



## FUN WITH BOOZE

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### FRENCH KICKS: DEPARTMENT 66

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If you've ever had the good fortune to visit Roussillon, you'd get it. This corner in the southwest of France is a magical place, barren nearly, rough hewn rocks and occasional stone fortresses, one time strongholds of the Cathars dot the horizon. From here, it is not far to Barcelona, and the Pyrenees, and much of this part of France is actually an extension of the Catalan territories of North eastern Spain. Vines here have an ancient and long standing history, and Syrah, Carignan and especially Grenache do well in the hot growing seasons that have made Roussillon a new darling of southern France. It was that "it" that rugged beauty that drew one of Napa's big names to this little corner of France.

Dave Phinney is most well known for his (formerly) Orin Swift label and its flagship wine, The Prisoner. He made a trip to Maury, here in the hot sun of Roussillon on a friend's behest to see this region for himself. Phinney was sceptical until he woke his first morning to a region that was as steep as he could possibly imagine a place where grapes could grow. The old, gnarled head trained vines dotted the landscape and he was smitten.

His experiment would become Department 66, the number designation for this French regional and administrative area that encapsulates Northern Catalonia otherwise known as the [Pyrénées-Orientales](#). The wines of D66 come properly from the Roussillon sub-region the Cotes Catalanes IGP. The wines that are grown here are seriously ripe,

robust and concentrated and that seems accentuated at the hands of a California winemaker who crafts a ripe style, and bottles high octane wines.

The region of Roussillon is often the back end of a hyphenation with the neighboring, and much larger Languedoc. The two regions were put together by the French government in 1972. Roussillon though is a distinct region, both culturally and viticulturally. The wines come largely from a small number of producers, and the techniques often times remain rustic. It is though a region on the rise, and in addition to Phinney, some of Southern France's best known winemakers have come to Roussillon to take advantage of the fairly wide open regulations by French standards.



### **2017 Fragile Rosé, Cotes Catalanes IGP \$18**

If ever there was a pink wine for red wine drinkers, this broad shouldered rosé from D66 fits the bill. The wine is very pale pink but is substantially structured and ripe, almost defying the character one comes to associate with rosé. There are plenty of light and crisp rosés made here but this bottling seems to be striving for something different. Aromas of ripe citrus and strawberry and With an alcohol % much more akin to very ripe red wines (15.3%) this wine is an enigma, light in appearance, with more heft and body as well as a touch of heat than any pink wine I've ever encountered. This wine is anything but Fragile.

### **2015 Others Red Blend, Cotes Catalanes IGP \$25**

A blend of Grenache, Carignan, Syrah and Mourvedre, Others aims to bring together the estate vineyard fruit that doesn't go into the flagship, D66 wine. Others blends young vine Syrah, Carignan and Mourvedre with the old vine Grenache found around Maury. The result is a more playful, yet still ripe and intense wine. Aromas of dried fig, mocha powder and the famous garrigue (wild aromatic herbs) for which this part of France is known. Flavors of blackberry, plum and clove.



### **2014 D66 Red Blend, Cotes Catalanes IGP \$38**

The namesake wine from Department 66 is a blend of Syrah, Grenache and Carignan. The wine is ripe and lush, with aromas of blue fruit, savory spice and fig. The palate is ripe, but balanced with berry fruit, spice, and ample minerality, even in a concentrated, broad shouldered wine.

The wines from Department 66 are certainly ripe and redolent, this arid region produces concentrated low yields in the vineyards. The wines tend to be rich, and powerful. The Department 66 wines are definitively American in style, New World takes (from an American winemaker) on this historical, although somewhat recently rediscovered region; lush, broad shouldered and with hallmarks of new oak. For a wine drinker looking to expand beyond a California or New World style to the wines of France, they may represent a gateway that offers familiarity.

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