world.

Roche-aux-Moines

The Chenin Blancs of Roche-aux-Moines and Coulée-de-Serrant are complex, honeyed, floral yet mineral wines that go brilliantly with rich fish dishes like salmon.
TOURAINE

THE LOIRE REGION COVERS A WIDE RANGE of landscapes as it stretches westward to the sea, and the Touraine appellation lies at its heart. Within its borders are examples of most of the reds and the dry and sweet white wines that are produced in the Loire. Between tastings, the spectacular châteaux of this attractive appellation are well worth taking time out to visit.

Despite the presence of all kinds of other agriculture competing for space, the Touraine appellation is huge, producing some 40 million bottles of red, white, and rosé wines. These are made primarily from Gamay, Sauvignon Blanc, and Chenin Blanc, but also from Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec and Pinots Noir, Meunier and Gris, Grolleau and Pineau d’Aunis. Chardonnay is also present, but its use has been restricted since 1994. Wines range from excellent Sauvignons and Cabernet Francs to dull Chenin Blancs and Gamays that taste as though they were lucky to make it into a bottle—the name of the producer here is crucial. Coopératives like Oisly et Thésée and the Cellier Léonard de Vinci in Limeray do well, as do a number of good merchants like Aimé Boucher and Bougrier.

Finer wines are supposedly produced under three separate Touraine appellations: Touraine-Mesland, Touraine-Amboise, and Touraine Azay-le-Rideau. In practice, everything here depends on the producer, but visitors to the region will be so dazzled by the beauty of the châteaux and the landscape that they will probably forgive all kinds of faults.

Touraine Azay-le-Rideau produces light-dry and semi-sweet Chenin Blancs and good Malbec and Gamay-based rosés. For red wines, head to Touraine-Mesland, where the reds are dominantly Cabernet Franc and have more character and body than those of Touraine-Amboise. The white wines of both these appellations are best avoided in all but the ripest vintages.

Other styles that are worth looking for here are Touraine Pétillant and Touraine Mousseux. The sparkling and semi-sparkling whites and rosés are good value when well made, but the real curiosities are the black-curranty Cabernet Francs, made in Chinon (see p216), Bourgueil and St Nicolas de Bourgueil (see p215).

Domaine Bellevue

Fresh and tangy, this Sauvignon has the refreshing bite of wine that is produced from this variety in a cool climate.

Sparkling reds, whites and rosés.
Bellevue, de la Besnerie, Paul Buisse, la Chapelle de Cray, de la Bréblière, les Corbillières, de la Gabilhère, Henry Marionnet, Moncoutant, Octavie, Oudin et Thésée, Oudin Frères.
White: St Marcellin cheese
Red: 3–8 years.
White: 1–4 years.
Rosé: 1–2 years.

AC Touraine, AC Touraine-Amboise, AC Touraine Azay-le-Rideau, AC Touraine-Mesland, AC Touraine Mousseux, AC Touraine Pétillant.
Red/rose: Gamay, Cabernet Franc, Malbec, Pinot Noir, Pineau d’Aunis.
White: Chenin Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc.
Light, often fruity reds.
Light, dry whites. Dry or medium rosés.
VOUVRAY

If one appellation in the Loire had to be chosen to demonstrate the extraordinarily varied potential of the Chenin Blanc, it would be Vouvray. While sweet, dry, and sparkling wines may be made in other parts of the Loire, only Vouvray can produce all three quite so well and, at the same time, demonstrate the aging potential of the Chenin Blanc.

Few wine regions anywhere have given me more, and less, pleasure than these vineyards on the northern bank of the Loire River. Vouvray has produced extraordinarily old sweet wines that have glorious flavors of apples, honey, and praline, as well as aggressive young wines that are packed full of surplus sulfur dioxide and tooth-stripping acidity.

There is nothing new about the minefield character of Vouvray; as the British author Roger Voss points out, Dutch merchants routinely blended other wine into Vouvray from the 15th to the 19th centuries and, during the early 20th century, the Loire grape growers casually used the appellation’s name on wines from vineyards scattered throughout other parts of Touraine.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Vouvray was consigned to the role of being the French semidry alternative to poor-quality German wines. Thankfully, in the 1990s, a run of good vintages and the success of quality-conscious producers like the Domaines Huët and des Aubuisières and Clos Naudin have led to a huge improvement in the quality of Vouvray. Most observers tend to focus on its sweet wines that, like any wines that are late-harvested, are the most seductive and long-lived. However, I must confess to being more fascinated by the semidry and dry wines that walk the tightrope between richness and acidity. Fine examples of either style can be complex wines, full of floral and nutty flavors. Be warned when buying Vouvray that many of its wines make no mention on the label of their level of sweetness. As one wine-maker explained to me, “customers prefer to drink semidry wine, but they like to fool themselves that it is dry.” Although the quality of Vouvray Mousseux does vary, a well-made example is smooth and creamy.
OTHERS

As well as the “big name” wines covered on previous pages, the Loire also offers a large number of smaller appellation and VDQS wines that cover a wide range of styles. Often overlooked by people outside the region itself, these wines are discovered with much delight by visitors, who soon learn to appreciate their fresh, characterful flavors.

unremarkable, wines from the Chenin Blanc, Cabernet Franc and the Pinot Gris, which is known here as the Malvoisie.

Elevated to appellation contrôlée status in 1998, the Coteaux du Giennois is a small but growing region of some 370 acres (150 ha) yielding Gamay, Sauvignon Blanc, and Pinot Noir grape varieties. The limestone and silex soil here results in quite serious, if shortish-lived wines.

If a long history has any value, on the other hand, St Pourçain ought to be an appellation wine rather than a VDQS. Grapes were, after all, first planted here by the Phoenicians in around 1100 BC. The red and the rosé wines are both juicy blends of the Gamay and Pinot Noir grapes, while the dry, grassy white wines are a combination of Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, and the local Tressalier. I predict its elevation to appellation contrôlée status before too long.

Other light, Gamay-based wines worth drinking young, and while in the region, are those labeled Côtes du Forez, Châteaumeillant, Côtes d’Auvergne, and Côtes Roannaises. Also of interest are the red wines of the Coteaux du Vendômois. These reds show how wines made mainly from the Pineau d’Aunis can be strengthened and improved by blending with the Gamay or Cabernet Franc.

Small Is Beautiful

While there are many large estates in France, most of the vineyards in this region are quite small and are often tended by local farmers who have other crops.

Of the other wines from the Loire, Gros Plant, made from a naturally acidic grape called the Folle Blanche, deserves a passing glance—but that’s about all. Although this wine is perfectly acceptable on the Atlantic coast as an accompaniment to seafood dishes when it is well made, young, and preferably bottled sur lie, it is not a wine that I would travel too far to drink.

Wines labeled as Rosé de Loire are dry and made from the Cabernet Franc or Sauvignon, Pineau d’Aunis, Grolleau, or Gamay grapes, grown anywhere within the appellations of Anjou (see p214), Saumur (see p223), or Touraine (see p225). Not surprisingly, it varies in both style and quality and should be bought with care. Crémant de Loire comes from the same areas as Cheverny (see p215). Wines that carry this label can be white or, sometimes, rosé and are made from grapes that include the Chenin Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Franc, and Cabernet Sauvignon.

Mostly known for its light and usually unmemorable reds made from the Gamay, the Coteaux d’Ancenis is a small 740-acre (300-ha) VDQS region that also makes inexpensive, and generally similarly unmemorable, wines from the Chenin Blanc, Cabernet Franc and the Pinot Gris, which is known here as the Malvoisie.

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Les Vignerons Foreziens

This Côtes du Forez estate is one of the very few wine producers to concentrate on the Gamay grape.

Tours • Poitiers • Nantes • Coteaux du Giennois • St Pourçain
Provence and Corsica
Among the oldest of France’s wine regions, Provence and Corsica have the potential to produce a wealth of wines that are packed with the flavor of the sun.

Order a bottle of Provençal rosé in a Parisian restaurant, and you are likely to be presented with a dull, copper-colored wine with about as much freshness as last week’s newspaper. Provence does make good wines, but the problem is, people claim, that they just don’t travel very well. In reality, as any experienced wine-maker will tell you, a well-produced wine can be carried around the world without suffering any ill effects. Take, for example, all the Australian wines that are enjoyed in countries like Canada, thousands of miles away. The thing that does genuinely suffer from travel sickness and jet lag is our memory. Unexceptional wines that we enjoyed in a little café at the edge of the beach on a sunny, carefree day in Provence simply lose their allure when they are set in the harsher reality of a winter evening in the city.

According to historical records, the wines of Provence appear to have traveled more successfully when the Romans carried them home in amphorae. However, those wines, like the region’s best today, were almost certainly red. Provence’s famous rosé is a relatively modern invention, and most of it is deserving of the contempt with which it is treated. If you want to enjoy wines that really exploit the full potential of this glorious region, head for appellations like Bandol (see p234), Cassis (see p235), Palette (see p236), and Coteaux d’Aix-en-Provence (see p235), and the village of Les Baux-de-Provence, within that last appellation.

In wine-making, as in so many other things, Corsica seems to be much farther from the rest of France than the 105-mile (170-km) sea journey might lead one to expect. Towns with names like Ajaccio and Porto-Vecchio and estates called Catarelli and Torraccia reveal a strong Italian influence here that also extends to the flavor of the island’s wines. In many ways, Corsica seems to have more in common with the Italian islands of Sardinia and Sicily than with the French mainland. Nielluccio, for example, the most widely planted grape variety in Corsica, is actually a close cousin of the Sangiovese of Italy’s Chianti region.

### REGIONAL OVERVIEW
- **54,000 acres (22,000 ha): 165 million bottles.**
- **Despite occasional variations caused by the proximity of the Mediterranean, the climate here is generally very warm in both summer and winter. Dry conditions can be a problem for the vines.**
- **Varied, including granite, sandstone, and occasional outcrops of limestone and flint.**
- **Red: Nielluccio, Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre, Cinsault, Carignan, Sciacarello, Barbarossa.**
- **White: Ugni Blanc, Grenache.**
Domaine de Rochebelle
While cooperatives and merchants have traditionally sold most of the wine in Provence, small estates like this are increasingly developing reputations for their wines.

Basking in the Sunshine
Situated on the Mediterranean coast, Provence enjoys a sun-soaked climate similar to that of Corsica, the aptly named Ile de Beauté, which lies just 105 miles (170 km) off the mainland but has very different grapes.

Until recently, a quick taste of a range of Corsica's wines was enough to show the almost laughably generous way in which the authorities have handed out appellation contrôlée status here. Most of the wines offered could be said to have deserved little more than vin de pays status. Now, however, a growing number of estates are producing good, characterful wines that truly exploit the potential of the island's grape varieties.
TRAVELING IN PROVENCE AND CORSICA

These two areas share an ancient history and a great climate, but offer very diverse experiences to visitors. Delve a little deeper in Provence and you find a lot more than rosé; explore Corsica and you will encounter dishes and wines unlike any other.

HOTELS & RESTAURANTS
A selection of the region’s best establishments, offering good local food and wine and notable, characterful places to stay.

PROVENCE
AIX-EN-PROVENCE
Le Carillon, 10 Rue Portalis
The absence of a telephone number in the details above is no editorial oversight; this bistro happily functions without one, filling its seats with local people who appreciate eating traditional local fare at some of the lowest prices in town.

BANDOL
L’Oulivo, 19 Rue des Tonnelliers.
04 94 29 81 79
On the road which, to judge by its name, was once home to Bandol’s barrel-makers, this is a good, simple Provençal restaurant with a terrace on which one can eat almost throughout the year.

BORDEAUX-LES-MIMOSAS
Le Bellevue, Place Gambetta.
04 94 71 15 15
04 94 05 96
www.bellevuebormes.fr.st
A lovely traditional, modestly priced, family-run hotel with 12 rooms and a great view across to the Îles des Porquerolles. The restaurant, which has a palm-shaded terrace, is recommended, too.

NICE
L’Auberge des Arts—La Cave, 9 Rue Pairolière.
04 93 62 95 01
In the oldest part of town, this is a great modern version of the old fashioned bistro where wine is sold from the barrel to drink in situ, or to enjoy elsewhere. Those going for the first option will experience great local cooking and knowledgeable wine service at low prices in the vaulted restaurant downstairs.

ST-RÉMY DE PROVENCE
Le Chalet Fleuri, 15 Avenue Frédéric Mistral.
04 90 92 03 62
A bargain in this region, for anyone prepared to enjoy staying half-board in a family-owned guesthouse. The rooms are simple but comfortable, and the food flavorsome. But make sure to wander along to La Gousse d’Ail for a more special meal before leaving.

La Gousse d’Ail, 6 Boulevard Marceau.
04 90 92 16 87
This is the place to go in St-Rémy for good food and wine at a reasonable price, but precisely what you get may depend on the day of the week. On Tuesday you could enjoy bouillabaisse, while on Thursday there’s jazz.

CORSICA
BASTIA
Restaurant a Casarella, 6 Rue Sète-Croix.
04 95 32 02 32
Occupying one of of the best locations in the town, this restaurant is in the citadel, close to the old Genovese governor’s palace. The food is classic Corsican, though prepared with a light hand. Try a Dégustation menu for a good introduction to local flavors.

PORTO-VECCHIO
Spuntino, Rue Sampiero.
04 95 72 11 63
Definitely not the place to go in search of a wide selection of Corsican wine; there are only two offered. The menu is pretty short, too—painted by hand on a board every day. But the food is some of the best simple, tasty fare on the island, and the terrace is a great place to relax and watch the world wander by.

Hotel-Restaurant le Tourisme, Route de Quenza.
04 95 95 87 72
04 95 78 73 23
www.hoteldutourisme.fr
Over a century old, this hotel has something of the feeling of a classic cruise liner. There are plenty of balconies and terraces and a restaurant that serves modern variations on Corsican cuisine, accompanied by a well-chosen range of local wines.

Eating Alfresco
Nowhere in France offers more opportunities to eat well outdoors.
WINE SHOPS
Many of Provence and Corsica's wines can be difficult to find outside the region, so stock up while you're in the area.

PROVENCE
CANNES
La Vinotheque,
14 Rue Marceau.
04 93 99 94 02
Laurent Bonetto offers a huge selection of wines from all over France, but this shop (and the one at 6 Avenue Michel-Jourdan in Cannes-la-Bocca) is one of the best places to go exploring for wines from Provence and Languedoc-Roussillon.

NICE
La Part des Anges,
17 Rue César-Campinchi.
04 93 62 69 80
Olivier Labarde is another understandable favorite of La Revue du Vin de France, partly for the way he champions organic and biodynamic wines, and partly for the fact that the shop is also a wine bar where wines bought over the counter can be enjoyed for the same price with a plate of local food.

CORSICA
BASTIA
Grand Vin de Corse,
24 Rue César-Campinchi.
04 95 31 24 94
Local wines are a specialty here, but there are plenty of good examples from other parts of France, if you want to set up a comparative tasting.

MUSEUMS
Some producers offer vineyard or winery tours. Contact tourist offices (see below) for details.

PROVENCE
ANSOUIS
Musée de la Vigne et du Vin,
Château Turcan.
04 90 09 83 33
One of the best-known estates in Luberon has set up this museum, which has displays of old tools and reveals the 12 processes involved in grape-growing and wine-making.

MENERBES
Le Musée du Tire Bouchon,
Domaine de la Citadelle.
04 90 72 41 58
In an age when screwcaps are taking the wine world by storm (happily for those who care more about purity of flavor than tradition), this Luberon estate offers a museum dedicated to corkscrews. There are over 1,000 examples, including some that date from the earliest days of the cork, in the 17th century.

ANTIBES
Musée d’Archéologie,
1 Avenue Mézière.
04 92 90 54 35
While taking a break from the more modern objects and paintings on display at Provence's many art museums and galleries, drop in here to see a range of old artifacts, including pottery salvaged from 18th century shipwrecks.

BIOT
Verrerie de Biot,
46 Rue St-Sebastien.
04 93 65 78 00
Of peripheral relevance to wine, but definitely worth a visit, the glassworks here offers the chance to see how glass is blown. Bear in mind, while watching the process, that the modern 75-cl glass bottle is said to owe its size to the lung capacity of early blowers.

ANNUAL WINE EVENTS
Proven& and Corsica have relatively few wine-specific events, but wine is available at the local food fairs. Ask tourist offices (see below) for details.

JUNE
Toulon
Les Rencontres Internationales du Rosé—cooking competition and tastings of pink wines

JULY
Hyères and Ramatuelle wine festivals

Luri Fiera Di U Vinu—the biggest annual wine event on the island of Corsica, and a great opportunity to taste a wide range of young examples

SEPTMBER
Cogolin, Grimaud, St Tropez, Cassis, and Plan de la Tour wine fairs

WEBSITES

OTHER INFORMATION
PROVENCE
LES ARCS SUR ARGENS
Comité Interprofessionnel des Vins Côtes de Provence
04 94 99 50 10
04 94 99 50 19

CORSICA
AJACCIO
Agence de Tourisme de la Corse
17 Boulevard Roi-Jérôme
04 95 51 00 00
info@visit-corsica.com
AJACCIO

At first glance, this large appellation on the west coast of Corsica would seem destined to produce thick wines with high alcohol levels. But the temperature here is actually cooler than one might expect, thanks to an altitude of over 330 ft (100 m), and to the moderating effect of the sea. Low temperatures in the spring help to reduce yields and aid in the production of wines with concentrated flavors.

The red wines are primarily made from the Sciacarello grape, which does well on the granite soil here. Until recently, the flavor of Ajaccio was often obscured by an excess of tannin and a lack of freshness. Improved wine-making skills and the efforts of ambitious producers have, however, exposed both the peppery character of the Sciacarello and the more herby appeal of the local Vermentino grape that is used for white Ajaccio.

[Image of Clos Capitoro]

Worth the Detour

Corsica’s popularity with tourists both from the French mainland and from farther afield ensures that most of the wine is sold and drunk on the island.

BANDOL

One of the longest-established appellations in France, Bandol made full-bodied wines that were popular at court in the 16th and 17th centuries and were supposedly credited by Louis XV, who said they provided him with “vital sap and wits.” Like Bordeaux (see p.93), Bandol benefited from being a port and at one point it no doubt shipped more wine under its name than was produced from its vines.

Following replanting as a result of phylloxera, a group of producers fought to restrict the appellation to the natural amphitheater of terraced vines. Today, however, the main threat comes from the vacation houses that sell more easily than their wines. Bandol’s red wine is made primarily from the Mourvèdre grape, which gives it an intense, spicy flavor. The peppery rosés are also good, but the whites are generally dull.

[Image of Domaine Tempier]

The Perfect Setting

The grapes that are produced by these vines ripen reliably in what is one of the finest natural sun-traps in France.
**LES BAUX DE PROVENCE**

This spectacular medieval hilltop village, which is now among France’s most popular tourist attractions, can add its village name to the vast appellation of the Coteaux d’Aix en Provence. Its best reds are deep, dark, chocolatey wines, with notes of plums and cherries, while the rosés can compete with the best of the Rhône. There are some excellent producers here, including a number who use a combination of traditional and organic methods in the vineyards and cellars.

**Mas de Gourgonnier**

This rich, gamey wine has fruity, berryish flavors.

- AC Les Baux de Provence.
- Red/rose: Grenache, Cinsault, Mourvèdre, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon.
- Full-bodied reds. Dry rosés.
- Terres Blanches, Mas de la Dame, Mas de Gourgonnier.
- Cold beef salad.
- Red: 3–10 years. Rosé: 1–3 years.

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**BELLET**

One of France’s smallest appellations, Bellet is situated on the steep hills to the west of Nice. The cooling Alpine winds combine with sea breezes to create a surprisingly cool microclimate. The grape varieties used here are found almost nowhere else. The fragrant reds are made from Braquet (Italy’s Brachetto) and Fuella (Folle Noir), while whites are made from Rolle, blended with Ugni Blanc, Pigneron Muscadet, Mayorquin, Clairette, Bouboulenc, and Chardonnay.

**Château de Bellet**

Cuvée Baron G adds spicy notes of new oak to the flavors of the local grapes.

- AC Bellet.
- Red/rose: Braquet, Fuella, Cinsault.
- White: Rolle.
- Full-bodied, earthy reds. Scented, full-bodied whites.
- Dry, full-bodied rosés.
- Ch de Bellet, de Crémat.
- Sea bass with fennel.

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**CASSIS**

One of France’s oldest appellations, this fishing village turned arty resort lies to the east of Marseilles. Vineyards compete with tourism and real estate development, allowing wine-makers to command high prices. The rosés are pleasant, but unremarkable, and the dense and deep-colored reds are best drunk young. Cassis’ white wines, made from Ugni Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc, Clairette, Doucillon, Marsanne and Pascal Blanc, are more interesting and go perfectly with the local fish dishes.

**Clos Ste Magdeleine**

Examples of fine Cassis are among the world’s most distinctive white wines.

- AC Cassis.
- Red/rose: Mourvèdre, Grenache, Cinsault.
- White: Clairette, Ugni Blanc, Marsanne.
- Du Bagnol, Ste Magdeleine.
- Pizza.
- 1–4 years.

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**COTEAUX D’AIX EN PROVENCE**

The Coteaux d’Aix en Provence is a relatively new appellation, covering some 50 communes spread across Provence from Arles eastward to Rians and from the Durance River south to Marseilles. The area’s traditional grapes have been enhanced by the addition of up to 30 percent of Cabernet Sauvignon. This is still too little to allow the inclusion within the appellation of the Cabernet-influenced wines of Domaine de Trevallon, the region’s top estate.

**Château de Fonscolombe**

This large 18th-century château makes one of the best wines of the appellation.

- AC Coteaux d’Aix en Provence.
- Red/rose: Grenache, Cinsault, Mourvèdre.
- Medium-bodied, fruity reds. Light, dry rosés.
- De Beaulieu, Calissanne, Fonscolombe, Pigoudet.
- Red: Lamb with garlic.
- Red: 2–5 years. White/rose: 1–3 years.
This part of Provence was once a vinous no-man’s-land. Today, however, quality is improving, thanks to new rules prescribing an increase in the proportion of Mourvèdre, Syrah, or Grenache in red and rose wines to 80 percent. Good, peppery, red-curranty examples of the rose are often better than the ubiquitous Côtes de Provence (see right). The reds can have a Rhône-like richness, while the rare whites are dry, aromatic, and good with local specialties such as poulpe (octopus) à la Provençale.

Dom du Deffends Clos de la Truffière
This wine is a star feature in any lineup of reds from

AC Coteaux Varois.
Red/rose: Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre.
White: Vermentino.
Full-bodied reds. Light- to medium-bodied whites; dry roses.

Des Chaberts, du Deffends.
Red: steak au poivre.
Red: 2–5 years.
White/rose: 1–3 years.

MUSCAT DU CAP CORSE
Until 1993 these classic wines, produced in 17 villages in the rugged north of Corsica, had no appellation of their own and no means of finding their way beyond Corsica. Thus they were rarely compared with such Muscats as Beaumes-de-Venise (see p.259) and Frontignan. The chalky soil and sea breezes contribute to some wonderful, ripe purity of fruit, and fresh, perfumed aromas. These Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains wines are among France’s finest vins doux naturels.

Domaine de Catarelli
De Catarelli produces an orange-scented wine that would go well with fruit salad.

AC Muscat du Cap Corse.
White: Muscat Blanc à Petit Grains.
Sweet vins doux naturels.
Antoine Arena, de Catarelli, de Gaffory, Dominique Gentile, Leccia, Orenga de Gaffory, San Quilico.
Chocolate cake.
2003.
1–3 years.

VENCE
Around half of France’s rosé wine is made in this, France’s largest appellation, which covers 45,000 acres (18,000 hectares) of diverse landscape and vines. Reds range from intense Syrah to light, peppery Grenache. Wine-making skills and aspirations vary. Most cheap bistro rosé is dull and disappointing, but there are serious rosés to be had (including the highly priced wines from Domaine Ott), and a growing number of worthwhile reds and whites.

Domaine Richaume
Domaine Richaume is one of Provence’s pioneer organic producers.

AC Côtes de Provence.
Red/rose: Carignan, Syrah, Cabernet.
White: Clairette.
Full-bodied reds. Crisp, dry whites and rosés.
La Bernard, de la Mireille, Richaume.
Red: saucisson sec.
Red: 2–4
1–3 years.

PALETTE
Today, this wine comes from two producers, both taking advantage of the limestone soil and relatively cool climate of the north-facing slopes to the east of Aix. In fact, however, the appellation (whose fans have included kings René and Edward VII) owes its existence to just one: Château Simone. Considering Palette’s tiny size, the list of permitted grape varieties seems ludicrously long, but there is no doubting the quality of this small area’s reds, which can keep for up to 20 years.

Château Simone
A classic of southern France—well worth keeping for a decade or so.

AC Palette.
Traditional rich reds and whites. Long-lived rosés.
Ch Cremade, Ch Simone.
Red: Braised calf’s liver.
Red: 5–15 years.
White/rose: 3–7 years.
Vin de Corse

This generic appellation applies to the whole island of Corsica and covers red, white, and rosé wines, many of which do not warrant appellation status. Production is centered mainly on the large coоперatives on the east coast, but smaller estates do make interesting wines, often under the name of smaller appellations. For example, Domaine de Torraccia produces red and rosé wines of the Vin de Corse Porto Vecchio appellation. The pink is a full-bodied rosé, perfect with bourride, the local fish stew, while the red has flavors of berries, herbs, and tobacco. The Vin de Corse Figari appellation is close to Bonifacio in the south. Much of its wine is quaffing fare, but Domaine de Tanella and Poggio d’Oro are two quality-conscious names to watch. Other small appellations are Vin de Corse Calvi and Vin de Corse Sartène.

Winter Wonderland
Corsica’s snowy hills overlook these sloping vineyards on the east coast. Here, the vines are pictured “resting” before the growing season.

Antoine Arena
This is a perfect chance to try the herby flavors of the Vermentino grape, which gives Corsica’s whites their character.

Patrimonio
Patrimonio is Corsica’s oldest appellation and one of its best. It comprises seven communes and is situated just west of Bastia on the island’s northern tip. The dominant grape for the reds, Nielluccio, is cited as a native grape, but is almost certainly the Sangiovese of Tuscany, and may be a fairly recent introduction in Corsica. The combination of this and other Italian and Italianate varieties with the local limestone soil contributes to the long-lived, meaty, herby style of some reds, such as Orenga de Gaffory’s oak-aged Cuvée des Gouverneurs. The rosés, made from varieties including Grenache, have an herby, peppery style similar to many rosés from Provence, but they are often better-made and better value. The Patrimonio appellation also covers whites, which are now made solely from the local Vermentino.

The northern part of the island of Corsica boasts some spectacularly rugged countryside.

Clos Culombu, Corse Calvi
This cuvée prestige is one of the best examples of the kind of well-made wines that are now being produced here.

Savage Country

AC Patrimonio.
Deep-colored, full-bodied, often peppery reds. Peppery rosés. Light, dry whites.
Dom Aliso-Rossi, Antoine Arena, de Caterelli, Dominique Gentile, Leccia, Clos Martinis, Orenga de Gaffory, Pasticciola.
White: Fish soup.
Red: 3-5 years.
White/rose: 1-3 years.
THE RHÔNE VALLEY
The Rhône Valley

Of all the red wines produced in France, none offer a wider range of excitingly spicy flavors than those of the long, sun-baked Rhône Valley.

Every time I head south through France, I try to pause, ideally just before dusk, for a few minutes at a small chapel on top of a hill at the end of a winding and bumpy road. The building in question is the former home of a crusader turned religious hermit and has given its name to one of the most famous wines in the world. Jaboulet Aîné’s La Chapelle vineyard in the appellation of Hermitage (see p258) is not only one of the most famous, it is also one of the most gloriously situated. The view across the sinuous river below is spectacular enough, but it is the vertiginous slope of the terraced vineyard itself that always makes me reflect on the extraordinary human effort involved in planting, tending, and picking grapes here. An hour or so farther south you will find another uninhabited building and another, very different, site of vinous pilgrimage. This is the château of Châteauneuf-du-Pape (see p251), the ruined castle that was once the summer residence of the exiled Pope John XXII. There are no spectacular slopes, but walking is still no easy matter because the vineyards are covered with large round pebbles like the ones on inhospitable beaches.

Both these vineyards produce mainly red, with a little white wine. In Hermitage at the northern end of the Rhône Valley, and in the nearby apppellations of Crozes-Hermitage (see p257), St Joseph (see p260), Cornas (see p253) and the Côte Rôtie (see p256), the smoky, blackberry flavor of the reds comes exclusively from the Syrah grape. In Châteauneuf-du-Pape, in Gigondas (see p257) and in the villages making wines sold as Côtes du Rhône (see pp254–5), the flavors are more varied, depending on the proportions in which a cocktail of grape varieties are used. Although Syrah still features here, the leading player is Grenache. Wines from this variety vary enormously depending on how they are made, but they are all marked out by the instantly recognizable and deliciously incongruous smell and taste of freshly ground pepper.

For centuries, these Rhône reds were used to improve weedy wines from Bordeaux (see pp80–111) and Burgundy (see pp112–159). At one time, the practice was so acceptable that higher prices were charged for Médoc wines (see p99) that had been “hermitagé”—that is, dosed with Hermitage. Today, such mixtures are illegal—and unlikely—since wine drinkers are willing to pay as much for the finest wines of the Rhône as they do for the best wines of other regions.
From the vineyards stretching out from the Rhône Valley come a range of sweet and dry red, white and rosé wines whose common characteristic is their rich and often spicy flavours.
The History of the Rhône Valley

The Rhône Valley has inevitably played a huge role in the history of France, serving as a principal artery between the north and south. But it has also been a source of fine wine, from the vineyards that were established 2,000 years ago in the northern part of the region, to those farther south at Châteauneuf-du-Pape that gained their fame 1,300 years later.

In the early days of the Roman Empire, no river in France was more important to traders than the Rhône. We know that during the first century BC, wine from Rome and Provence was carried up the river valley and used as currency by the tribes who were struggling for supremacy in Gaul. Even before Julius Caesar and his troops arrived in Chalon-sur-Saône, in what is now part of southern Burgundy, the wine business was thriving enough for two enterprising Romans to have already set up shop as merchants.

The first quality wines said to have originated in the Rhône were the red wines that were made in the vineyards of Hermitage (see p258) and the Côte Rôtie (see p256) by a tribe called the Allobroges. These wines were evidently good enough for Pliny to note in 71 AD that the red wines of Vienne were sold at a premium. They were also considered fine enough to be exported to Rome and even across the Channel to the new colony of Britain. Historians still argue over whether the grape variety grown by the Allobroges was Syrah or Pinot Noir. The quality of these wines lay in the ripeness of their flavors, but the flavor of the grape may well have been hard to discern behind the pine resin that was used to preserve the wine on its travels. As elsewhere in France, monasteries in the Rhône region grew vines and made wine in the 12th and 13th centuries, but none of the wines they made gained the reputation enjoyed by their counterparts farther north in Burgundy. Recognition of the region’s potential first arrived in 1305, when Pope Clement V temporarily moved his palace from Rome to Avignon. Although the papal preference was apparently for Burgundy, most of the wine drunk at the papal court was from local vineyards. Pope John XXII unknowingly gave the name to the Rhône’s most famous wine, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, when he built himself a summer home in a flattish, pebbled region near Avignon.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, the region began to prosper as Lyon became an important trading center for silk. Rivalry with the Burgundians, however, who banned all Rhône wines from passing through Dijon on the grounds that they were “très petits et pauvres” (very small and poor), prevented the wines from being sold in northern France, Britain, and the Low Countries. Rhône wines finally began to develop a following among wine drinkers in Paris and London in the 17th and 18th centuries. At this time, they were also popular among merchants, who used Hermitage to improve the quality of red Bordeaux.
Ironically, it was not long before the wines of another Rhône commune found themselves to be the focus of attention among blenders and vinous fraudsters. When the vineyards of Châteauneuf-du-Pape were replanted at the beginning of the 20th century after having been destroyed by phylloxera, unscrupulous merchants and vine-growers used this famous name on wines that had nothing to do with its pebbled vineyards. In response to these threats to the prestige of their wines, a group of quality-conscious Châteauneuf-du-Pape producers, led by Baron Leroy (see p37), the owner of the finest domaine in the region, drafted a set of laws that dictated the boundaries within which Châteauneuf-du-Pape could be made. These rules covered a range of stipulations, including vine varieties, pruning, training, and ripeness, and even the health of the grapes. Thus it was that Châteauneuf-du-Pape became the true birthplace of the appellation contrôlée system.

These efforts, and the wine-making success of the region’s best growers and merchants, helped to keep the key appellations of the Rhône firmly among France’s more respected wines, but it was the rare exceptions, such as Jaboulet’s Hermitage La Chapelle, that were ranked alongside the top reds of Bordeaux.

This changed in the 1980s and 1990s, with the arrival on the scene of the American wine guru Robert Parker. Like the Romans of 2,000 years earlier, Parker relished the naturally ripe and “voluptuous” style of the region’s top wines, and treated them as seriously as he did the classic wines of the Médoc (see p99) and St Émilion (see p105). As wine-makers throughout the world tasted recent vintages from the Rhône and wines made from the same grape varieties in Australia and California, they began to question whether they ought to be planting Syrah, Grenache, and Viognier grapes instead of Cabernet, Merlot, and Chardonnay. No French wine region entered the 21st century better placed than the Rhône Valley.
A Driving Tour of the Rhône Valley

This short tour takes you southward, past the Syrah-dominated vineyards of the northern part of the Rhône Valley, through evocatively named and often spectacular appellations that include Côte Rôtie, Hermitage, and Condrieu, famous for the unexpectedly exotic white wines produced from the Viognier grape.

VIENNE TO AMPUIS

It is worth pausing in Vienne ① to visit some of the city’s churches and Roman monuments, including La Pyramide, an 82-ft (25-m) obelisk that is said to mark the tomb of Pontius Pilate. Then follow the river southward for a few miles before crossing to the west bank and the small but illustrious Côte Rôtie appellation. In Verenay ②, stop to visit producers like Clusel-Roch and Jean-Michel Gérin before turning left and following the steeply sloping vineyards toward Ampuis ③. This quiet town is just beginning to wake up to the recent explosion of interest in Côte Rôtie and Condrieu wines. The merchant Marcel Guigal, maker of some of the best, most expensive wines of the Côte Rôtie, has cellars here. Among Guigal’s very best wines is one named after the imposing Château d’Ampuis, visible in the distance but not open to visitors.

CONDRIEU TO ST PIERRE-DE-BOEUF

Near Ampuis is the town of Condrieu ④, surrounded by the vineyards of its namesake white wine appellation, where the Viognier grape shows what it can do when used on its own. If you pass through at harvest time, look for actor Gérard Depardieu, who owns a vineyard here. Turning right onto the D34 at the village of Vérin, you will reach the spectacular punchbowl vineyard and château that make up the tiny monopole of Château Grillet ⑤. The setting is worth a look, but this rather overpriced wine is not sold at the château. Offering better value, Condrieu producers well worth visiting include André Perret and Yves Guilleron at Verlieu ⑥, and Alain Paret, whose cellars are at St Pierre-de-Boeuf ⑦.

ST PIERRE-DE-BOEUF TO ST DÉSIRAT

The wines of the St Joseph appellation are made in communes spread over 37 miles (60 km) between Condrieu and Hermitage. Head for the 16th-century village of Malleval ⑧—to get there, turn off the N86 at St-Pierre-de-Boeuf on the D503, through the Gorge de Malleval, and past the Saut de Laurette waterfall, taking the D79 to Malleval. Its medieval salt market, the château and the cellars of Pierre Gaillard are worth visiting. Returning to the N86, some of the best-value wines in the area can be found at the coopérative of St Désirat ⑨, one of the most highly regarded in France.

CROZES-HERMITAGE AND TAIN L’HERMITAGE

Cross the river at Sarras and follow the N7 before turning left onto the D163, which takes you up through the vineyards of Crozes-Hermitage ⑩. Michel Martin is a producer worth visiting in Crozes-
Hermitage, and there are plenty of good estates in nearby villages, such as Chanos-Curson. Back on the N7, you will soon reach Tain l’Hermitage, which faces its twin town of Tournon-sur-Rhône across the river, and takes its name from the single hillside that makes up the appellation of Hermitage. These great granite vineyards cover an area of 311 acres (126 ha) on the east bank of the Rhône. All face due south, overlooked by the famous chapel that stands in the vineyard of Hermitage La Chapelle. You can reach the chapel by following the narrow road that climbs the hill near the cave coopérative. My favorite producer here is Gérard Chave of Domaine Jean-Louis Chave, who can be found in the nearby village of Mauves. All of the wine-makers listed on p214 are also worth a visit.

CORNAS TO ST PÉRAY AND VALENCE

The village of Cornas lies at the heart of the small, underrated appellation of Cornas. The vines, sheltered from the mistral winds, produce unusually ripe grapes. For a fine view of the vineyards and river, head up the narrow road to St-Romain-de-Lerps, returning to pick up the N86 that leads to the sparkling-wine village of St Péray and on to the town of Valence, where the vineyards are increasingly being encroached upon by housing developments.
If you were to ask a number of French gourmets to name the city where they would most like to spend a few days, Lyon would no doubt be among the most popular choices. Situated right on the border between the Rhône Valley and Burgundy, this has long been the home of a number of great restaurants, not to mention some of the finest charcuteries in France. Traditionally Lyonnaise, the spiced, dry, salami-style sausages rosette and saucisson de Lyon are now famous all over France and are made by charcuteries in other regions. Harder to find outside this city, however, is saladier lyonnais, once prepared with sheep’s testicles, but now more commonly made with sheep’s feet and chicken livers, and cervelas lyonnais, a brioche filled with boiled sausage mixed with pistachio nuts and truffles.

Throughout the northern part of the region, veal is cooked in white wine to make blanquette de veau. The main ingredient here, however, is the onion, which goes into soupe à l’oignon (onion soup) as well as sauce soubise, a simple onion sauce that is often served as an accompaniment to sausages.

Peppers
Farther south in the Rhône Valley, the cuisine adopts a Mediterranean flavor, and peppers, tomatoes, and olives are more commonly used.

Poulet à la Demi-Deuil
To make this dish, also known as poularde à la Lyonnaise, the chicken is poached in white chicken stock and stuffed with truffled forcemeat. Small pieces of truffle are also inserted under the skin and the dish is served with vegetables cooked in the chicken broth.
Pike fished from inland rivers is used as the basis of quenelles de brochet, fish mousse sausages, a delicious appetizer served with crayfish sauce.

As you move south, the focus shifts toward Mediterranean flavors: of ratatouille and tapenade, of wild herbs, saffron, tomatoes, peppers and olives. Whereas the northern part of the region cooks with butter, here olive oil is far more common.

The river is also the source of eel, used to make matelote, a fish stew from Barthelasse island on the Rhône River near Avignon. But the best fish come from the sea. There is rougets grillés aux feuilles de vigne, red mullet cooked with grape leaves and fennel, and all kinds of fish soup, the most famous being bouillabaisse served with rouille, a mayonnaise made with oil, garlic, chili peppers, and stock. Just as interesting, though, is bourride, a fish stew that comes with garlicky aïoli mayonnaise.

The Rhône Valley isn’t a haven for the sweet-toothed, but it is the place to find nougat, bugnes lyonnaises (lemon fritters) and almondy bread tarts.
TRAVELING IN THE RHÔNE VALLEY
Too many people speed through this region on their way to the south of France. Leave them to zoom along the autoroute while you turn off at Vienne and follow the river at a more leisurely pace. Apart from some of France’s most spectacular vineyards, the Rhône Valley has a wealth of historic villages and lots of great places to sleep and eat.

HOTELS & RESTAURANTS
A selection of the region’s best, combining good local food and wine with notable places to stay.

AVIGNON
 Matcher Chabran, Avenue du 45ème Parallèle, Route Nationale, Pont de l’Isère. 4 75 84 60 09
Situated between Tain l’Hermitage and Valence, this 12-room hotel is light and airy, with a great restaurant offering a really good range of wines from local producers.

POILOP, NEAR ORANGE
Matcher Chabran, Avenue du 45ème Parallèle, Route Nationale, Pont de l’Isère. 4 75 84 60 09
Situated between Tain l’Hermitage and Valence, this 12-room hotel is light and airy, with a great restaurant offering a really good range of wines from local producers.

CONDRIEU
Matcher Chabran, Avenue du 45ème Parallèle, Route Nationale, Pont de l’Isère. 4 75 84 60 09
Situated between Tain l’Hermitage and Valence, this 12-room hotel is light and airy, with a great restaurant offering a really good range of wines from local producers.

LES ROCHES
Matcher Chabran, Avenue du 45ème Parallèle, Route Nationale, Pont de l’Isère. 4 75 84 60 09
Situated between Tain l’Hermitage and Valence, this 12-room hotel is light and airy, with a great restaurant offering a really good range of wines from local producers.

CROZES–HERMITAGE
Matcher Chabran, Avenue du 45ème Parallèle, Route Nationale, Pont de l’Isère. 4 75 84 60 09
Situated between Tain l’Hermitage and Valence, this 12-room hotel is light and airy, with a great restaurant offering a really good range of wines from local producers.

LE MONTELBARD
Matcher Chabran, Avenue du 45ème Parallèle, Route Nationale, Pont de l’Isère. 4 75 84 60 09
Situated between Tain l’Hermitage and Valence, this 12-room hotel is light and airy, with a great restaurant offering a really good range of wines from local producers.

LYON
Matcher Chabran, Avenue du 45ème Parallèle, Route Nationale, Pont de l’Isère. 4 75 84 60 09
Situated between Tain l’Hermitage and Valence, this 12-room hotel is light and airy, with a great restaurant offering a really good range of wines from local producers.

WINE SHOPS
Some Rhône Valley wines that are widely available here can be more difficult to find at home, so don’t forget to stock up.

LYON
Le Vieille Reserve, 59 Avenue Foch. 4 78 89 15 17
Monsieur Morel and his son run this pair of shops, which offer fine wines from the Rhône Valley and from Burgundy to the north.

VIENNE
Le Vieille Reserve, 59 Avenue Foch. 4 78 89 15 17
Monsieur Morel and his son run this pair of shops, which offer fine wines from the Rhône Valley and from Burgundy to the north.

In the summer, explore the local whites and rosés of the Rhône Valley.
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TAIN L’HERMITAGE
Compagnie de l’Hermitage, 7 Place Taurobole.
\[04 75 08 19 70\]
Within a short walk of the best vineyards in the Rhône Valley, this friendly shop stocks the wine they produce, and those of every other corner of the region.

Des Terrasses du Rhône au Sommelier, 13 Rue Joseph-Péala.
\[04 75 08 40 56\]
The other place in this small town to offer a terrific range of wines from across the Rhône.

VINSOBRES
Cave du Prieuré, Avenue de Nyons.
\[04 75 27 60 11\]
In the heart of the Côtes du Rhône, a shop selling 100 wines from nowhere but here.

MUSEUMS
Some producers offer vineyard or winery tours. Contact tourist offices (see below) for details.

CHÂTEAUNEUF DU PAPE
Le Musée des Outils de Vignerons, Musée du Père Anselme/Caves Laurent Charles Brotte.
\[04 90 83 70 07\]
Set up by a big producer, this museum focuses on the tools used over the years by vine-growers and wine-makers.

RASTEAU
Le Musée du Vigneron, Route de Vaison.
\[04 90 83 71 79\]
This well-laid-out space, centered, again, around the tools of the trade, is the work of Paul Coulon of the Domaine de Beaurenard.

WEBSITES
For tourist information, go to www.tourisme.fr and type in the name of a town or village.

OTHER INFORMATION
Office de Tourisme, Parvis de la Gare, Valence.
\[04 75 44 90 40\]
The office of the Rhône region’s wine fraternity.

ANNUAL WINE EVENTS

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There are tourist offices in most towns, but this one has plenty of general information.

Inter Rhone, 6 Rue des 6 Faucons, Avignon.
\[04 90 27 24 00\]
Maison@inter-rhone.com
The office of the Rhône region’s wine fraternity.
CHÂTEAU GRILLET

Surrounded by vineyards belonging to the *appellation* of Condrieu (see p. 252), this unusually tiny, single-estate *appellation* faces southeast, providing perfect ripening conditions for the low-yielding Viognier vines. Extravagantly praised by 18th-century connoisseurs, the delicate white wines of Château Grillet have traditionally been considered some of the best in France, but vintages in the 1980s and early 1990s were disappointingly dull and over-sulfured. More recent efforts have shown a marked improvement, and at their best these wines can develop remarkably with time. Prices are still very high, and my advice for anyone looking for great apricot-scented Viognier wines is to consider the best wines of Condrieu before indulging in the wines of Château Grillet, which come with rather more extravagant price tags.

Château Grillet
The brown bottle and distinctive label make it easy to recognize the wines of Château Grillet.

Faded Glory
Gloomily imposing, the once-great Château Grillet overlooks its vineyards, which nestle comfortably in a natural granite amphitheater.

THE VIOGNIER REVIVAL

Chardonnay is the most widely planted white-wine grape variety in the world, and its apparent ubiquity has prompted some of the more experimental wine-makers to search for an alternative. Having dismissed Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, Sémillon, Chenin Blanc, and Pinot Gris, a number of producers, including the prominent Beaujolais *négociant* Georges Duboeuf, have turned their attention to the Viognier grape. This fragrant but low-yielding grape was once widely planted along the northern part of the Rhône Valley. Its tendency, however, to give small crops, and to make wines that go flabby a few years after bottling, led to a decline in its popularity. By 1968 there were just 35 acres (14 ha) of Viognier vines under cultivation. As part of the grape’s recent revival, Georges Duboeuf has planted significant Viognier vineyards in the Ardèche, and there are now more than 370 acres (150 ha) of Viognier vines farther south in Languedoc-Roussillon. The variety’s greatest success, however, is most evident in the vineyards of the recently rejuvenated *appellation* of Condrieu (see p. 252). Often made with nearly 100 percent Viognier grapes, the exotically perfumed and perfectly balanced white wines made here are some of the most exciting in the Rhône Valley.

Challenging but Rewarding
Deliciously fragrant but temperamental and low-yielding, Viognier is a difficult grape variety to grow.
As a result, producers here are entitled to combine 13 different grape varieties, from Grenache and Syrah to Mourvèdre, Terret Noir and white Bourboulenc. Despite this freedom, most wine-makers use a mixture of only three or four grape varieties, with Syrah, Mourvèdre, and Grenache the most widely used. Another famously unusual feature of most parts of the appellation are the large, cream-colored pebbles that make the vineyards look like pebble beaches, storing heat during the day and reflecting it onto the vines at night.

In recent years, most of the red wines produced here have become much less light and fruity than they used to be, and are richer and more gamey and long-lived. White wines are often dull, though better use of the Roussanne grape is helping to make a growing number of intriguingly aromatic wines.

Château de Beaucastel
Producing wines of wonderful character, this estate remains the favorite of many French critics.

Shingle Vineyards
It is the pebbles in Châteauneuf-du-Pape that set its vineyards apart from wine-growing land elsewhere in France. At night, the stones give off heat that has been stored during the day.

Dominating its namesake village, the now-ruined 14th-century château at Châteauneuf-du-Pape was built for Pope Jean XXII as a summer retreat from the papal court in the nearby city of Avignon. By the second half of the 14th century, flourishing walled vineyards had been established here. They produced popular red and white wines that were sold throughout the region, until the latter part of the 18th century, under the name of vin d’Avignon.

Classified under the rules of the appellations contrôlées system in 1935, the terroir of Châteauneuf-du-Pape is unusually varied, with soils ranging from sand through to gravel and alluvial deposits.

Château Rayas
This is one of the very best estates in the appellation. Unusually in Châteauneuf-du-Pape, the wines here are made entirely from a single grape variety, Grenache.
CLAIRETTE DE DIE

HUGGING THE SLOPES of the Drôme Valley, about 25 miles (40 km) to the east of the Rhône, the sparkling white-wine appellation of Clairette de Die is something of an anomaly in a region better known for full-bodied red wines from appellations such as Côte Rôtie (see p256) and Crozes-Hermitage (see p257). The area covered by the Clairette de Die appellation produces two contrasting styles of sparkling wine. The first is a dry, neutral-tasting wine made entirely from the Clairette grape and known, since a recent name change, as Crémant de Die. The second is the deliciously ripe and peachy Clairette de Die Méthode Dioise Ancestrale. Made from a mixture of Clairette and Muscat grapes, this unusual wine is bottled during its initial fermentation, to trap the carbon dioxide bubbles.

Dry and sweet sparkling whites.

Vincent Achard, Cave Cooperative de Die, Didier Cornillon, Magord, Jean-Claude Raspail, Union des Jeunes Viticulteurs (Chamberan).

CLAIRETTE DE DIE Méthode Dioise Ancestrale: Raspberry and strawberry tart.

2002.
1–2 years.

CONDRIEU

DRY AND RICHLY ALCOHOLIC, and with a wonderful, unexpected perfume of peach blossom, apricots, and violets, the white wines of Condrieu are the best in the Rhône and have recently acquired almost cult status. Originally planted during the first few centuries AD, the south-facing vineyards around the town of Condrieu in the eastern part of the appellation have long been used to produce semi-sweet, often botrytized, late-harvest wines; a style that is being successfully revived. Planted, as today, with the fragrant but temperamental Viognier grape (see p250), by the 1960s the vineyards of Condrieu covered only 25 acres (10 ha). Today, however, thanks to the recent Rhône boom, global Viognier fever, and some talented young producers, the area has risen to 259 acres (105 ha).

This fine producer makes fruity, semi-sweet Méthode Dioise Ancestrale, sold until 1999 as Clairette de Die Tradition.

Yves Cuilleron

This Condrieu producer makes fragrant, late-harvest sweet wines as well as the usual apricot-scented dry ones.

Picking in Condrieu

Yields are low and harvesting is hard in the steeply sloping vineyards of Condrieu, two explanations for the high prices paid for the hugely popular wines of the appellation.

Ac Clairette de Die Méthode Dioise Ancestrale, AC Crémant de Die.

White: Clairette, Muscat à Petits Grains.

Dry and sweet sparkling whites.

Vincent Achard, Cave Cooperative de Die, Didier Cornillon, Magord, Jean-Claude Raspail, Union des Jeunes Viticulteurs (Chamberan).

Clairette de Die Méthode Dioise Ancestrale: Raspberry and strawberry tart.

2–8 years.
CORNAS

AN AREA OF STEEPLY TERRACED south-facing granite vineyards on the western bank of the Rhône, the tiny appellation of Cornas covered only 130 acres (53 hectares) in 1975. Since then, however, the increasing international popularity of wines from the Rhône has given the full-bodied, somewhat rustic red wines of Cornas a new lease on life, and the area under vine has now risen to 210 acres (85 hectares). Improved vineyard practices have increased yields, while techniques such as destemming grapes before fermentation and the use of new oak barrels for maturation have produced smoky wines that are fruitier and less tannic than the ones traditionally made here. Old-school wines made by producers such as Auguste Clape offer top quality, but they need time.

Auguste Clape
Bucking the modern trend in Cornas toward a lighter, fruiter style, these more traditional wines are attractive and robust.

Sun-Trap Slopes
The terraced south- and southeast-facing vineyards on the hillsides of the Cornas appellation are perfectly positioned to soak up every available ray of sunshine and are ideal for Syrah.

CÔTES DU VENTOUX

CLOSE TO THE POINT where the Rhône Valley meets Provence is Mont Ventoux, venerated in local folklore as the source of the bitterly cold, high-speed mistral wind that whips down the Rhône Valley every winter. The limestone vineyards of the surrounding Côtes du Ventoux appellation are used to grow varieties such as the Grenache, the Cinsault, the Mourvèdre and the Syrah, producing fruity, light, early-drinking reds. Smaller amounts of unmemorable white and rosé are also made here.

Château Unang
In contrast to many Rhône wines, the Côtes du Ventoux are fresh and fragrant.

COTEAUX DU TRICASTIN

SPREADING OUTWARD from the eastern bank of the Rhône just south of Montélimar, the little-known hillside vineyards of Tricastin were awarded appellation contrôlée status in 1973. Several varieties are grown here, but many of the red and rosé wines of the appellation are made from a blend of Syrah and Grenache. The red wines in particular can offer excellent value, but so do the whites, which are often made from a blend of Viognier, Marsanne, and Roussanne.

Domaine de Grangeneuve
This light, fruity-peppery wine offers good value and easy drinking.

Côtes du Ventoux

AC Côtes du Ventoux.
Red/ rosé: Grenache, Syrah, Cinsault, Carignan.
White: Clairette.
Spicy reds. Dry, crisp whites. Rosés.
Cold roast beef.
1–4 years.
**CÔTES DU RHÔNE**

Of all the larger, so-called generic appellations in France, it is the Côtes du Rhône, stretching along the banks of the Rhône River from Vienne to Pertuis, and the Côtes du Rhône-Villages with its 16 named villages, that would get my vote for the greatest improvement in wine-making in recent years, and some of the very best value for money.

Officially, a bottle of wine labeled appellation contrôlée Côtes du Rhône could come from any part of a large swath of vineyards between Vienne and Pertuis—in other words, from anywhere along the Rhône Valley. In practice, the geography of the region means that the contents of such bottles have almost certainly been crushed from grapes grown in the southern Rhône. Between them, 10,000 wine-makers produce around 300 million bottles of appellation contrôlée Côtes du Rhône each year. Both the soils and the grape varieties grown here are diverse, with the dominant Grenache followed closely by Syrah, Mourvèdre, and Cinsault. As for the whites, these include a mixture of varieties from the dull Clairette to the fragrant Roussanne. Further variety is guaranteed by the ways in which the wines are made. At the same time, the trend among more ambitious producers is to use more traditional techniques to make wines with a firmer structure and greater longevity.

In theory, the finest wines of the Côtes du Rhône are found among the 20 million bottles labeled as Côtes du Rhône-Villages. Many of the best of these are produced in the villages listed on the right, each of which is named on the label (after Côtes du Rhône in the case of the first 16, before it in the case of Brézème). While named village wines quite justifiably command the highest prices, many good wines are also sold under the more basic Côtes du Rhône appellation, made by well-known négociant firms including Jaboulet Aîné and Guigal, and on estates throughout the southern Rhône Valley such as Château Mont-Redon in Châteauneuf-du-Pape (see p251).
The first 16 villages belong to the appellation Côtes du Rhône-Villages and print their name after the name Côtes du Rhône. Listed at the end is Brézème, which has its own appellation.

Beaumes-de-Venise (see p259) Best known for its fortified wines made from the Muscat grape, this village also produces good, light but juicy, peppery reds. Best producers include Domaine de Fenouillet and Château Redortier.

Cairanne One of the star villages of the region, home to several ambitious producers making some seriously good, spicy wines.

Chusclan The wines to buy here are the rosés, which can be better than those of nearby Tavel (see p261). The reds are attractive, too, but they are less worth keeping.

Laudun Producers here make unusually good white wines, as well as some of the region’s finest Grenache-dominant reds. The best wines will improve with a year or two in the bottle.

Rasteau (see p260). This village and Beaumes-de-Venise (see above) are noted as the only two communes in France that include both fortified (vin doux naturel) and unfortified wines.

Roaix The commune of Roaix shares a wine-making coopérative with the neighboring village of Séguret (see below), producing intense reds that repay three or four years’ aging.

Rochegude Although once famed for its whites, this appellation now covers only red wines, which are light and peppery.

Sablet Competing with Cairanne (see above) and named for its sandy soil, this is a dynamic commune known for its light reds, but increasing use of the Syrah grape variety is producing longer-lived wines.

St Gervais This commune is increasingly well regarded, thanks partly to the efforts of producer Guy Steinmaier at Domaine Ste Anne. The Mourvèdre and Syrah grapes both perform well in this southern region, as does Viognier, which contributes to some fine whites.

St Maurice-sur-Eygues Most of the unexceptional wines of this village are produced by the local coopérative.

St Pantéleon-les-Vignes and Rousset-les-Vignes The coolest climate in the Rhône explains the lightness of the wines made in these two neighboring villages.

Séguret These are some of the most serious and tightly structured wines in the Côtes du Rhône, and deserve to be kept for four years or more before drinking.

Valréas This commune produces some of the most attractively fruity, floral reds in the Rhône.

Visan Delicious when young, many of the wines from this commune also age well, and are worth keeping in the bottle for a few years.

Brézème Lying midway between the northern and southern Rhône and to the north of the Villages, Brézème labels its wines Brézème-Côtes du Rhône. The reds here are distinguished in that they are made only from the Syrah grape.

Intense Wines
In the shadow of brooding hills, the Grenache vineyards of Vinsobres produce the varied range of red wines sold as Côtes du Rhône-Vinsobres.
CÔTE RÔTIE

The CÔTE RÔTIE, or the “roasted hillside,” where the grapes are often literally roasted in the sun, produces red wines that live up to their evocative name, being deep-colored, luscious, and powerful. Covering the steep slopes behind the village of Ampuis, the vineyards form a bridge between Burgundy to the north and the Rhône Valley to the south.

Despite a vinicultural history dating back nearly 2,000 years, a large proportion of the vineyards of the CÔTE RÔTIE were not replanted following the devastating late-19th-century epidemic of the vine louse phylloxera. Vines gave way to fruit trees and, for the first three-quarters of the 20th century, the wines of the CÔTE RÔTIE were almost forgotten. While a small number of wine-makers have always persevered on the steep and challenging slopes here, credit for the rescue of the appellation has to go largely to the gifted producer and négociant Marcel Guigal. Not only is Guigal a tireless promoter of high-quality CÔTE RÔTIE, he has also revealed the potential of several individual estates by producing and bottling their wines separately. Today, Guigal’s single-estate wines, produced from grapes grown in the vineyards of La Landonne, La Mouline, La Turque, and the Château d’Ampuis, are undoubtedly the very best of the appellation, and command prices that are some of the highest in France. Guigal also produces a wine known as Brune et Blonde, made from a blend of grapes grown on two of the best-known slopes of the CÔTE RÔTIE, the Côte Brune and the Côte Blonde.

Popular legend has it that the vineyards, with their different-colored soils, were named after the hair color of the two beautiful daughters of the local landowner.

This is quintessential Syrah country, producing great wines with complex berry flavors and an unmistakable smoky note. Increasingly, producers are adding up to 20 percent white Viognier grapes to the Syrah, giving the wines an exotic violet and apricot perfume.

Château d’Ampuis

Many of the finest wines of the CÔTE RÔTIE come from producer Marcel Guigal’s collection of vineyards, including his illustrious recent acquisition, the Château d’Ampuis, whose wines bear the name of the château.

Despite a vinicultural history dating back nearly 2,000 years, a large proportion of the vineyards of the CÔTE RÔTIE were not replanted following the devastating late-19th-century epidemic of the vine louse phylloxera. Vines gave way to fruit trees and, for the first three-quarters of the 20th century, the wines of the CÔTE RÔTIE were almost forgotten. While a small number of
CROZES-HERMITAGE
Covering an area of 2,470 acres (1,000 ha), this large appellation spreads out around 11 villages to the north and south of the town of Tain-l’Hermitage. Like the terroir, the wines of Crozes-Hermitage are very varied, but at their complex, full-bodied, fruity best, they offer fantastic value. The finest estates, including Les Chassis and Domaine de Thalabert, lie to the north of Tain-l’Hermitage on south-facing slopes along the banks of the Rhône. Farther east the land is flatter, yields are higher, and the wines more ordinary. Ninety percent of the wines are red, made mainly from Syrah mixed with small amounts of Roussanne and Marsanne. White wines are made from the delicate Roussanne, either alone or mixed with Marsanne, and are often fresh and elegant.

Hidden Treasure
Some of the best vineyards in Crozes-Hermitage are tucked away just behind the slopes used to produce the more expensive wines of neighboring Hermitage (see p258).

The Brothers Chapoutier
The largest landowners in Crozes-Hermitage, the Chapoutier brothers produce a variety of fine wines.

GIGONDAS
The village and the surrounding vineyards of the appellation of Gigondas are situated in the spectacular Dentelles de Montmirail mountains to the east of the small town of Orange. In the early 1950s, the commune was granted appellation contrôlée Côtes du Rhône-Villages status, and in 1971 its wines were promoted to appellation contrôlée Gigondas. At their best, the reds of Gigondas are plummy and rich, dominated by the mellow flavors of the Grenache, carefully combined with smaller amounts of the tannic Syrah and the aromatic Mourvèdre. A great alternative to the more expensive vintages of nearby Châteauneuf-du-Pape (see p251), these wines will develop well for up to a decade. Dry, peppery rosé wines are also made here, and are well worth looking for.

Domaine du Cayron
Strangely underrated, the peppery, long-lived wines of Gigondas offer some of the best value in the region.

Mountains of Lace
Small but poetically named, the “lacy” Dentelles de Montmirail mountain range forms a stunning backdrop to the vineyards of Gigondas.
somewhat tough and inaccessible in their youth. A decade or so in the cellar, however, gives them a wonderfully gamey complexity. Extending over 380 acres (154 ha), the single south-facing slope that makes up the Hermitage appellation includes a number of subtly different environments, and wines here traditionally have been made from a blend of grapes selected from several sites. Increasingly, however, producers are choosing to make their wines from grapes grown on single, named plots of land. The best of these include Paul Jaboulet Aîné’s well-known La Chapelle. Other excellent single-estate wines to look for include Les Bessards and Les Greffieux.

The white wines of Hermitage, once as highly regarded as its reds, are now produced in only tiny quantities, but in two distinct styles. First, with its own appellation, but rarely produced, is the unusual wine known as vin de paille. Made by drying the grapes on straw before pressing, the best of these wines are crisp and honeyed. More common are rich, dry white wines made from a mixture of Marsanne and Roussanne grapes, which often improve for as long as 10 years in the bottle.

Jean-Louis Chave The wines produced by Jean-Louis Chave are some of the very best of the appellation.
LIRAC

**Known Until Recently** as an unsuccessful emulator of the rosé wines produced by its southern neighbor, Tavel (see p261), today the **appellation** of Lirac is more famous as a producer of fast-improving red and white wines. Set on the west bank of the Rhône just north of Avignon, the producers of Lirac use a classically varied southern Rhône combination of the Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre, and Cinsault grape varieties to make red wines that are medium-bodied, smooth, and spicy. At their best, these represent excellent value. The dry white wines made here are losing their reputation for dullness and have been vastly improved by the inclusion in 1992 of the Marsanne, the Roussanne, and the fragrant Viognier on the list of permitted grape varieties, and many are now attractively floral.

**Domaine Pélaquié**

Deliciously rich and peppery at their best, the little-known red wines of Lirac can offer excellent value.

**Grenache Vines**

Skillfully combined with other grape varieties, the mellow flavors of the Grenache are an important component in the red and rosé wines of Lirac.

**AC Lirac.**

- Red/ rosé: Grenache, Carignan, Mourvèdre, Syrah.
- White: Clairette, Ugni Blanc, Marsanne, Roussanne, Viognier.

- Medium- to full-bodied reds.
- Dry whites. Dry rosés.

Ch d’Aquéria, les domaines Bernard, de Devoye Martine, la Fermade, Mahy, de la Mordorée, Chapelle de Maillac, Pélaquié, St Maurice, St Roch.

**Red:** Saddle of hare.


**Red:** 2–5 years.

**White/ rosé:** 1–3 years.

MUSCAT DE BEAUMES-DE-VENISE

**Although It Produces** high-quality red wines that are sold under the Côtes du Rhône-Villages **appellation**, the village of Beaumes-de-Venise, to the east of the town of Orange, is more famous for its apricot-gold vins doux naturels (see p31), made from the fragrant Muscat grape.

Most of the Muscat wines here are made at the Coopérative des Vins et Muscats, famous due to its hugely successful 1970s marketing campaign, which sold the wine throughout northern Europe as a dessert wine to be enjoyed by the glass, thanks to its screw-top bottle.

The coopérative’s top wines are comparable to the single-estate wines made by individual producers. The best efforts of this **appellation** are rich and peachy, achieving a perfect balance of sweetness and acidity.

**Domaine de Durban**

The best wines here are made by individual producers like this one, rather than in the local coopérative.

**Provençal Sun**

The sun-baked vineyards around the village of Beaumes-de-Venise are used to grow two varieties of the Muscat grape, named for its distinctive musky fragrance.
RASTEAU

This Côtes du Rhône-Villages commune offers both fortified and unfortified wines. The grapes for the former are 90 percent Grenache (Noir, Gris, or Blanc) from the villages of Rasteau, Sablet, and Cairanne. Fortification is carried out by adding brandy during early development. The fortified wines are in rancio style—that is, they are purposely maderized by storing the wine in oak casks, which are later exposed to air and sunlight. The wines vary with the quality of grapes, the cleanliness of casks, and the degree of maderization. Some are like thick, sweet sherry; others have a delicate, Madeira-like quality. Rasteau’s red table wines, though possibly less exciting, tend to be reliable, peppery Rhônes. The whites can be dull and are almost always best drunk young.

Marie-France Masson

This is a peppery-rich wine that could serve as a perfect illustration of the flavors of the southern Rhône.

Cave des Vigneronns

As in some other parts of the Rhône, the smaller coopératives to be found in these communes produce some of the best—and best-value—wines.

ST JOSEPH

Once called Vin de Mauves after the commune of that name, St Joseph became an appellation in 1956. It then grew six times its former size, stretching south down the west bank of the Rhône to Valence. Many of the new plantings took little account of the character of the original vineyards, with the effect that buying St Joseph today is a hit-or-miss business—wines range in style and quality from basic Côtes du Rhône (see pp254–5) to junior Hermitage (see p258). The best vineyards are on the sandy and gravelly granite slopes behind and around Tournon. Grapes ripen less well than they do in Hermitage, and wines are less intense. Even so, they can be first-class, blackberryish reds for relatively early drinking. Small quantities of Marsanne- and Roussanne-based whites are also produced.

Jean-Louis Grippat

Classy reds like this can sometimes age more successfully than feeble examples of supposedly classier Hermitage.

Mauves

The village that once gave its name to the entire region is now a quiet commune almost hidden among the vines, and still producing good wine.

AC St Joseph.

Red: Syrah.

White: Marsanne, Roussanne.

Soft, fruity reds. Fragrant, richly flavored dry whites.

Cave St Désirat, Cave de Tain-Hermitage, Chapoutier, Chave, Chëze, Courbuys, P. Coursodon, Y. Cuilleron, Pierre Gaillard, Graillot, J-L. Grippat, Jaboulet, Perret, G. Vernay, Villard.

Red: Wood pigeon with onions, red wine, and ham.


White: 1–3 years.

3–10 years.
ST PÉRAY

This appellation is situated on the Rhône’s west bank, opposite and now almost within the sprawling outskirts of Valence. The fight against competition from developers is not made any easier by the undistinguished character of these light, often quite acidic wines. St Péray’s style makes it an anomaly in this area of rich, meaty Syrahs and full-bodied Viogniers. Conditions for grape-growing are affected by a cooler climate and the richness of the soils. Most of the grape harvest goes to make rustic méthode traditionelle sparkling wines, which are jointly produced by the caves coopératives of Tain-l’Hermitage and St Péray, and mostly sold within the region itself. For a taste of what this appellation can produce when given more individual care and attention, try the wines of Jean Lionnet and Marcel Juge.

TAVEL

A favorite with both Louis XIV and the novelist Honoré de Balzac, this is the most famous rosé in France, and the only Rhône appellation to produce exclusively pink wine. In the past, although it often tasted stale and dull, it was praised for its bronze color and lauded as the only rosé wine to improve with age. This reputation helped to swell the vineyards to nearly 2,500 acres (1,000 ha). There is no disputing the potential of Grenache, Syrah, and Mourvèdre to make good wine on Tavel’s sandy, clay-alluvial and pebbly soils, and modern wine-growers and critics respectively produce and praise much fresher, more violet-hued wine. Good Tavel should be both fragrant and fruity, yet full-bodied and bone-dry. It is an excellent food wine that can accompany charcuterie, fish in sauce, or white meats.
**VACQUEYRAS**

Eighteen years after Gigondas (see p257) became the first of the named Côtes du Rhône-Villages (see p255) to get its own appellation, this village achieved similar recognition in 1990. Its best reds rarely match good examples of Gigondas and do not always outclass wines from Côtes du Rhône-Villages communes such as Cairanne. The reds contain Grenache (a minimum of 50 percent) plus Syrah, Mourvèdre, and Cinsault. At their best, they are deep-colored, spicy wines, though after three or four years in the bottle they lose some of their rustic character and gain complexity. The rosés are good; whites are less so, partly because of their high content of Grenache Blanc, Clairette, and Bourboulenc. An increased proportion of Marsanne, Roussanne, and Viognier would improve them dramatically.

**Grape Varieties of the Rhône**

Four varieties are well known for the role they play in the wines of the Rhône Valley. First there is the leading player, Syrah, from which are made the rich, dark, smoky, blackberryish red wines of Hermitage (see p258), Côte Rôtie (see p256), Cornas (see p253), St Joseph (see p260) and Crozes-Hermitage (see p257) in the northern Rhône. Second is Grenache, the mainstay of the strawberry-cherryish, peppery-red Côtes du Rhône (see pp254–5) and Châteauneuf-du-Pape (see p251) of the southern Rhône. Third is Muscat, which produces the unashamedly grapey wines of Beaumes-de-Venise (see p259), and fourth is the newly fashionable Viognier, found in the perfumed white wines of Condrieu (see p252) and Château Grillet (see p250). The Rhône is also the traditional home of a large range of other, less well-known grapes. Some, such as Grenache Blanc, Bourboulenc, and Clairette, are decidedly dull, and depend on good winemaking to produce white wines with any degree of flavor. Then there are the far more characterful Roussanne and Marsanne, which are used to make some of the world's most fascinatingly floral dry whites. The spicy Mourvèdre and Cinsault, though usually better in blends than as soloists, can contribute quite significantly to the flavor of red Châteauneuf-du-Pape and a range of other red wines.
OTHERS

AMONG THE OTHER WINES of the Rhône, some are dull and old-fashioned, while others offer some of the best value in France. Among those most worth seeking out are light, juicy reds that compete well with Beaujolais; spicy, fuller-bodied Côtes du Rhône-style reds; and the extraordinary sweet whites that are now being made from partially dried grapes.

One Rhône Valley wine that I would dispose of quickly is Coteaux de Die, which gained an appellation in 1993 as part of the redefinition of the sparkling wines previously called Clairette de Die. Under the new arrangements, less of Die’s appellation bubbly is now made from the dull Clairette grape variety—and instead of consigning the now-obsolete Clairette grapes to vin de pays blends, the authorities generously encourage producers to turn them into a still wine that they can sell under this appellation.

Similar generosity was shown in 1998 when the Coteaux de Pierrevert were promoted from VDQS to appellation contrôlée.

Châtillon-en-Diois is a small appellation that celebrated its 25th birthday in 1999. The white is made from two Burgundy grape varieties, Chardonnay and Aligoté, while the red is made from Gamay with some Pinot Noir and Syrah.

Côtes du Lubéron owes its appellation status to the efforts of Jean-Louis Chancel, who, during the 1970s and 1980s, invested part of a fortune made from vegetable oil in relandscaping and planting 400 acres (160 ha) of pebbly vineyards and in building his showcase Val Joanis wine estate. The quality of the Val Joanis Grenache-Syrah reds has not always justified the creation of the appellation, and the whites have been downright dull, but the rosés have been good and a number of other producers, such as La Vieille Ferme, Châteaux de l’Isollette and Canorgue, and Domaines de la Citadelle and de Fontenille, make attractive, fairly lightweight wines in all three styles.

One region that can offer good-value reds is Côtes du Vivarais. Still a VDQS, it produces a growing range of good light reds, rosés, and even whites, thanks to recent moves to outlaw duller grape varieties such as Carignan and Ugni Blanc. The best villages (whose names are permitted to feature on labels) are St Remèze and Orgnac.

Finally, Hermitage Vin de Paille is a glorious, ancient style that, like its counterpart in Alsace, has been revived by a number of top producers, including Chave, Chapoutier, Grippat, and Guigal. The drying process, which allows the grapes to lose three-quarters of their water content, produces glorious, sweet wines with extraordinary longevity.

Domaine de la Citadelle
Here is the proof that the Côtes du Lubéron can make reds worthy of its recently won appellation status.
Southwest France

This region is an ideal hunting ground for anyone who wants unusual flavors or good-value alternatives to Bordeaux made from the same grapes in similar conditions.

The southwest is an area where frontiers have been drawn up with more regard for convenience than logic. There are several appellations here that grow the same grape varieties used in neighboring Bordeaux (see pp80–111), and that might, but for an accident of geography and history, be classified as part of that region. Bergerac (see p270), for example, was an important wine region long before the Médoc (see p99) began to earn its reputation. Indeed, the second-class status of Bergerac today owes more to the efforts of Bordeaux merchants to discriminate against it than to the quality of its wines. Though never great, when made with care and skill the wines of Bergerac can compete easily with many pricier wines from Bordeaux. The same is true of wines from the sweet white appellation of Monbazillac (see p274), and of more expensive wines from appellations such as Saussignac and Pécarmant (see p275).

Even more interesting, to my mind, are a number of appellations, including Gaillac (see p272), Cahors (see p271) and Irouléguy (see p275), that make their wines from local grape varieties such as Tannat, Fer, Gros and Petit Manseng, and Len de L’Elh, which are grown almost nowhere else in the world. These wines are often resolutely unfashionable, and stand out like hand-thrown pots in a shop full of machine-made crowd pleasers. Although varied, the reds tend toward the rugged and tannic, made to accompany the hearty stews for which this region is known. The whites, at their best, have a fresh and gently tangy character all their own. Perhaps inevitably, the so-called real world of international commerce and technical innovation has begun to make an impact on these wines in recent years. While Cahors, for example, has traditionally produced intense, inky-dark wines, modern techniques are now being used here to make light and medium-bodied reds, too. So, until you pull the cork, there is often no way to know whether the contents of the bottle will be richly tannic and best drunk with a cassoulet, or light and fruity to go with a plate of cold meats. Throughout the
Southwest France
Despite the high quality of its wines, this diverse region has historically been overshadowed by neighboring Bordeaux, where merchants often took steps to prevent rival wines from reaching overseas markets.

Southwest region, a new generation of wine-makers has responded to the demands of the international marketplace by learning new ways to bring out the best qualities of their vineyards and local grape varieties, and to replace rusticity with refinement. It is no coincidence that, after centuries of disdain, the grandees of Bordeaux have recently begun to consider including both Bergerac and Monbazillac within their appellation.

New Shades of Black
The tough, tannic “black wine” from the Cahors vineyards may be a rarity these days, but there are delicious modern versions to be found by anyone prepared to seek them out.
TRAVELING IN SOUTHWEST FRANCE
Traditionally, the country to the east of Bordeaux and to the northwest of the Languedoc was far too often overlooked. But in recent years its discovery by Britons looking for a place to spend the summer and its rediscovery by Parisians have helped to clear the way for a growing number of first class hotels and restaurants.

HOTELS & RESTAURANTS
A selection of recommended establishments in southwest France, combining great local food and wine with notable places to stay.

CAMBO-LES-BAINS
05 59 93 91 88
FAX 05 59 29 28 57
If you want to explore traditional Basque cooking, and what happens when talented cooks put a modern spin on it, this is the place to come. Try the Eizekaria vegetable soup with a glass of Jurançon or the Tripotxa black pudding with an Irouleguy. Stay overnight and you can spend the next day by the pool.

FOURCÈS
Château de Fourcès.
05 62 29 49 53
It’s best to make reservations well in advance and allow yourself a few hours to work off the meals in the pool, or to sleep them off on the terraces.

FOURCÈS
The restaurants of the southwest offer an unusually wide ranges of wines, thanks to the varied list of grapes the wine makers have at their disposal.

LAGARDE FIMARCON
Castelnau des Fieumarcon.
05 62 68 99 30
FAX 02 47 32 02 52
www.lagarde.org
fcoustols@lagarde.org
Close to Condom and the heartland of Vin de Pays des Côtes de Gascogne and Armagnac, this is quite simply a 13th century walled village in which 12 houses have been sympathetically restored to include kitchens, but no telephones or televisions—making the views over what Stendhal called France’s Tuscany all the easier to appreciate.

LARESSINGLE NEAR CONDOM
l’Auberge de Larressingle.
05 62 28 29 67
FAX 05 62 68 33 14
www.auberge-de-larressingle.fr
A few minutes along the D15 from Condom, this is a pretty old hotel and restaurant close to the gorgeous castle and offering good local cooking. There are also well chosen

A treasure trove for those looking for something different
The restaurants of the southwest offer an unusually wide ranges of wines, thanks to the varied list of grapes the wine makers have at their disposal.
examples of Vin de Pays des Côtes de Gascogne and Côtes de St Mont.

**MERCULÉS**

Château de Mercuès, 46090, Mercuès, Lot.  
05 65 20 00 01  
05 65 20 05 72

This medieval turreted castle overlooking a swath of vines was once the place where the bishops of Cahors used to spend their summer. Today, it is both a wine estate, and a luxury hotel and restaurant where truffles and foie gras are well handled. Be sure to visit the cellar before dining, and stay overnight to enjoy the sensation of waking here in the morning.

**TOUZAC**

Hostellerie la Source Bleu, Moulin de Leygues.  
05 65 36 52 01  
05 65 24 65 69

Beautifully set in a trio of old mills, dating from the 11th, 12th, and 17th centuries, with a rustling stream and a peaceful lake, this 15-bedroom family hotel is a perfect place from which to explore the country around Cahors.

**WINE SHOPS**

Wines from the southwest can be difficult to find back home, so it’s worth visiting a good shop while you’re in the area.

**AGEN**

Plaisirs du Vin, Allée de Riols, ZAC Agen Sud.  
05 53 66 76 42

Agen is best known for its prunes, but it also lays claim to one of the best wine shops in the southwest.

**MUSEUMS**

Some producers offer vineyard or winery tours. Contact tourist offices (see below) for details.

**ANNUAL WINE EVENTS**

There are plenty of wine festivals throughout the southwestern region, sometimes combined with celebrations of local dishes and ingredients. Look also for musical events like l’Été Musical (which is held every year in several villages and towns in the Lot Valley), the terrific Marcillac jazz festival in August, Cahors’ blues festival, and Vinojazz in Bergerac in the spring. Contact tourist offices (see below) for further details.

**MARCH**

St-Mont wine festival centered around the region’s reds

**MAY**

Albas wine festival—a good chance to sample young vintages of Cahors  
Bergerac Vinojazz—a festival that reflects the popularity of jazz in this area

**BERGERAC**

Musée du vin de la Batellerie et de la Tonnellerie, 5 Rue des Conférences.  
05 53 57 80 92

Barrel-making is as much of a focus as vines and wines here, which adds to the interest of the museum.

Maison des vins—Cloître des Recollets, 1 Rue des Récollets.  
05 53 63 57 55  
05 53 63 01 30

A small promotional center and regional museum in an old cloisters, the Maison des Vins is worth dropping into as you wander around Bergerac.

**WEBSITES**

The first stop for this region is www.vins-du-sud-ouest.com. Other (more specific) sites worth visiting include www.plaimont.com, www.vigneronsbuzet.fr, www.montus-madiran.com and www.vins-jurancon.fr—the last of these is a particularly good site devoted to the old but often overlooked region of Jurançon. There is also some very useful information about Bergerac and the surrounding area at www.bergerac-tourisme.com.

**OTHER INFORMATION**

Conseil Interprofessionnel des Vins de la Région de Bergerac, 1 Rue des Récollets, Bergerac.  
05 53 63 57 57  
05 53 63 01 30

The place to go for information on Bergerac and its wines.
BERGERAC

The wines of Bergerac have for a long time been kept in the shadows, with Bordeaux (see p.93) across the Dordogne taking the limelight. Vines have been cultivated in this picturesque region since Roman times, with exports of wine to England recorded as early as 1250. Today, Bergerac is the biggest appellation in the southwest. The wine produced here is sufficiently similar to Bordeaux for it to have been suggested in the late 1990s that it might one day be accepted as part of that region. Another appellation, the Côtes de Bergerac, exists for red wines with a higher minimum alcohol content (11 rather than 10 percent), but some top producers prefer not to use it, focusing attention instead on Bergerac and on the names of their estates.

**Château Tour des Gendres**

Good white Bergerac, like this, easily outclasses wines like Entre-Deux-Mers (see p.95) and basic white Bordeaux.

**Bergerac**

A magnet for thousands of fans of the play "Cyrano de Bergerac," Bergerac is a small, pleasant, country town that is only now beginning to gain a good reputation for its wines.

**Buzet**

Formerly known as the Côtes de Buzet, the vineyards located between the towns of Agen and Marmande date back to Roman times. As with many appellations in this area, Buzet suffered when the importation of wine into Bordeaux (see p.93) was banned following the Hundred Years’ War. More recently, however, Buzet’s wines were blended with the wines of Bordeaux, until appellation laws made this illegal. Today, this region’s red wines are better than some more expensive Haut-Médoc (see p.99) and St Émilion (see p.105). Those of Châteaux de Gueyze, Baleste, du Frandat, and de la Tuque can all be recommended and are made by the local coopérative, which produces most of Buzet’s wines. Sadly, its rosés and whites are decidedly less interesting.
**CAHORS**

The once famous “black wine” of Cahors takes its name from the Malbec grape that, prior to phylloxera, produced dark, inky-colored wine. This is said to have been enjoyed in London since the 13th century, but the merchants of Bordeaux (see p93) banned its sale in Great Britain after the Hundred Years’ War. The producers responded by selling their wine in Holland, where drinkers preferred it to the paler efforts of Bordeaux. Today’s Cahors is more approachable, but varies in quality, from the light and dull examples sold cheaply in supermarkets to the rich, delicious wines stocked by specialized merchants and good restaurants. Fans of traditional Cahors should head for the limestone flats, while those seeking lighter, plummier reds will prefer wines from the sand and gravel hillside.

**Côtes de Duras**

If Bordeaux (see p93) ever wanted to expand the boundaries of its region, the wine-makers could quite easily join up with the Côtes de Duras, whose slopes carved out by the Dourdèze River are actually an extension of the Entre-Deux-Mers (see p95). Even the grape varieties used here are primarily the same as those used for Bordeaux. As for the quality of its wines, while there are no Côtes de Duras wines that provoke excitement, there are plenty of decently made reds and whites.

**Côtes du Marmandais**

Surrounded by Entre-deux-Mers (see p95), the Côtes de Duras and Buzet (see p270), this appellation for red, white and rosé wines extends over both sides of the Garonne River. The often rustic reds are prevented from being too Bordeaux-like (see p93) by the stipulation that the three main Bordeaux grape varieties (Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon) can only make up 75 percent of the blend. The whites are mainly mixtures of Sauvignon Blanc, Sémillon, and Ugni Blanc.
GAILLAC

ONE OF FRANCE'S MOST ANCIENT wine regions, Gaillac is enjoying a renaissance due to a growing interest in traditional grapes and styles. Gamay, used to produce Gaillac's feebler red wines, is on its way out and local varieties, like Duras and Fer, are being encouraged. For whites, Mauzac, Ondenc, and Len de l'Elh are making a similar comeback. Luckily, the authorities have recognized that these grapes produce better wines if blended with varieties such as Syrah and Sauvignon Blanc. Gaillac produces a wide variety of wines, from light reds and pale rosés to appley, perfumed, dry and honey-sweet whites. Gaillac’s appley, sparkling wines are its most interesting product and are sold as Méthode Gaillaçoise and Méthode Gaillaçoise Doux.

Domaine des Perches
This is a lovely, tangy example of new wave Gaillac made from the Sauvignon Blanc.

Pattern of Life
Gaillac's vineyards, some of which are among the oldest in France, are grown alongside a wide range of other crops because wines can be hard to sell.

JURANÇON

PROONENTS OF MODERN VIEWS against giving alcohol to children presumably dislike the legend that drops of Jurançon were placed on Henri IV's lips at his baptism in 1553. Jurançon is one of France’s oldest appellations, and its delicate white wines have always been fiercely protected. Planted in the foothills of the Pyrenees around the town of Pau, most of the vines are at an altitude of 1,000 ft (300 m), and they are often trained on trellises to avoid frost damage. The local grape varieties are Gros Manseng, Petit Manseng, and Courbu. In the best dry and sweet wines, these produce a tangy bouquet of pineapples and peaches, and a combination of richness and acidity that comes from the underrated Manseng. The appellation has good producers and deserves to be better known.

Domaine Cauphèpè
This producer is well worth remembering for both its dry and sweet Jurançon wines.

View from the Top
Some of Jurançon’s best vines are grown on the very steep hillside slopes of the appellation, while other crops are grown on the flatter land beneath.
**MADIRAN**

One of the best, most progressive producers in the area, Alain Brumont produces first-class barrel-matured Madiran at this château.

**Domaine Pichard**

The toughness of the Tannat grape variety is beautifully balanced by the fruitiness and richness of this Madiran red wine.

**Château Bouscassé**

One of the best, most progressive producers in the area, Alain Brumont produces first-class barrel-matured Madiran at this château.

**MARCILLAC**

The savage Auvergne countryside is one of the few places in which the Fer, or Mansois, grape is found. It produces reds and rosés that tend to be fiercely tannic when young, becoming peppery and almost perfumed with age. Once there were thousands of acres of Fer vines in this appellation, but today there are only a scant hundred left. If the authorities had not elevated Marcillac’s status from VDQS to appellation contrôlée in 1990, the area’s producers might even have given up wine-making altogether. Recent regulations require a minimum of 90 percent of Fer, with Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, or Cabernet Franc making up the balance. The young reds are now more approachable, but the rosés still tend to be fairly dull.

**Domaine du Cros**

Domaine du Cros’ peppery, perfumed wines are some of the most characterful and reliable of the wines produced in Marcillac.

**Sun-Baked Terraces**

The vines of Marcillac are planted on steep slopes, where grapes ripen and develop thick skins that can give toughness to the red and rosé wines.
MONBAZILLAC

Château de Monbazillac
One of the most imposing châteaux in Monbazillac, this is also the source of some of the best, longest-lived wines produced in the appellation.

Château Theulet
The care taken in the vineyard and cellar of Château Theulet has resulted in oaky wines that are often better than basic Sauternes.

MONTRAVEL

This ambitious small region follows the Dordogne River westward from Ste Foy-la-Grande to the border between the Gironde and the Dordogne départements. Boasting three separate appellations for its white wines, Montravel produces crisp wines mainly from Sémillon and Sauvignon, while Côtes de Montravel and Haut-Montravel cover semi-sweet, medium-sweet, and late-harvest whites. Red Montravel from top estates often outclasses Bordeaux and red Bergerac (see p.270).

Château Pique-Serre
This white wine, with its dry, peachy flavor, is typical of Montravel.

PACHERENC DU VIC-BILH

One of the little-known gems of the French wine world, Pacherenc du Vic-Bilh has an unusual Gascon name and comes from 247 acres (100 ha) of vines to the west of Auch and north of Pau. The dry, medium-sweet, and sweet whites are made from the local Ruffiac, Petit Courbu, Petit Manseng, and Gros Manseng varieties, better known for their role in Jurançon (see p.272), as well as Sémillon and Sauvignon. The best Pacherenc du Vic-Bilhs have a fruity flavor, with an occasional touch of oak.

Plaimont
A fine, honeyed example of Pacherenc du Vic-Bilh from the Plaimont cooperative.
PECHARMANT

The red wines of Pécharmant, an appelation covering 445 acres (180 ha) to the east of the town of Bergerac, put many Bordeaux (see p93) to shame. The Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Merlot vines grow on the banks of the Dordogne, where the soil’s high iron content contributes to the rich structure, flavor, and longevity of the wines. A number of estates are exploiting the region’s potential and making ideal accompaniments to traditional Perigord cuisine.

Château de Tiregand
This fine old estate produces subtle and supple wines.

OTHERS

Among the other wines of the southwest are Irouléguy’s richly spicy if tannic reds, made from a blend of Tannat and Cabernet grapes. These are easy to spot on the shelf: their Basque names tend to include unexpected consonants as with the excellent Cuvée Bixintxo. Rosés can be fair, but the whites are dull. The reds of the Béarn appelation, made nearby from similar blends, are lighter and less interesting, though the young whites and rosés can be aromatic. The Côtes du Frontonnais reds—sold as Fronton or Villaudièrc, depending on the village in which they were produced—are characterful country wines with the spicy, berryish flavors of the Negrette grape, which must make up at least 60 percent of the blend. Saussignac and Rosette are sweet wines worth watching. Saussignac is made from Sémillon, Sauvignon Blanc, Muscadelle, and Chenin Blanc and must have a minimum of 18 g (0.6 oz) per liter of residual sugar. At its best, it is full-bodied with a rich flavor. Rosette must contain between eight and 54 grams (0.3–2 oz) per liter of residual sugar and is softer than Saussignac. Produced near Bergerac (see p270), under whose name their reds are sold, these are good alternatives to Sauternes (see p110).
France’s vins de pays, or country wines, are increasingly the unexpected driving force behind the French wine industry.

In the early 1990s, a reliable way of bringing a disdainful look to the face of a Parisian wine snob would have been to utter the three words “vin de pays.” California, Australia, and South Africa were, he might grudgingly have conceded, starting to make palatable country wines. But in France, to get something worthwhile, you had to choose from the appellations contrôlées.

The vins de pays, he would argue, are merely 140 or so designations created in the 1970s for areas that had previously turned out basic vins de table. This wine was either sold by the liter in plastic or returnable glass bottles, or poured directly into the European wine lake. Admittedly, the vins de pays were subject to legislation that dictated where they could be made and which grapes could be used, but the rules were far looser than they were for appellation wines. Vins de pays could be made by combining grapes that were never blended elsewhere, and fruits from vineyards hundreds of miles apart were often blended in the larger regions.

In a sense, the snob’s dismissal of the vins de pays was, and still is, largely valid. While there have been occasional exceptions to the rule, such as the Vin de Pays de l’Hérault made by Aimé Guibert at his Mas de Daumas Gassac estate, most of the wines sold under this designation are still basic fare, carelessly produced by ill-equipped coopératives from badly tended grapes grown on poorly sited land. However, behind the scenes, this picture has begun to change.

Pioneers like Yves Grassa in Gascony and Robert Skalli have introduced New World wine-making methods and marketing techniques, and have begun to play the New World producers at their own game by producing smartly packaged, modern, fruity wines in France. Throughout the Vin de Pays d’Oc vineyards of Languedoc-Roussillon, dull Carignan and Grenache Blanc vines have been replaced by Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, all of whose names feature on vin de pays labels in the same way as they do on bottles from California and Australia. Another influence has been the arrival of outside investors and “flying wine-makers,” who, like vinous mercenaries, have been sent into French coopératives by British supermarkets to make the modern wine that their customers demand.

Vins de pays now represent over a quarter of all French wine and a growing proportion of France’s vinous exports. They are classified by region, département, and zone. Although there is no official quality difference between the three, zonal vins de pays often show more individual character than those from regions or départements. There is still room for improvement, but the best examples not only easily outclass the least distinguished efforts from appellation contrôlée regions like Bordeaux and the Loire, they are also commanding higher prices for their quality.
VINS DE PAYS

How the Vins de Pays Work

Vins de pays have a hierarchy all of their own. At the lowest level are the four regional designations, Vin de Pays du Jardin de la France, Vin de Pays du Comté Tolosan, Vin de Pays d’Oc and Vin de Pays Comtés Rhodaniens. Next come the 39 vins de pays départements that are responsible for the production of nearly half of all vins de pays and are named after the département in which the wines are made—unless this is part of the name of an appellation contrôlée. Finally, there are nearly 100 zonal vins de pays. Between a quarter and a third of the total, they can be smaller than some appellations.
**VINS DE PAYS**

**BOUCHES-DU-RHÔNE**

*The département* of Bouches-du-Rhône stretches from the peaks of the Alpilles to the marshlands of the Camargue, and from Marseilles to the port of Aigues-Mortes. Most Bouches-du-Rhône wines come from the Coteaux d’Aix en Provence area, with 80 percent being reds made from Merlot, Carignan, Grenache, Syrah, Cinsault, and Cabernet Sauvignon. Many Bouches-du-Rhône rosés are in fact better than a lot of Provençal *appellations contrôlées* examples.

**Domaine des Gavelles**

This rich red wine tastes better than many an *appellation contrôlée*.

- **Bouches-du-Rhône.**
- **Red/rose**: Carignan, Syrah, Grenache, Cinsault, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon.
- **White**: Clairette, Ugni Blanc
- **Soft, reds. Dry whites. Dry rosés.**
- **De Beaulieu, des Gavelles, Mas de Rey, de Trévallon.**
- **Lamb with garlic.**
- **Red**: 1–7 years.

**CÔTES DE GASCOGNE**

Until the 1970s, this region produced little but Armagnac. Thanks to the efforts of the Domaine du Tariquet and the Plaimont *coopérative*, Colombard and Ugni Blanc are now used to make fruity, dry wines. Modern methods of fermentation and the addition of Sauvignon Blanc and Manseng to the blend have given the whites a more lifted, aromatic quality. Wines from many warmer regions farther south, however, are giving the Côtes de Gascogne a lot of competition.

**Domaines Grassa**

This dynamic producer has greatly improved the reputation of this region.

- **Côtes de Gascogne.**
- **Red**: Gamay, Cabernet Sauvignon and Franc, Duras, Tannat. **White**: Colombard, Ugni Blanc, Chardonnay, Gros Manseng
- **Light- to medium-bodied reds. Crisp, dry whites.**
- **Grassa, Plaimont.**
- **White**: Cheese tart.
- **White**: 1–3 years.

**HÉRAULT**

The reputation of this huge *département* was given its biggest boost by the success of the Mas de Daumas Gassac estate to the north of Montpellier. Aimé Guibert, the man behind this enterprise, planted an eccentric mixture of vines on steep slopes of fine, volcanic soil close to the village of Aniane, which subsequently attracted the likes of Robert Mondavi and Gérard Depardieu. Plots of land like this are rare, but the area’s vine-growing and wine-making skills are improving fast.

**Mas de Daumas Gassac**

This eccentric blend is produced by one of the best estates in southern France.

- **Hérault.**
- **Medium- to full-bodied reds. Dry whites. Dry rosés.**
- **De Bosc, Capion, Mas de Daumas Gassac.**
- **Red**: Beef casserole.

**COTEaux de l’Ardèche**

Although this area comes under the regional category of Comtés Rhodaniens, most wine-makers here prefer to sell their wines as Coteaux de l’Ardèche. The Burgundy merchant Louis Latour’s Grand Ardèche Chardonnay is made from grapes grown in the limestone soil here, and the Beaujolais merchant Georges Duboeuf, who has planted grapes in partnership with 120 grape growers and seven *coopératives*, helped to put the area on the map.

**Vignerons Ardéchois**

Wine makers Ardéchois produce attractive, peppery, light red wines.

- **Coteaux de l’Ardèche.**
- **Peppery reds. Dry rosés.**
- **Ardéchois, la Clapouze, Combelonge, Louis Latour.**
- **Red**: Pigeon with olives.
- **White**: 2002.
- **1–5 years.**
THE GENEROUS WAY IN WHICH appellation contrôlée designations have been allocated here leaves little room for wines to be labeled vins de pays. However, there are interesting experimental wines being produced here, including a number of promising early attempts with the Pinot Noir grape variety. Although Pinot Noir has been used with success, the designation encompasses local varieties as well as Italian ones, making it very hard to generalize about the overall quality.

Producteurs Réunis
This attractive wine has the herby, Italian character of most Corsican red wines.

RED/ROSE: Nielluccio, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir.
WHITE: Vernintino, Muscat.

Herby reds. Light, fruity whites.

Herby rosés.

Laroche, Producteurs Réunis, Sette Piana.

RED: Mixed pork meats.
D: 1–3 years.

THE DEPARTEMENT OF VAR stretches west from St Raphael to Bandol and north to the Provençal Alps and Lac St Croix. Here, the predominantly rosé wines are primarily made using the saignée method, and range in color from pale vins gris through to deep coral. The whites are of little interest, but good reds include spicy blends of Grenache, Mourvèdre, Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah. Within Var, the zonal Coteaux de Verdon is the source of Louis Latour’s Pinot Noir red.

Nicolas Thiais
This light, fruity, and spicy red is a typical example of wine from this region.

RED/ROSE: Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre.
WHITE: Ugni Blanc, Clairette, Roussanne.

Soft, fruity reds. Dry whites.
Dry rosés.

Du Deffends, Rabiega, de Valmoissine (Louis Latour).

RED: Pizza.
D: 1–4 years.

THE HUGE REGION OF OC takes in the départements of Pyrénées Orientales, Aude, Hérault, and Gard and produces most of the best vins de pays in southern France. These wines have done particularly well outside France, partly due to the easy recognition of the name and because of the quality and “international” style of producers here: Skalli Fortant de France and Domaine Virginie; Australian companies such as Penfolds; and “flying wine-makers,” employed by British retailers.

Fortant de France
This red wine is made by one of the region’s most ambitious producers.

VIN DE PAYS D’OC

RED: Merlot, Grenache, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon.
WHITE: Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Marsanne, Viognier.

Medium- to full-bodied, fruity reds. Dry whites.

De la Baume, Fortant.

RED: Mixed pork meats.
D: 1–6 years.

OTHERS

COMPOSED TO OC, the three other main vin de pays regions seem fairly insignificant. The Jardin de la France designation runs from the mouth of the Loire River at Nantes to Auxerre, taking in 14 départements. Although it is best known for dry whites, most of its wines are in fact red. Comté Tolosan, which follows the Garonne, Lot, and Tarn rivers and takes in the Pyrenees and Auvergne, makes mainly red wines, from a wide range of varieties. Comtés Rhodaniens, which encompasses eight départements, stretches south from Mâcon to the Ardèche and east into the Alps; this name can only be given to wines that are already zonal vins de pays. Outside these three regions lie the départements of Dordogne and Puy de Dôme and, between Champagne and Alsace, the département of Meuse.

Clos de Cray
The Jardin de la France in the Loire Valley can make delicious Chardonnay like this.
France offers innumerable opportunities to sample and buy wine—and plenty of places where one can learn about wine in general, or improve one’s knowledge of a particular region. In these pages, we have picked out recommendable examples, including some that fall outside the regional sections covered in the rest of this book.

**BUYING WINE**

Apart from the wine retailers listed elsewhere in this book, France offers plenty of other sources of wine, including the Nicolas chain—which has branches in most towns. There are, however, few other big chains; most companies have one or, at most, two shops. When visiting producers, it is a good idea to ask for recommendations of retailers who sell their wine, or take advice from sommeliers in restaurants that have particularly good wine lists.

**SUPERMARKETS**

France’s big supermarkets—les Grandes Surfaces—are a mixed blessing for wine-lovers. Generally, the focus will be on wines from nearby vineyards, but far too many shelves are filled with wines bought on the name of their appellation and price. Look closely to find finer examples among the dross. These same chains also buy wines such as top Bordeaux, and offer them at fair prices, at Foires aux Vin—Wine Fairs—where they are used to entice shoppers into the stores. Do take careful note of vintages, however. The supermarkets do much of their shopping in years when other customers are less enthusiastic. Canny wine lovers go the Foires aux Vins armed with a magazine or a book detailing which producers did best in each vintage.

**WINE FAIRS**

There are opportunities to buy wine at all of the regional fairs listed elsewhere in this book. In addition to these, there are also national fairs—usually held in and to the north of Paris—at which small-scale producers (Caves Particulières or Viticulteurs Indépendants) from throughout the country present their most recent vintages. Even if you are not looking for large quantities of wine, these events offer a unique opportunity to taste your way around the whole of France, to see how different regions fared in the same vintage and which wine-makers offer the best value for money. The biggest and best of these is held in Paris in November. For details, visit www.vigneron-independant.com.

**BUYING ONLINE**

A growing number of firms now offer good French wines online, although not all of them deliver outside France. I would particularly recommend three: www.savour-club.com, www.chateaonline.com and www.wineandco.com. Do also look at other online retailers, however, since prices can vary quite considerably from one website to another.

**FINDING INFORMATION**

Given the confusing nature of France’s wines and the natural variation between vintages, it is worth doing a bit of research before pulling out your wallet. There are magazines, newsletters, books, and plenty of information on the Internet.

**BURGHOUD**

www.burghound.com

The other side of the Robert Parker (see below) coin. Allen Meadows loves and understands Burgundy, and his subscription-based website is well respected by readers across the globe who share his passion. It is available in English only.

**LE CLASSEMENT DES MEILLEURS VINS DE FRANCE**

Éditions de la Revue du Vin de France is responsible for producing this annual guide, which unfortunately is published only in French. Over the 10 years of its existence, it has become the equivalent of a Guide Michelin for wine. The founding authors, Michel Bettane and Thierry Desseauve, stepped down in 2005, but it is worth looking for other works by these writers.

**DECANTER**

www.decanter.com

The UK’s oldest wine magazine. The website has a good news section and information on international auction prices.

**LE GUIDE HACHETTE**

Hachette’s annual guide appears in French and English, and covers the full range of France’s wines and producers. Its Coups de Cœur (“love at first sight”) wines are always worth watching for.
### FRENCH WINE COURSES

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<td><strong>PARIS</strong></td>
<td>L’École du Bordeaux, Château Cordelinan-Bages, Pauillac.</td>
<td>05 56 59 24 24, FAX 05 56 59 01 89</td>
<td>This school, launched by the owners of Château Lynch-Bages, hosts courses at the luxurious Cordelinan Bages hotel in Pauillac, and in the heart of Bordeaux.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PARIS</strong></td>
<td>L’École du Bordeaux,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BURGUNDY</strong></td>
<td>L’École du Vin du Bureau Interprofessionnel des Vins de Bourgogne, 12 Boulevard Bretonnière, Beaune.</td>
<td>03 80 24 70 20, FAX 03 80 24 69 36</td>
<td>One of the world’s most respected faculties opens its doors to students seeking brief introductions to wine and to Bordeaux.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE LOIRE VALLEY</strong></td>
<td>Bouvet Ladubay, St-Hilaire-St-Florent, Saumur.</td>
<td>02 41 50 11 12, FAX 02 41 50 24 32</td>
<td>One of the most respected of the larger Loire Valley producers hosts wine courses taught by a contributor to the Guide Hachette.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE RHÔNE VALLEY</strong></td>
<td>Université du Vin, Château de Suze-Suze-la-Rousse.</td>
<td>04 75 04 86 09, FAX 04 75 98 24-20</td>
<td>Situated between Valence and Avignon in an imposing chateau, this establishment offers weekend courses in French and English.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### INTERNATIONAL WINE CELLAR

Stephen Tanzer’s newsletter is a good US-based alternative to Robert Parker’s [see below].

**LA REVUE DU VIN DE FRANCE**

Published only in French, this is the one wine magazine that is taken seriously in France.

**ROBERT JOSEPH**

The author’s own website, which incorporates a wine school.

**JANCIS ROBINSON**

The British editor of the Oxford Companion to Wine offers a first class subscription-based site, which gives an impartial view on wines of every kind.

**THE WINE ADVOCATE**

A US-based biweekly competing with Robert Parker’s newsletter [see above] for global influence. The website has a good news section.

**WINE INTERNATIONAL**


**WINESEARCHER**

An English language site that should be on every wine lover’s list of favorites. Type in the name of a wine and vintage and you will see what it is being sold for worldwide, including at auction. It reveals, for example, that one firm charges as much for a 75-cl bottle of Bordeaux as another asks for a magnum.

**WINE SPECTATOR**

A US-based biweekly competing with Robert Parker’s newsletter [see above] for global influence. The website has a good news section.
GLOSSARY OF TECHNICAL TERMS

Appellation Contrôlée/Appellation d’Origine Contrôlée The top quality designation, guaranteeing a wine’s origin, grape varieties, and production methods.

Caves Coopératives Vineyards and wineries owned jointly by a number of members are known as caves coopératives. More than half of all French vineyards are currently collectively owned, but numbers are declining.

Climat Specific vineyard site, defined by its climatological and geographical characteristics. The terms climat and terroir are interchangeable.

Commune French for village or parish.

Cru Classé The best wines of Bordeaux’s Médoc district are split into five crus, from premier cru classé (best) to cinquième cru classé, with an additional sixth, cru Bourgeois.

Dégorgement (Disgorgement) Following remuage, this is the final stage in méthode traditionelle sparkling wine production: the removal, by freezing, of yeast deposits.

Grand Cru Literally “great growth,” this classification is awarded to the finest vineyards and the wines they produce. Specific meanings vary from region to region.

Grand Vin The best wine of an estate.

Méthode Traditionnelle Method used to make all high-quality sparkling wines, involving, among other things, a second fermentation in the bottle.

Phylloxera Aphid that has periodically devastated French vines, killing them by feeding on their roots.

Premier Cru Quality indicator applied in Burgundy to wines classified just below grand cru, and used in various ways in Bordeaux and elsewhere.

Remuage (Riddling) In the méthode traditionelle, the shaking process by which dead yeasts are moved to the neck of the bottle after the second fermentation.

Vin de Table Quality classification applied to the lowest level of French wines.

Vin de Pays One step above the vin de table quality classification, and one below VDQS, these are mostly simple country wines with a regional character.

Vin Délimité de Qualité Supérieure (VDQS) Quality classification for wines better than vin de pays but not as good as those of appellation contrôlée status.

SUPPLIERS

BOSTON
Federal Wine and Spirits
Tel: (617) 367 8605
Marty’s Liquors
Tel: (617) 782 3250

CHICAGO
Sam’s Wine and Spirits
Tel: (312) 664 4394
Wine Discount Center
Tel: (773) 489 3454

DALLAS-FT. WORTH
Centennial Fine Wines & Spirits
Tel: (214) 361 6697
Sigel’s
Tel: (972) 387 9873

DETROIT
Merchant’s Fine Wine
Tel: (313) 563 8700
Village Corner
Tel: (734) 995 1818

HOUSTON
Richard’s Liquors and Fine Wines
Tel: (713) 523 7405
Spec’s Warehouse
Tel: (713) 526 8787

LOS ANGELES
Wally’s Wines & Spirits
Tel: (310) 475 0606
Woodland Hills Wine
Tel: (800) 678 9463

MINNEAPOLIS-ST PAUL
Haskell’s
Tel: (612) 342 2437
Surdyk’s
Tel: (612) 379 3232

NEW YORK
Astor Wines & Spirits
Tel: (212) 674 7500
Zachys
Tel: (800) 723 0241

PHOENIX
Epicurean Wine Service
Tel: (480) 998 7800
Sportsman’s Wines
Tel: (602) 955 7730

SEATTLE
McCarthy & Schiering
Tel: (206) 524 9500
Pike & Western Wine Shop
Tel: (206) 441 1307

TAMPA
Bern’s Fine Wines and Spirits
Tel: (813) 250 9463
The Wine Warehouse
Tel: (727) 839 5601

WASHINGTON, DC
MacArthur Beverages
Tel: (202) 338 1433
Schneider’s of Capitol Hill
Tel: (202) 543 9300
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