

JULY 2009 LIZ SAGUES ROAMS IN ROUSSILLON

# A SENSE OF PLACE...

If, as a wine communicator, imparting the concept of *terroir* is daunting, simply indulging Gallic Chauvinism, go to Roussillon. More specifically, encourage your audience to discover the village of Calce, up in the hills 15 kilometres to the north-west of Perpignan, and tell them the story of a cow and a castle they will find there.

The cow is Laïs, a doe-eyed Jersey far from her native pastures. The castle is the restored ruin of a fortress whose first recorded seigneur was a 13th century Knight Templar. But why a cow among the vines? Sentiment, says her owner, Olivier Pithon. Before coming south, to grow biodynamically in a region where « the extraordinary potential wasn't being developed », he'd worked in Bordeaux and kept lots of animals. « When I left I ate them all, except Laïs ». Maybe the importance of cow dung in biodynamic preparations played a part, too.

Pithon's wines, the whites vins de pays des Côtes Catalanes, the reds Côtes du Roussillon, take the Calce experience a stage further. They are superbly perfumed, complex and long, with pure fruit stylishly complemented by time in barrel.

Les Caves de Pyrène, [www.lescaves.co.uk](http://www.lescaves.co.uk), imports them, with a retail price range of £19 to £29.50.

Cuvée Laïs is the first white, followed by la D18, while the red Saturne (adtonishingly, a previous owner of the vineyard was called Saturne) will become Cuvée Laïs when the 2007 vintage is released. Pithon also makes Pilou, a very stylish pure old Carignan – two of the vines are centenarians-from vineyards on limestone (all his others are on schist).



# Los Angeles Times

## Chic and affordable

October 3, 2007

Roussillon wines may come from any of the region's several AOCs (Appellations d'Origine Contrôlée ). Many of the modern dry style wines are labeled Côtes du Roussillon or Côtes du Roussillon-Villages. When you see "Vins du Pays des Côtes Catalanes," it usually means the winemaker has defied AOC blending requirements, as in the 100% Carignane below. Most of these selections come from three import companies dedicated to the region's wines: Eric Solomon, Vinalia and Weygandt-Metzler. Wines are listed in alphabetical order.

**2003 Domaine Olivier Pithon Côtes du Roussillon "Saturne."** A deeply scented blend of Carignane and Grenache, with a touch of Syrah, this wine leads with notes of licorice root in its herbal bouquet, adding complexity to its black raspberry scents. The texture bears a mineral core that is quite fine-grained, with notes of dark spices. About \$30 at K & L Wine Merchants and Wally's Wines & Spirits in Los Angeles, (310) 475-0606

## **Wine: Southern comforts**

By Anthony Rose

*Saturday, 26 August 2006*

Historically, southern French wines have struggled in the shadows of their more "classic" northerly rivals. One very simple reason for this is that the cooler climates of Bordeaux, Burgundy, Alsace and the Loire lend that extra zip and zing to their red and white grape varieties. But as the emergence of so many excellent wines from the southern hemisphere shows, a warm or even hot climate doesn't have to be a barrier to making good wine. Climate can be moderated by altitude and technology - temperature control is a wonderful thing. Coupled with fresh local grape varieties, this facility is the key to the development of more appetising reds and zingier whites from the South, while rosés, once a Provençal speciality, have improved out of all recognition.

In Roussillon, not only has investment in technology led to better control in the cellar, but the region has a great legacy of wines made from the local white-grape varieties grenache, maccabeu and malvoisie. Even in a warm vintage such as 2003, a dry white retains intensity of flavour and real freshness. Its full-bodied, savoury richness means that it also goes very well with Mediterranean vegetable dishes. The fresh and fruity Roussillon reds, such as the spicy **2004 Olivier Pithon La Coulée Côtes du Roussillon Villages** (£11.14, Caves de Pyrène, Guildford, 01483 538820), makes them ideal matches for southern dishes like the delicious Provençal lamb featured by Mark Hix on the previous pages.

December 8, 2005 Xavier Rousset's

### Understanding

Yet wine-lovers agree that France still produces the greatest wines in the world. The French respect terroir and have a profound understanding of what the regions and vineyards bring to their wines.

OK, so there's still a lot of rubbish about; and the appellation d'origine controle system is still a minefield. But France is having its own revolution. There's now a new generation of producers travelling the vinous world, picking up the best lessons of New World winemaking and fusing them back into the traditions at home. The result is wines of startling complexity and quality which also offer accessibility and value for money.

These days, if you want a more interesting glug than the monotony of many New World brands, France is still the place to go - and don't sommeliers know it.

Xavier Rousset, head sommelier at Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons, has just launched his new wine list. Instead of predictably adding to the line-up of big names from famous regions, he has concentrated on smaller producers from lesser-known appellations.

The new wines - 60 in all, come from obscure pockets from all over France, from Madiran to Menetou-Salon and from Collioure to Cahors. "I've gone for things that people wouldn't normally go for," says Rousset. "If guests ask for Sancerre or Chablis, then I'll gently suggest an equivalent from one of these.

"I'm not saying France is perfect - it still produces a lot of bad wine, and then there's that French ego to contend with," he laughs.

# NEW-GENERATION WINEMAKERS BID TO RESTORE FRENCH FORTUNES



"But producers can't wait for people to come to them any more. They have to go out there and sell their wine. If they don't, they'll struggle." Sourcing wines from these lesser-known regions is much easier these days, according to Rousset, thanks to the likes of suppliers such as Yapp, Terroir and [Les Caves de Pyrene](#) - and business is booming.

At Guildford-based Les Caves de Pyrene, sales have quadrupled in the last five years. "The market really started to change about six years ago," confirms managing director Eric Narioo, who's now applying his obsessively terroir-focused buying criteria to other countries - particularly Italy - with huge success. "It's become much more receptive and this is down to a combination of things," he says. "The market got more educated - thanks to the likes of Club Gascon, which successfully brought regional French food and wine to everybody's attention; to chefs, who are much more attuned to wine these days; and finally to consumers, who are getting tired of one-dimensional New World Chardonnays which don't match their food."

And we can't forget Sopexa's involvement. The global communications agency represents many French wine regions and has a near-frantic PR and marketing schedule in the UK. The agency can be credited for upping the quota of Alsace wines on our restaurant lists and bringing Loire Cabernet Franc to our attention.

"In the traditional sector - wines that aren't trying to compete with the New World - France remains unparalleled for quality and value for money," declares restaurant wine consultant Kate Thal, who buys for pub groups to five-star hotels. "Good examples taste of what they cost, and sometimes taste quite a bit more than what they cost. There are horrible wines from France as there are from everywhere, but if you buy carefully, you'll find an amazing selection of styles, the best of which really are sensational."