

GREAT VARIETY, GREAT VALUE

Southwest France offers a host of lively, fresh whites and rich, fruity reds of distinct character. **NATASHA HUGHES** reports on a tasting of the best

Diversity unites the disparate areas of France's southwest, and the 175 wines and 12 Armagnacs our panel tasted showcased some of the region's most popular styles. The reds showed better than whites, with a few surprises. The appellation earning the highest praise was Madiran: Andrew Jefford, Decanter World Wine Awards chair for Regional France and author of *The New France*, believes it is 'one of France's most extraordinary and undervalued' areas.

Gaillac, too, was applauded for the improvements made in recent years – the wines have far more depth and fruit than previously. Cahors, Irouléguay and Côtes de St-Mont also showed well.

Rosés tend to be dry in style, and the very best pack a rich, fruity punch. Those made from Bordeaux varieties fared better than Malbec-based wines.

When it came to the region's whites, the vins de pays were well made, showing great liveliness and freshness. In addition, wine buyer Doug Wregg noted that a

growing proportion were sealed with screwcap, 'which must be a good thing'. All the tasters agreed that the southwest's native Manseng grapes (both Petit and Gros) are underrated in the UK, delivering excellent value for money and plenty of lively, aromatic fruit.

Focusing on sweet wines, the panel felt the best of region were not adequately represented in this tasting. Armagnacs, on the other hand, were deemed to be very good, with some truly outstanding examples tasted.



Domaine de Millet, VdP des Côtes de Gascogne 2005
Gros Manseng. Attractive pink grapefruit nose. Mellow, sugared almond palate with balanced acidity. Good late-harvest style. (DW) **£5.75; Yap**



VINOVALIE, Tarani Sauvignon, VdP du Comté Tolosan 2006
Pale yellow with a greenish tinge. Pleasant citrus fruit and good balancing acidity. Not a complex wine, but easy drinking. (NH) **£5.99; JLi, P&V**



Cave de Crouseilles, Folie de Roi, Pachereuc du Vic-Bilh Sec 2005
Gros Manseng, Arrufiac and Petit Courbu. Soft pear nose. Clean mineral palate. Fresh and complex. (AJ) **£11.99; Gen**



La Cave Irouléguay, Xuri 2006
Gros Manseng 78%, Petit Manseng 16%, Petit Courbu 6%. Lively aromas of crisp green apples. Clean, mineral palate, very fresh style. (AC) **£7.90; CPy**



Domaine d'en Ségur, Le Rosé, VdP des Côtes du Tarn 2006
A blend of Cabernets Sauvignon and Franc. Pale pink in colour. Very elegant on the palate, with lively pomegranate fruit. (AC) **£6.95; C4W**



La Cave Irouléguay, Alexiou Rosé, Irouléguay 2006
Cabernet Franc 58%, Cabernet Sauvignon 24%, Tannat 18%. Meaty nose. Juicy extracted red fruit with pepper and mint. Great partner for charcuterie. (AC) **£7.99; CPy**



VINOVALIE, Rosa Rosa Rosam, Fronton 2006
Negrette 50%, Cabernet Franc 30%, Syrah 20%. Sweet nose of watermelon, cherry and mint, which follows on the palate. Crisp acidity. Bone dry. A good food wine. (NH) **£4.49; P&V**

COLOUR KEY

- White wines
- Rosé wines
- Red wines
- Sweet wines
- Armagnacs

For UK stockists, see page 154.



VINOVALIE, Terre Réserve Malbec, VdP du Lot 2004
Deep ruby. Fig rolls, cherries and marzipan on the nose. Attractive, fruit-driven style. A very moreish wine. Drink now–2011. (DW) **£5.49; MSO, P&V**



Domaine Le Roc, Cuvee Classique, Fronton 2004
Negrette 60%, Syrah 25%, Cabernet Sauvignon 15%. Firm tannins cloaked by violet and cherry fruit and balancing acidity. Good long finish. Drink now–2010. (NH) **£5.10; CPy**



Château Larroze, Prestige, Gaillac 2005
Duras, Braucol, Merlot, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon. Sweet, fresh cherry scents. Almost porty, but vivacious too. Engaging. Drink now–2009. (AJ) **£5.02; Coe, Whb**



Château de Surs, Réserve Eliézer, Gaillac 2002
Braucol, Duras, Merlot, Syrah. Gentle cherry fruit warmth. Lively, fresh and spicy. Soft and balanced, with fine-grained fruit tannins. Drink now. (AJ) **£10.75; Frs, Roo**



Producteurs Plaimont, Le Faîte, Côtes de St-Mont 2004
Tannat, Pinenc, Cabernet Sauvignon. Inky dark wine with an intense nose. Rich blackberry and violet fruit on the palate. Drink 2009–2015. (AC) **£13.99; Adn, Bed, Gpl**



Domaine de Mignaberry, Irouléguay 2003
Tannat, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon. Aromatic red and black fruit. Elegant, bold fruit and melting tannins give good structure. Drink 2009–2015. (AC) **£7.50; CPy**



Château Haut-Monplaisir, Prestige, Cahors 2003
Malbec. Tea, flowers and spice on the nose and palate, as well as plenty of black fruit. Ripe, robust tannins provide support. Long finish. Drink now–2012. (NH) **£10.99; BWC**



Château de Haute Serre, Cahors 2003
Malbec 80%, Merlot 15%, Tannat 5%. Animal, musky nose, savoury, pepper fruit and supple tannins. Classic Cahors. Drink now–2009. (DW) **£8.35–9.90; Bed, Lol, SHJ**



Château Montus, Montus, Madiran 2003
Coffee and chocolate combine with jammy fruit, spice and orange peel. It's complex with rich tannins but still very approachable. Drink now–2012. (AC) **£14.99; CPy, CvD, ThH**



Producteurs Plaimont, Plénitude, Madiran 2001
Tannat, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc. Lifted, sweet sloe nose. Full, textured palate. Superb tannins and aromatic fruit power. Great. Drink now–2012. (AJ) **£13.99; Adn, Bed, Gpl**



LEDA SA, Château Peyros, Vieilles Vignes, Madiran 2001
Tannat 80%, Cabernet Franc, 20%. Intense red fruit with just a touch of the farmyard, supported by fine-grained tannins. Classic. Drink 2009–2017. (AC) **£9.95; LSF**



Domaine Berthoumiou, Cuvée Charles de Batz, Madiran 2004
Tannat 90%, Cabernet Sauvignon 10%. Pure, fresh and seductive aromas. Oak gives aromatic vein. Earthy and deep. Great length. Drink now–2013. (AJ) **£9.95; CPy**



Domaine du Tariquet, Les Dernières Grives, VdP des Côtes de Gascogne 2004
Ripe pineapple, lychee and mango fruit intertwines with just enough acidity to balance the sugar levels. Drink now–2010. (NH) **£11.95; WSo**



Château de Pellehaut 1979
Pale and delicate. Not the typical fire of Armagnac, something more graceful. Opens with warmth, finishing with a complex, stony and perfumed array of flavours. (AJ) **£30; Dvy, Har, Roo**



LEDA SA, Laubade 1977
Complex, multilayered aromas of mushrooms and nuts. Deep, full and mouthfilling, with subtle autumnal flavours and the warm core of inner Armagnac fire. (AJ) **£59.99; BWC**

TASTERS

Arnaud Compas, buyer, Bedales; **Natasha Hughes**, wine writer; **Andrew Jefford**, wine writer; **Marcel Orford-Williams**, wine buyer, The Wine Society; **Doug Wregg**, sales director, Les Caves de Pyrène. *Tasters' initials are given after their notes.*

SOUTHWEST WINES: GOOD FOR YOUR HEALTH?

The French, who traditionally eat enough dairy products and foie gras to induce heart attacks by the time they reach their 20s, actually have a life expectancy as high as – if not higher than – other Europeans. This apparent contravention of medical rules, the French Paradox, has long been ascribed to the beneficial effects of a daily dose of red wine.

The mechanism behind this process has been uncovered by Professor Roger Corder of Queen Mary's College in London, whose team is researching the effect of a set of chemical compounds known as procyanidins on the body's blood vessels. Procyanidins, which are a type of polyphenol, block the production of a protein that constricts blood vessels, thus reducing the risk of blockages and heart attacks.



Wines from southwest France have high levels of heart-healthy polyphenols

Polyphenols are present in tannic red wines, and the highest concentrations are found in wines from southwest France and Sardinia – a fact that correlates well with the longer-than-average life expectancy in these areas.

And hot off the press comes news of recent research at the University of Bordeaux, which suggests that Armagnac – another staple of the southwestern lifestyle – can not only inhibit production of blood platelets, which are implicated in arterial thrombosis, but may also help in the fight against obesity.

If you'd like to find out more about Professor Corder's research and its implications for your health, his book *The Wine Diet* (£9.99, Sphere) is a good place to start.