

Wine & Spirits

WINE & SPIRITS
OF THE YEAR!

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YEAR'S BEST LANGUEDOC-ROUSSILLON

Our blind panels tasted **179** new-release Languedoc-Roussillon wines over the past 12 months.

Tara Q. Thomas, our critic for southwest France, rated **25** as exceptional (90+) and **15** as Best Buys.

Find a complete list of wines tasted and all reviews at wineandspiritsmagazine.com.

LANGUEDOC WHITE

93 | Domaine de la Réserve d'O \$35

2016 Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert La Réserve d'O Blanc Marie and Frédéric Chaufray farm several patches of old vines in the heights of the Terraces du Larzac, including a one-acre mixed planting of grenache blanc, roussanne and chenin blanc. As chenin isn't allowed under the Terraces appellation, they've declassified it to Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert, but there's nothing downmarket about this white. It's rich and salty, with the sweet savor of the beeswax in a honeycomb and the scent of flowers adding delicacy. The wine lasts, firm and dense, with a meaty, brothy note that gives it a sense of breadth without getting weighty. It would be delicious with a parmesan risotto, or simply salty ham. *Cape Classics, NY*

91 | Domaine Gaujal de Saint Bon \$13

2016 Picpoul de Pinet Cuvée des Dames (Best Buy) Anne-Virginie Arnaud-Gaujal runs this family estate with her mother, Simone. By working with low yields in the appellation's clay-limestone soils, and leaving the wines on the lees six to eight months after fermentation, they turn out vivid, concentrated Picpoul de Pinet. The 2016 is as refreshing as a dip in the Mediterranean, notes of lemon zest and herbal scrub mixing with a palate-whetting salinity. The time on the lees gives the wine impressive body for a picpoul, a roundness that's a pleasant counter to the bright, tart acidity. *Polaner Selections, Mount Kisco, NY*

90 | Mas de Daumas Gassac \$45

2015 Pays d'Herault Blanc A blend of viognier, chardonnay, chenin blanc, petit manseng and a host of other local varieties, this feels like it came from another century, when sweetness in wines wasn't feared. The fruit is unabashedly golden, notes of pear and peach meeting candied ginger and marmalade; at the same time, there's plenty of spicy alcohol and enough acidity to balance it. Pour it in

place of the chutney you might serve with a chicken-liver terrine. *Polaner Selections, Mount Kisco, NY*

88 | Vignerons de Saint-Chinian \$12

2016 St-Chinian Le Secret des Capitelles (Best Buy) A big, blowsy blend of grenache blanc and roussanne, this is floral and exotic in its pineapple ripeness. For all its sweet fruit, however, the wine remains light and breezy, a relaxed white for dinner *en plein air*. *Micca, Mount Horeb, WI*

VIN DE PAYS D'OC

86 | Wild Pig \$10

2017 Pays d'Oc Viognier (Best Buy) A lean and restrained viognier, with a light spritz and a green-peach crunch to its floral fruit. *DHI, Manhasset, NY*

VIN DE FRANCE

90 | François Chidaine \$21

2016 Vin de France Le Chenin d'Ailleurs After a devastating spring frost in 2016, Loire chenin master François Chidaine headed south to look for replacement grapes. He made this wine with chenin grown in the limestone soils of Limoux, fermenting the grapes with ambient yeasts in 600-liter barrels. It's a fascinating take on the variety: The texture is pure chenin, waxy and broad, with an almost meaty intensity thanks to the chalky minerality running through this wine. The flavors, however, are filled with southern notes of salty herbs and golden fruit. Give it a chill for miso-glazed cod. *Polaner Selections, Mount Kisco, NY*

90 | Sous la Montagne \$17

2016 Vin de France Vignes Perdues Grenache Gris (Best Buy) Jeff Carrel blends this wine from old bush-vine grenache blanc in two areas: Carmany, in the foothills of the Pyrenees, where the vines grow on granite, and farther north in Villeneuve des Corbières, where they grow on schist. Together, the parcels make a wine that speaks more of rock than fruit, the wine warm and savory. It's

firm, with a pleasant grit to the texture, notes of Bosc pear and parmesan cheese pointing it toward a cheese plate or *tartiflette*, potatoes smothered in bacon and Reblochon. *Hand Picked Selections, Warrenton, VA*

ROUSSILLON WHITE

92 | Domaine de l'Edre \$33

2016 Côtes du Roussillon Carrément Blanc A blend of grenaches blanc and gris with 30 percent roussanne, fermented in a combination of stainless-steel vats and used barrels, this feels instantly refreshing. The acidity is sharp as a spritz of lemon, accenting the meatiness of the sunny yellow fruit; the mineral tones feel cooling, guiding the wine to a savory finish. It lasts with a hint of roussanne's nutty side, a flavor that would pick up on the browned butter you might pour over scallops to accompany this wine. *Hand Picked Selections, Warrenton, VA*

LANGUEDOC RED

CORBIERES

92 | Château des Aladères \$25

2015 Corbières Sélection Vieilles Vignes Château des Aladères is one of the labels put out by Château de Lastours, a vast, 2,100-acre estate in Corbières owned by the Allard family of Château Laroque in Saint-Emilion. Working with consultant Stéphane Derenoncourt, the team put out a succulent Corbières from their oldest vines in 2015, a blend of 45 percent carignan with grenache and syrah. Fermented entirely in stainless steel, it retains a cool freshness, pure purple fruit suffused with violet notes and a sense of mineral firmness. The tannins hold it fast, suggesting this will age well over the next few years, though it's also approachable now, with lamb chops. *W. Direct, Sonoma, CA*

92 | Dom. des Deux Anes \$17

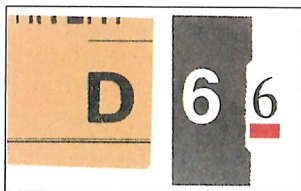
2014 Corbières Fontanilles (Best Buy) Beaujolais-born Magali Roux-Terrier started this biodynamic estate in 2000, farming 53 acres in Peyriac-de-Mer. She blended this wine from old-vine carignan with a lit-

tle syrah and grenache, fermenting it with ambient yeasts in stainless steel. It's a hint natchy, with a little acetic funk at first, but those elements soon fade as the fruit comes up, savory, juicy and expansive. It smells of bay leaves, sage and warm, dusty earth and tastes as meaty as a Mangalitsa pork chop. It would be delicious with one, as well. *Jenny & François Selections, NY*

91 | Château des Aladères \$32
2015 Corbières Barrigue Réserve Sleek and spicy, this carries its concentrated, plummy fruit on soft yet persistent tannins. It feels firm and elegant, notes of garrigue and black-pepper spice adding lift and detail. *W. Direct, Sonoma, CA*

90 | Domaines Barons de Rothschild (Lafite) \$20
2015 Corbières Blason d'Aussières The second wine from the Rothschild's Corbières estate, this blends syrah, grenache, mourvèdre and carignan with just a touch of oak from the 20 percent that spent time in barrels. More noticeable are the scents of garrigue that saturate the fruit, notes of wild oregano and rosemary that lift the earthy flavors and give it a firm sense of place. *Shaw-Ross Int'l, Miami, FL*

COTES CATALANES



92 | Department 66 \$38
2014 Côtes Catalanes D66 Grenache Dave Phinney, the winemaker who founded The Prisoner and Orin Swift, bought a vineyard in Maury in 2008 and built a winery the next year. He now farms more than 300 acres of vineyards in the region's black schist, most of the vines over 60 years old. This wine, a blend of grenache with small amounts of syrah and carignan, starts out intensely sweet, the cherry fruit as ripe and dense as jam. But if you decant it, a low growl of tannins emerge alongside an earthy minerality that firms it up. It tastes, in fact, like a dry wine from a sweet-wine appellation, an intriguing bottle to open with spicy lamb sausages or boar chops. *Bloodlines, Sausalito, CA*



90 | Department 66 \$25
2014 Côtes Catalanes Others (Best Buy) Less intense than the D66 (also recommended here), this blend of grenache, carignan, syrah and mourvèdre has a sultry, smoky flavor, notes of coffee and toffee wrapping around the tangy red fruit. It's sunny and ripe, with enough tannins to keep it structured but not impede the smooth, sleek texture. *Bloodlines, Sausalito, CA*

COTES DE THONGUE

86 | Les Chemins de Bassac \$15
2015 Côtes de Thongue Isa Rouge (Best Buy) An unusual blend of grenache, mourvèdre and syrah with cabernet sauvignon and pinot noir grown just north of Béziers, this tastes like a country wine in the best way: It's fresh and friendly, with no pretensions, with a beety rootiness and rhubarb tang. It's light enough to pour with pasta in a meat *ragout*. *Jenny & François Selections, NY*

FAUGERES

92 | Domaine Léon Barral \$35
2014 Faugères Didier Barral eschews syrah for this blend, focusing instead on the Languedoc natives carignan, grenache and cinsault. The vines are 40 to 70 years old, growing on schist, and he's farmed them biodynamically since the 1990s. The result is a wine that feels impossibly vibrant and youthful for a four-year-old, the fruit bright red, tangy and pure. Yet there's nothing sweet or heavy about it: Notes of bay leaf, rose petals and a touch of pickle come through its gauzy layers, keeping the wine light and breezy, elegant and thirst quenching. *Kermit Lynch Wine Merchant, Berkeley, CA*

90 | Mas des Capitelles \$19
2015 Faugères Vieilles Vignes (Best Buy) If you like the chewy, leathery notes of old-vine carignan, you'll appreciate this wine. Based on biodynamically farmed, 80-year-old carignan with 20 percent mourvèdre, it smells like blood sausage hitting a hot cast-iron pan, sanguine and meaty scents blending with notes of cinnamon and bay leaf. Those savory notes carry through the flavors, too,

red-berry fruit providing an undercurrent of juiciness. Pleasantly rustic, it would be delicious this winter with a thick cut of meat or a wild-mushroom fricassee. *Kysela Père et Fils, Winchester, VA*

LANGUEDOC

90 | Château Saint Martin de la Garrigue \$22
2015 Coteaux du Languedoc Bronzinelle A blend of syrah, mourvèdre, carignan and grenache, this underwent carbonic maceration in stainless steel, then part of the lot aged in used oak barrels for a year. The result is both tangy and smoky, fresh and chocolatey. With a day open, the herbal, peppery scents get the upper hand, bringing in extra freshness, while the tannins tighten their grip on the fruit—signs that this should age well over the next few years in the cellar. *Soilair Selection, NY*

87 | Jeff Carrel \$16
2016 Languedoc Les Darons (Best Buy) A fresh, peppery red blended from grenache with a little syrah and carignan, this is light and brisk, with hints of tobacco leaf and dusty earth to keep its cherry fruit rooted firmly in southern France. *Hand Picked Selections, Warrenton, VA*

MINERVOIS LA LIVINIÈRE

92 | Château Maris \$80
2015 Minervois La Livinière Dynamic From a parcel of biodynamically grown syrah at about 1,000 in altitude, at the top of La Livinière, this wine lives up to its name, contrasting its black fruit with the coolness of a stone cave. It feels superripe yet superfresh—not just-pressed, but picked *à point*, the fruit skins taut and the flesh meaty and firm, the tannins mineral and the acidity vibrant. The wine lasts for days after opening, picking up herbal tones that continue the refreshing feel. *Verity Wine Partners, NY*

88 | Château Maris \$17
2015 Minervois La Livinière Natural Selection (Best Buy) Biodynamically grown, this blend of syrah with 30 percent grenache buzzes with pure red-raspberry flavor, juicy and pleasantly raspy. The flavors are not long, but they are firm, with a cool earthy note that keeps the wine refreshing. *Verity Wine Partners, NY*