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The Sky's the Limit

In the Languedoc, vintners take advantage of flexible rules to explore diverse wines



From left: David Chardron, Tim Ford and Vincent Chansault of Domaine Gayda were drawn to Languedoc for its combination of diverse *terroirs* and affordability.

BY GILLIAN SCIARETTA

France's wine community ranges from the artisanal to the industrial. It includes family-run estates deeply rooted in their regions, prestigious domaines owned by wealthy investors and ambitious winemakers looking for places to make their mark.

These young and restless vintners—both native- and foreign-born—are making their way to the south of France to Languedoc and Roussillon, where production costs are lower and regulations are less rigorous. In just a generation, this vast region has gone from a sea of undifferentiated wines to a focus of innovation and excitement.

Since my previous report ("Languedoc Rising," Dec. 31, 2018 – Jan. 15, 2019), I have reviewed nearly 175 wines from the Languedoc and Roussillon regions in blind tastings at our New York office, with 42 bottlings earning 90 points or higher on *Wine Spectator's* 100-point scale. These regions cover a remarkably large swath of *terroirs*, grape varieties and styles. Standout wines from my tastings include trailblazer Gérard Bertrand's generous Minervois La Livinière Clos d'Ora 2016 (94 points, \$300), the highest-scoring wine from my tastings; M. Chapoutier's meaty and spicy Côtes du Roussillon-Villages Lesquerde Domaine de Bila-Haut r.f. 2015 (92, \$125); the *terroir*-driven Domaine de la Grange des Pères Pays de l'Hérault 2015 (93, \$100); and the richly accented Château Haut-Blanville Languedoc Grés de Montpellier 1955 2014 (93, \$75).

Languedoc vintners have the choice of making top-tier AOC wines, for which they have to adhere to strict rules, or local and regional IGP wines, for which they have more say over the varieties they use, as well as where, when and how they're sourced. With so many talented winemakers flocking here to embrace freedom and creativity, wine lovers

can find exciting, high quality wines throughout all the categories.

The concept of Domaine Gayda, located about 15 miles southwest of Carcassonne in the town of Brugairolles, originated on another continent. Managing director Tim Ford, a horticulturist from England, ran flower farms in Kenya and Zimbabwe before he and his French wife, Barbara, decided in 2002 that it was time for a new venture.

Through friends, Ford was introduced to South African winemaker Marc Kent of Boekenhoutskloof. The stars really began to align when Kent brought his talented winemaking intern, Vincent Chansault, into the mix. Chansault, then 24, was eager to return to his homeland of France to make wine there. Thus, the vision of Domaine Gayda was born. But the big question was: Where in France should they go?

"It was Kent that convinced us to go to the Languedoc," says Ford, "He said 'Look, the Languedoc, apart from the fact it's affordable, you've got this incredible diversity in *terroir* within one hour of wherever you are. You've got granite, schist and limestone. You've got sea level and mountains. You've got all those grape varieties and *terroir* that makes the whole process of winemaking and blending more exciting.'"

Ford admits the venture into Languedoc was a gamble, but he adds, "If you don't take risks, you can't succeed at anything.[And] if you go somewhere that's already established, you're going to pay 10 times as much for the soil. So we came at the start of the increase in interest in the Languedoc."

Today, Domaine Gayda produces more than 1.2 million bottles a year, sourcing grapes from its 200 acres of vineyards in Languedoc and in Roussillon, as well as some purchased fruit. Ford describes their style as "wines of provenance" inspired by the history of the land, with each line of wines linked to a unique story.



Bruno Lafon's Domaine Magellan

Named after stories of the Aéropostale pilots of the 1920s that once flew over the property, Domaine Gayda's Flying Solo wines (all Pays d'Oc IGP) are tremendous values. Ford takes special pride in these wines and believes that winemakers' skills are best judged by their entry-level bottlings: "When you've got an entry-level wine, it's tricky because you don't have a lot of margin to play with."

The 2017 Flying Solo red (87, \$10), a blend of Grenache Noir and Syrah, shows purity and focus to the fruit and mineral flavors, while the 2018 white (88, \$13), a blend of Grenache Blanc and Viognier, offers lively acidity, with a refreshing mix of peach, mineral and chamomile notes. A rosé (2018; 85, \$10) is also available in the U.S.

Gayda's Pays d'Oc En Passant bottlings, a step up in quality, truly embrace the domaine's philosophy of offering wines that are, according to Ford, "Old World with a bit of New World packaging." Each year, a new label, designed by a South African artist, depicts the story of the vintage. Along with that, the blend for both the white and the red changes slightly each year. The spicy, red-fruit driven Pays d'Oc En Passant 2017 red (88, \$15) sources Syrah (70%) from Roussillon and Cinsault (30%) from Minervois La Livinière in Languedoc. The 2017 white (89, \$15), a blend of Macabeu aged in stainless steel and Muscat d'Alexandrie aged in both stainless steel and amphora, offers refreshing complexity, with a creamy mix of floral and stone fruit flavors.

Gayda's top wine, Chemin de Moscou, named after the road leading to the winery, is blended with the help of Kent, who makes an annual visit from South Africa. The Pays d'Oc 2016 (90, \$38) shows the dominance of Syrah (72%), with blackberry and currant fruit along with touches of *garrigue* and spice. In addition to the Syrah (from Roussillon), the blend uses Grenache from Tautavel and La Livinière and Cinsault from La Livinière. All the grapes are sourced from estate vineyards.

Bruno Lafon cut his winemaking teeth in Burgundy, but 20 years ago he ventured south to look for something new. "When you are in Burgundy, you have to do Burgundy and do what is written," says Lafon. "In Languedoc, you have much more freedom to do whatever you want, which is why I like it."

Still, after he started his winery, Domaine Magellan, located in the town of Magalas, north of Beziers, Lafon wanted to bring a Burgundian touch to his wines. "For me as a producer, I like to have elegant wines, balanced wines," he says.

For his Magellan white, a blend of Grenache Blanc and Roussanne

under the Languedoc AOC designation, Lafon does alcoholic and 100% malolactic fermentation in used Burgundy casks, a unique approach for white wines from the area. Lafon believes the malolactic fermentation allows this wine to be more stable. "I started doing compete malolactic in 2011," he explains. "And when I want to show people why I do this, I open up a 2011 and it's very fresh and balanced with lots of minerality. And for me, that's good proof." The supple 2017 version (90, \$22) shows rich flavors of apple and peach, with underpinnings of honey cream, mineral and butterscotch.

Magellan's top red wine is a single-vineyard bottling sourced from a small site in the town of Pézenas. For this wine, Lafon's goal is balance and elegance. To achieve this he uses

north-facing Syrah and south-facing Grenache grown on sandstone soils, which are picked at the same time and fermented together using wild yeasts. Aging is done in used Burgundy barrels, followed by concrete tanks. The 2016 bottling (90, \$25) is a sleek wine packed with fruit, pepper and mineral notes.

Sadly, Sylvie Legros, Lafon's longtime business partner, died in 2018. Her death has caused Lafon to reevaluate the direction of Domaine Magellan. "I really want to make wine with even more expression, even more background," says Lafon. Luckily, being in a region like the Languedoc, he has the ability to pursue any direction he wants. And who knows where that path might lead.

Associate editor Gillian Sciaretta is Wine Spectator's lead taster on the wines of Languedoc.



Gérard Bertrand in his flagship Clos d'Ora vineyard

GILLIAN SCIARETTA'S RECOMMENDED WINES FROM LANGUEDOC

Nearly 175 wines were reviewed for this report. A free alphabetical list for all wines tasted is available at WineSpectator.com/LanguedocAlpha111519. WineSpectator.com members can access complete reviews using the online Wine Ratings search.

WINE	SCORE	PRICE	WINE	SCORE	PRICE
GÉRARD BERTRAND Minervois La Livinière Clos d'Ora 2016	94	\$300	DOMAINE DE LA RÉSERVE D'O Terrasses du Larzac La Réserve d'O 2016	90	\$35
This generous red shows lots of finesse, offering rich layers of cherry tart and raspberry compote flavors, with vivid acidity. Syrah blend.			A nice mineral thread weaves through blackberry and black cherry flavors that are ripe and fresh, ending with a plush finish.		
DOMAINE DE FABRÈGUES Pays d'Hérault L'As de Coeur 2014	93	\$80	DOMAINE DE LA RÉSERVE D'O St.-Gulhem-Le-Désert White La Réserve d'O 2017	90	\$33
A muscular but elegant red, showing layers of dried cherry, raspberry tart and orange tea notes, with a mineral-tinged finish. Syrah blend.			Medium-bodied, with heather, almond and chamomile details that accent the glazed peach and quince flavors. Chenin Blanc blend.		
DOMAINE DE LA GRANGE DES PÈRES Pays d'Hérault 2015	93	\$100	DOMAINE DU SILÈNE DES PEYRALS Languedoc White Esprit de Silène 2017	90	\$25
A powerful red, with a graceful, integrated profile, offering dried cherry, licorice and cured meat flavors. Syrah blend.			Floral-tinged notes of pureed mango and guava fill this creamy white, with honeysuckle, spice and mineral details. Grenache Blanc blend.		
CHÂTEAU HAUT-BLANVILLE Languedoc Grés de Montpellier 1955 2014	93	\$75	CHÂTEAU STE.-EULALIE Minervois La Livinière 2017	90	\$50
Richly infused, offering black cherry and glazed raspberry flavors that are flanked by tea, licorice and espresso undertones.			Cherry and dried raspberry notes have a savory, meaty undertone, with pepper, tea and mineral details. Syrah and Grenache.		
GÉRARD BERTRAND Terrasses du Larzac Château La Sauvageonne 2017	92	\$45	CHÂTEAU L'ARGENTIER Languedoc Grés de Montpellier 2015	89	\$19
Black cherry reduction and raspberry tart flavors are nicely polished, with black tea, herb and spice undertones. Syrah blend.			Juicy raspberry and cherry notes have a licorice edge in this red, with elements of tea, mineral and spice. Grenache blend.		
DOMAINE DE FABRÈGUES Languedoc Pézenas Le Coeur 2016	92	\$50	CHÂTEAU COUPE ROSES Minervois Granaxa 2015	89	\$29
A muscular, concentrated red, featuring plum cake and cherry tart notes matched to savory, meaty undertones. Syrah and Carignan.			Bold cherry reduction and raspberry tart notes fill this richly spiced red, with floral, black tea and mineral flavors. Grenache and Syrah.		
M. CHAPOUTIER Côtes du Roussillon-Villages Latour de France Domaine de Bila-Haut v.l.t. 2016	91	\$85	DOMAINE GAYDA Pays d'Oc White En Passant 2017	89	\$15
Savory-driven and powerful, offering wild currant and brambly fruit, this red is full-bodied and focused. Grenache and Syrah.			Peach and apple flavors show floral, lanolin and spice notes in this refreshing white, ending with creamy details. Macabeu and Muscat.		
COMMANDERIE DE ST.-PIERRE LA GARRIGUE La Clape Grand Maître 2017	91	\$60	CHÂTEAU DE LANCYRE Languedoc Pic St.-Loup Coste d'Aleyrac 2017	89	\$21
Rich and sinewy, with supple layers of blackberry tart and raspberry reduction, followed by more savory touches on the finish. Syrah blend.			Concentrated raspberry and black cherry tart notes are accented by black peppercorn, grilled herb and black tea hints. Syrah blend.		
BARON PHILIPPE DE ROTHSCHILD Limoux White Domaine de Baronarques 2016	91	\$45	DOMAINE MAGELLAN Grenache Vin de Pays de l'Hérault 2018	89	\$17
Fresh and elegant, this medium- to full-bodied white offers pear and peach flavors that show a honey-tinged edge. Chardonnay.			This medium-bodied red is bursting with raspberry, cherry and brambly fruit flavors that are pure and fresh, with tangy acidity.		
CHÂTEAU D'AUSSIÈRES Corbières 2016	90	\$20	CHÂTEAU STE.-EULALIE Minervois La Livinière La Cantilène 2016	89	\$25
Peppery on the nose, this red features fresh blackberry, plum and dark cherry notes flanked by graphite and spice accents.			Black peppercorn notes accent the currant and dried raspberry flavors in this supple red, with dried herb and graphite details. Syrah blend.		
GÉRARD BERTRAND Languedoc Art de Vivre 2015	90	\$20	CHÂTEAU D'ANGLÈS Syrah-Grenache-Mourvèdre La Clape Classique 2017	88	\$18
Polished, supple tannins support the flavors of black cherry, red plum and wild raspberry in this juicy red. Grenache blend.			Blackberry and currant flavors are flanked by graphite, wild herb and pepper notes in this fresh, medium- to full-bodied red. Syrah blend.		
DOMAINE DE FABRÈGUES Languedoc Le Mas 2016	90	\$30	DOMAINE GAYDA Pays d'Oc En Passant 2017	88	\$15
Well-structured, with bright, tangy acidity and integrated tannins, this full-bodied red offers raspberry and cherry notes. Grenache blend.			This medium-bodied red offers fresh raspberry and cherry fruit, accented by herb, spice and tea details. Syrah and Cinsault.		
DOMAINE GAYDA Pays d'Oc Chemin de Moscou 2016	90	\$38	CHÂTEAU HAUT-BLANVILLE Syrah-Grenache Noir Languedoc Grande Réserve 2017	88	\$18
Concentrated but focused, with blackberry and currant fruit flavors flanked by tea, licorice and savory spice details. Syrah blend.			Ripe blackberry and plum compote notes are focused and interwoven with spice and licorice, offering a mineral finish. Syrah and Grenache.		
CHÂTEAU DE LANCYRE Languedoc Pic St.-Loup Vieilles Vignes 2017	90	\$25	HECHT & BANNIER Languedoc 2017	88	\$13
Ripe raspberry and boysenberry flavors have a briary undertone, with black peppercorn, herb and graphite notes. Syrah and Grenache.			Ripe raspberry and currant notes are backed by fresh acidity that highlights the licorice, floral and mineral details, with a tangy finish.		
DOMAINE MAGELLAN Coteaux du Languedoc Pézenas 2016	90	\$25	DOMAINE GAYDA Grenache-Syrah Pays d'Oc Flying Solo 2017	87	\$10
Medium- to full-bodied, with a sleek profile, offering raspberry, currant and garrigue notes. Grenache and Syrah.			Shows good purity and focus, featuring abundant cherry and blackberry fruit, with mineral, herb and spice details. Grenache and Syrah.		
DOMAINE MAGELLAN Grenache-Roussanne Languedoc 2017	90	\$22			
Fresh floral notes line the flavors of apple tart and ripe peach in this spicy, supple white. Grenache and Roussanne.					

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93 Philippe Pacalet Chambolle-Musigny 1er Cru 2017 \$250 This perfumed, graceful red exudes rose, sandalwood, incense and smoky aromas and flavors that complement the macerated cherry and currant fruit. Shows weight and richness midpalate, with a lingering aftertaste of flowers, fruit and mineral. Best from 2021 through 2036. 240 cases made, 20 cases imported.—B.S.

92 Albert Bichot Chambolle-Musigny Les Chabiots 2017 \$145 Elegant and silky, boasting violet, black currant and black cherry flavors, shaded by stone and spice accents. Vibrant and balanced, with fine length. Approachable now. Drink now through 2032. 80 cases imported.—B.S.

92 Lécheneaut Chambolle-Musigny 2016 \$120 Supple and succulent, displaying black cherry, blackberry, violet, stone and light spice flavors. Taut and focused, with dusty tannins lining the finish. Fine intensity. Best from 2021 through 2036. 46 cases imported.—B.S.

92 Lécheneaut Morey-St.-Denis Clos des Ormes 2016 \$145 A ripe, juicy style, this delivers black cherry, blackberry and loamy earth flavors, with a hint of black pepper. A fleeting floral note also adds interest as this red stays saturated and focused through the long finish. Best from 2021 through 2036. 20 cases imported.—B.S.

91 Albert Bichot Chambolle-Musigny Les Amoureuses 2017 \$450 This is smoky and spicy, featuring sandalwood and Asian spice notes that grace the cherry and raspberry flavors. Firm and tense, with refined tannins lining the finish. Drink now through 2029. 34 cases imported.—B.S.

91 Albert Bichot Morey-St.-Denis Les Sorbets 2017 \$99 Well-constituted, with black cherry and blackberry flavors and touches of violet, earth and sweet spices. This red offers a broad profile. Balanced and long, showing moderate density on the finish. Drink now through 2030. 200 cases imported.—B.S.

90 Lécheneaut Morey-St.-Denis 2016 \$110 A rich, sumptuous style, delivering ripe black cherry, black currant and spice flavors, with a hint of licorice. Ripe, dense tannins lend support as this plays out on the finish. Shows fine balance and length. Drink now through 2032. 50 cases imported.—B.S.

FRANCE

Corsica

90 Domaine Vetriccie Corse White 2018 \$28 Juicy and forward, with pink grapefruit, tangerine and white peach flavors. Bright and well-defined, showing a flash of shortbread on the finish. Drink now. 28,000 cases made, 4,600 cases imported.—J.M.

90 Domaine Vetriccie Île de Beauté White 2018 \$15 Bright and high-pitched, with star fruit, quinine and white peach flavors, laced with a flash of lime pith. Offers a bracing, lively finish. Vermentino and Chardonnay. Drink now. 2,600 cases made, 900 cases imported.—J.M.

89 Domaine Petroni Corse 2017 \$25 Fresh black cherry and red currant fruit mingles with rosemary, violet and chalk notes. Shows good cut and purity on the finish. Niellucciu, Syrah and Grenache. Drink now through 2022. 7,000 cases made, 4,000 cases imported.—J.M.

89 Terra Santa Île de Beauté White 2018 \$15 See Best Values, page 131.

89 Domaine Vetriccie Corse 2017 \$20 Solid, with a direct beam of black cherry and plum fruit, laced with tobacco, savory and earth hints. A tug of chalky minerality adds cut on the very end. Niellucciu, Sciacarellu and Syrah. Best from 2020 through 2022. 7,500 cases made, 2,900 cases imported.—J.M.

88 Domaine Petroni Corse White 2018 \$25 Yellow apple, fennel and white peach flavors form the mix here. Gently buttered, with a rounded feel and a fresh edge. Drink now. 8,000 cases made, 1,900 cases imported.—J.M.

88 Reine de la Ville Pinot Noir Île de Beauté 2016 \$12 Lightly steeped black cherry fruit is laced with wood spice, black tea and savory notes. The gently rustic finish shows charm. Drink now through 2020. 2,500 cases made, 140 cases imported.—J.M.

88 Domaine Santa Giulietta Corse White 2018 \$25 Racy, with lime pith, tangerine and verbena notes that give this a distinctive profile. Drink now through 2020. 3,800 cases made, 1,500 cases imported.—J.M.

88 Domaine Vetriccie Biancu Gentile Île de Beauté 2018 \$20 Friendly apple and melon flavors are lined with a light zip of lemon peel. Offers a plump, gently buttered finish. Drink now. 2,500 cases made, 300 cases imported.—J.M.

FRANCE

Languedoc & Roussillon

94 Gérard Bertrand Minervois La Livinière Clos d'Ora 2016 \$300 This generous red shows lots of finesse, with rich layers of cherry tart and raspberry compote flavors, infused with black tea, mocha and baking spice notes, structured by polished tannins and vivid acidity. Details of floral, olive and *garrigue* linger into the long finish. Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre and Carignan. Drink now through 2025. 822 cases made, 100 cases imported.—G.S.

92 Gérard Bertrand La Clape Château L'Hospitalet 2016 \$50 A generous, broad red that layers steeped black cherry, Kalamata olive and red plum reduction flavors, infused with graphite, black tea and mocha accents, all bound together with full, polished tannins on the meaty, spicy finish. Drink now through 2025. 1,300 cases made, 600 cases imported.—G.S.

92 Gérard Bertrand La Clape White Château L'Hospitalet 2018 \$45 Honey-tinged peach, tangerine and pineapple notes are encased by vivid acidity in this creamy, medium-bodied white, with ample baking spice accents paired to floral, white tea and mineral details on the lengthy finish. Roussanne, Vermentino, Viognier and Bourboulenc. Drink now through 2022.—G.S.

92 Gérard Bertrand Languedoc White Château La Sauvageonne 2018 \$45 A beautifully layered, medium-bodied white, with intertwining mango, pureed pineapple and tangerine notes that are honey-kissed and matched to floral, baking spice and mineral details. Lingering finish. Grenache Blanc, Vermentino and Viognier. Drink now through 2021. 1,200 cases made, 300 cases imported.—G.S.

90 Château de Lancyre Languedoc Pic St.-Loup Vieilles Vignes 2017 \$25 The ripe raspberry and boysenberry flavors have a briary undertone, with black peppercorn, herb and graphite notes lingering into the meaty finish. Grippy tannins. Syrah and Grenache. Drink now through 2023. 3,300 cases made.—G.S.

89 Domaine Gayda Pays d'Oc Rosé La Minuette 2018 \$20 An open-knit rosé, offering lots of freshness to the melon and white raspberry flavors that are nicely spiced and accented by floral, salty mineral and white peach details. Mouthwatering finish. Mourvèdre, Syrah and Grenache. Drink now. 2,000 cases made, 280 cases imported.—G.S.

89 Château de Lancyre Languedoc Pic St.-Loup Coste d'Aleirac 2017 \$21 Concentrated raspberry and black cherry tart notes are accented by black peppercorn, grilled herb and black tea hints in this medium-bodied red, with hot stone and meaty elements marking the moderately tannic finish. Syrah, Grenache and Carignan. Drink now through 2022. 5,000 cases made.—G.S.