PRESS PACK

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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: around 568 ha
- Production area: 32 communes
- Number of producers: 5 caves coopérative, 87 independent producers
- Annual production 2016: around 16 719 hl
- 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 surroundings 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.
Recognized as an AOC since 17th October 2014, Terrasses du Larzac is one of the most promising appellations for red wine in the Languedoc. Eric Ajorque, owner of Mas Conscience in St Jean-de-Fos, was elected president on 8th June 2017. He thus succeeds Marie Chauffray of Domaine La Réserve d’O and has three priorities: to help new wine-makers to integrate, ensure the recognition of white wines as part of the AOC and reinforce the appellation’s image.

Why did you decide to apply for the presidency of the Terrasses du Larzac appellation?

E. Ajorque – Following two years spent in India, I came back in 2012 with my wife and three children with the intention of working on an agricultural project. We completely fell in love with the Terrasses du Larzac. A year later, in 2013, we took over Mas Conscience, helped by neighbouring wine-makers. I was deeply touched by this support and wanted to get more involved with the appellation and its development. As president of the AOC Terrasses du Larzac, I want to give back to everyone, what they gave me.

You have set three goals for the appellation: helping newcomers to integrate, working towards the recognition of white wines as part of the AOC and reinforcing the image of the Terrasses du Larzac. Can you elaborate?

E. Ajorque – We are lucky enough to have a very dynamic wine-growing area, which attracts a lot of wine-makers. In the last five years, we have seen the arrival of twenty-five new estates. In the minds of the newcomers, this is “where it’s at”. This is great news for the appellation – we are very open to new ideas and this is part of our success. However, we need to make sure that this energy remains positive and the notion of “family” endures. Hence we have created a special “mentoring” commission, which regularly proposes themed workshops, be they technical (maturing in wood), financial (grouped employment) or production-based (computerized customs declarations). The aim is to reunite our experiences and reinforce the notion of family.
Alongside this project, we have launched two others: a collective reflection on the recognition of our whites as part of the AOC, and the reinforcement of our image. We are basing the latter on one of the strong points of our appellation, which is that we are the only appellation in the Languedoc to have three locations recognized as Unesco World Heritage sites: the Lac du Salagou, the Cirque de Navacelles and the village of St Guilhem-le-Dessert. The idea is simple: associate our wines with the image of these unique and protected sites, by creating events in the vineyard. The “Circulade Vigneronne”, a gastronomic wine walk, which attracts 1 500 people every year, is a good example. But we want to go even further by setting up an event aimed at influencers that would take place at these three World Heritage Sites, offering prestigious wine tasting in a welcoming and convivial atmosphere.

« Today, more than 50% of the appellation is under organic production. In two or three years’ time it will be nearer 80%. It’s a natural progression. Almost all the new producers set themselves up as organic. »
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 terrasses 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).
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