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Environnement and area

Lying inland among the foothills of the Larzac, the Terrasses du Larzac was officially recognized as an AOC in its own right in the decree of 17 October 2014. The area covers 32 communes which all fit well into the AOC Languedoc hierarchical structure. The Terrasses du Larzac red wines offer keen wine lovers a great range of diverse flavours, aromas and character. The wines combine delightful complexity and freshness with ever present hints of the garrigue.

A terroir in the north-centre of the Hérault

Comprising a ‘V’ shape of 45kms by 20kms, the Terrasses du Larzac area is bounded to the north by the Causse du Larzac which rises to over 800m at the Pic Saint Baudile.

One of its main characteristics is the difference in altitude between the hilly and more lower lying land which is protected by natural barriers formed by great limestone cliffs.

Key figures

- Area under production: 648 ha of which 74% have an environmental certification
- Production area: 32 communes
- 100 wine-making growers: 3 caves coopératives, 94 independent producers, 3 wine-making traders
- Annual production: 18,352 hl (2018)
- Maximum yield: 45 hl/ha
- Colours: red wines only

The Terrasses du Larzac en fête: the « Circulade Vigneronne »

Each year in early July the Terrasses du Larzac producers organize a wine enthusiasts’ wine and food walk around the vines, including stops along the way to taste the wines and eat gourmet food. It’s a great opportunity to discover more about the Appellation and the outstanding area.

Reservation: Syndicat AOC Languedoc - Tél. 33 (0)4 67 06 04 44
Countryside influenced by the history of the vines

As with the whole AOC Languedoc area, vines have been cultivated on the Terrasses du Larzac for over 2000 years. Even today, this heritage has left its mark on the villages and their surrounding areas.

From Roman times to the Middle Ages
The land around Lodève had great appeal to the Romans, stretching as it did along the busy Gallo-Roman road which linked Cessero (St Thibéry) with Segodunum (Rodez). Viticultural activity grew with the advent of Benedictine monks (Aniane, Lodève, St Guilhem le Desert) whose influence stretched over most of the land.

Small stone shelters and dry stone walls are everywhere
From the XVI century onwards wine growing took off in the most stony areas. The cleared scrubland became home to vines, olive and almond plantations. Often laid out on stone built terraces (faysses) which needed regular clearing, local records from the time show that each inhabitant owned at least one patch of vines which were often interspersed with fruit trees. The fruit was destined for personal consumption, the vines brought in cash. Even today, this heritage has left its mark on the countryside. Here and there the small stone shelters and walls built to separate individual pieces of land as well as the terraces built into the steepest slopes are reminders of these times. The countryside around Pégairolles de l’Escalette is covered with little horizontal stone walls forming a sort of geometric mesh on the hillsides. And there are some fifty XVIII century ‘capitelles’ (igloo shaped stone huts) well away from the homesteads in the commune, which served as storage space for grape producers or shelter for roaming shepherds. All these were built over a long period as stones were cleared, thus allowing the crumbling Larzac hillsides to be stabilised, creating terraces for the vines, and improving the soil.

Increased exchanges
In the XVII and XVIII centuries, the area grew in importance thanks to increased exchanges between those living on the Causse and beyond. As in the rest of the Languedoc, the area’s vineyards increased during the XIX century even though yields were lower than in other regions. Then, in 1850, Oïdium appeared, then phylloxera. The vines were almost totally destroyed. And although a way of fighting the insect had been discovered in Montpellier, many producers chose to dig out their old vines and replant plants grafted onto American stock. The vineyards were reborn from the XX century onwards.
“I want to establish AOC Terrasses du Larzac’s notoriety”

Sébastien Fillon, the winemaker at Le Clos du Serres in Saint-Jean-de-la-Blaquière took on the role of president of the Terrasses du Larzac appellation* in July 2019. We meet the man who wishes to pursue the team effort of his predecessors to reinforce the appellation’s notoriety.

*Decree in 2014, having been a denomination of the AOC Coteaux de Languedoc since 2004.

Why did you accept to become president of the AOC Terrasses du Larzac?

Sébastien Fillon – In 2006, we fell in love with this terroir and its wines. We bought the Clos du Serres winery. We owe our success in setting it up to the solidarity and energy of our fellow winemakers. We grew up with the appellation, which has followed an exceptional path.

What projects do you want to push forward?

Sébastien Fillon – I want to continue the work undertaken by my predecessors, which allowed the appellation to gain a strong notoriety. The Terrasses du Larzac is a dynamic appellation with great potential, which attracts newcomers. Since just 2014, about forty new winemakers have arrived. Today, two thirds of the wineries are organic. It’s a terroir that is going places and benefits from a great image, thanks mainly to the presence of several driving forces. But in order to remain a reference, we have to continue working on the quality of our wines. Insisting on quality must continue to be our main focus. It is even more important than before now that we have about one hundred members.

What strategy are you going to put into place to grow your notoriety?

Sébastien Fillon – We are going to concentrate on relationships, tastings and sharing knowledge. On the agenda: increasing the number of B to C and B to B events in the vicinity. We are also renewing “Tous en Terrasses...du Larzac”, an event that takes places in wine shops, restaurants and wine bars in Montpellier. In the vineyards we will continue with the wine walk “Circulade Vigneronne en Terrasses du Larzac”. For professionals, we are going to repeat the very successful « Soulence » of 2019, a meal in the vineyards after harvest with more than 500 French and overseas professionals.
The winemaker Sébastien Fillon set up Clos du Serres in 2006 with 14 hectares of vineyards in Saint-Jean-de-la-Blaquière. He took over the presidency of the Terrasses du Larzac syndicate from Eric Ajorques (Mas Conscience). The 45-year-old engineer embodies the neo-winemakers of the appellation. Having resigned from his engineering job in 2001, he obtained a BTS certificate in viticulture and winemaking in 2003. He then set up in the Languedoc vineyards thanks to a participative financial plan.

« Today, more than 50% of the appellation is conducted organically. Within the next two to three years, it will be 80%. It’s inevitable. All the new winemakers are setting themselves up automatically as organic. »
**TERRASSES DU LARZAC**

A homogenous terroir

Made up of gritty, pebble covered soil, the Terrasses du Larzac's orientation at the foot of the Larzac plateau means the area is ideal. The arid, fast draining soil acts as a natural influence on the vines' balance.

The climate

Average temperatures are relatively cooler than elsewhere in the AOC Languedoc area due largely to its distance from the sea; the maritime influence is felt during the growing stages, when day and night time temperatures can vary enormously. These differences vary on average by 13 °C and 14 °C during summer months, compared with only 11 °C at the coast. The variation is also influenced by cool or fresh air sweeping down from the Causse.

Soil types

All geological eras are present, but two in particular: the Primary epoch consisting of schist, sandstone and sedimentary rock and the Quarternary epoch featuring scree or soil washed down by water (old alluvial terraces and spreading talus).

Where the vines grow

Although the natural boundaries of the Terrasses du Larzac can reach to over 800 m in altitude, the planted and permitted AOC zones are situated at between 50 and 300 m in altitude on the foothills of the Causse and on old terraces.

The environment

Unusually well protected, plants within the Terrasses du Larzac area are those especially well suited to the land such as the original Salzmann pine, Holm and Kermes oak... There's a lot of garrigue too: juniper, thyme, rosemary, heather... all grow freely. Olives have long been cultivated here too, and are still very much present.
From vines to wine

Known for being so homogenous, Carignan, Cinsault, Grenache, Syrah and Mourvèdre grapes flourish contributing their riches to the Terrasses du Larzac red wines. Each adds something to the wine, ensuring its great fresh complexity, and reflecting the aromas of the garrigue.

Grapes and yields
The red wines must be made from these five grapes: Grenache, Mourvèdre, Syrah, Carignan, Cinsault, and must include at least three of them. The proportion of a blend including Grenache, Mourvèdre and Syrah must not be less than 60 % of the total. The proportion of any one of Grenache, Mourvèdre and Syrah grapes must not be higher than 75 %. The proportion of Mourvèdre and Syrah – together or separately – cannot be less than 20 %. If the wine includes Carignan, the proportion of Grenache cannot be less than 20 %. The proportion of Cinsault cannot exceed 30 %. Yields must not be over 45 hl/ha.

Vinification
After de-stemming, vinification is usually traditional. Grapes must be picked only when they are fully mature. Only wine produced from vines that have been planted for at least four years may be labelled AOC Terrasses du Larzac.

In the glass
Terrasses du Larzac wines are a brilliant ruby colour (with violet highlights). Garrigue aromas (bay, thyme) often dominate the nose. They open very fresh, well balanced with good spice and tannin. Many will age well (3 to 5 years or more).

Wine and food
Red Terrasses du Larzac wines go splendidly with meat based characterful dishes such as rib of lamb, wild boar stew, rib of beef, game, grilled meat or tajines. As a dessert, the more fruity reds could not be better with Flaune (a south Aveyron pudding, resembling a cheese mousse, produced by heating ewes’ milk whey to 95 °C).