

1824



2024

THE
ATHENÆUM
PALL MALL LONDON

FRENCH REGIONAL WINE LUNCHEON

to be held on

Wednesday 6th November 2024 at 12:30pm

The wines and cuisine of South West France

Presenters: Professor Frank Larkin & Dr Jonathan Punt

Chaired by: Professor Frank Larkin



Nouvelle-Aquitaine - "France's Hidden Corner"

LE MENU et LES VINS

Apéritif

**Domaine Plageoles, Mauzac Nature, AOP Gaillac,
2022. ABV 12.5%.**

Entrée

La Salade Landaise

[Smoked duck, pine nuts, croutons]

**Clos Lapeyre, Vitatge Vielh, Jurançon Sec, AC Jurançon,
2020. ABV 14%.**

**Château Bouscassé, “*Les Jardins Philosophiques*”,
2016. AC Pacherenc du Vic-Bilh Sec. ABV 13.5%.**

Plat principal

***Les Joues de Veau Braisées, Les Petites Pommes de terre au
Safran, Les Haricots Verts aux échalotes***

[Veal cheeks, Piment d’Espelette – saffron ratte potatoes - haricots verts
with shallots]

**Château du Cèdre, “*Le Cèdre*”,
2019, AC Cahors. ABV 13%.**

**Château Montus, Cuvée Prestige,
2002, AOP Madiran. ABV 15.5%.**

Dessert

La Tarte Aux Pruneaux d'Agen
[Agen Prune Tart]

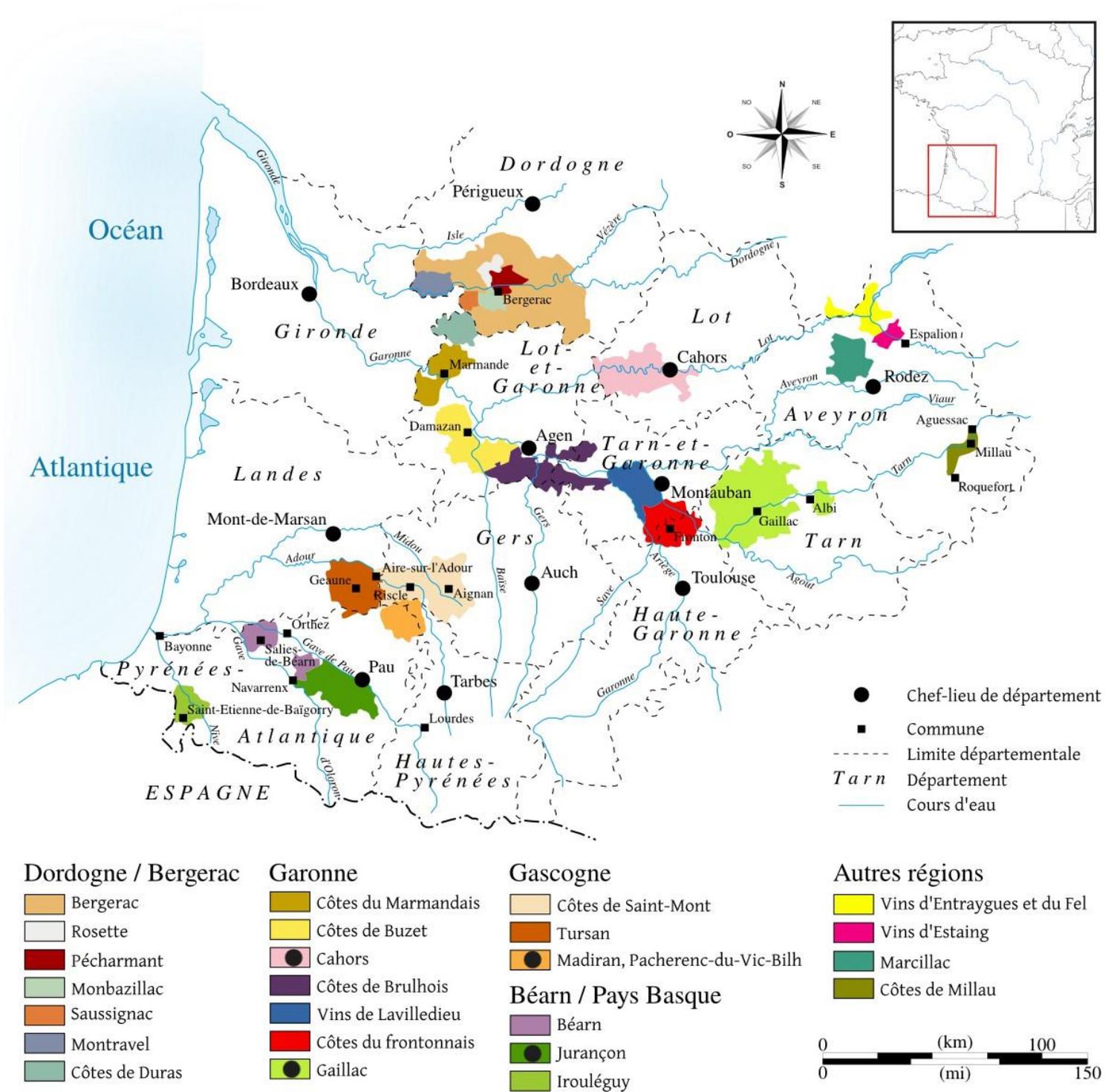
**Domaine Cauhapé, “*Symphonie de Novembre*”,
2021, AC Jurançon. ABV 13.5%.**



Café, Thé, Canelés
[Rum, vanilla, custard pastries]



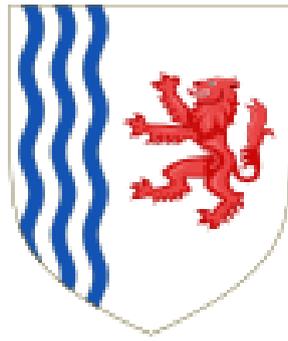
SOUTH WEST FRANCE WINE REGION



Regions featured in today's Luncheon marked on legend

- Cahors
- Gaillac
- Madiran & Pacherenc-du-Vic-Bilh
- Jurançon

WINE FACTS



Coat of Arms of Nouvelle-Aquitaine.

The region of Nouvelle-Aquitaine was created in 2014 by the merging of Aquitaine, Limousin and Poitou-Charentes. It extends over a large part of the former medieval Duchy of Eleanor of Aquitaine; by area, at 84,061 square kilometres, it is the largest administrative region in France.

The region embraces Basque, Occitan, Poitevin and Saintongeais cultures and dialects.

The economy historically rests on agriculture, viticulture, and ceramics, but in modern times includes aerospace industry, digital economy, design, pharmaceutical and parachechemical industries, and financial sector activities.

Of specific relevance are tourism, and the fact that Nouvelle-Aquitaine is the fifth largest wine region in France. As to the viticulture, the region is incoherent both as to its geology and to its viniculture, unsurprisingly given its geographic span: North to South from Bordeaux to the Franco-Spanish Basque borderlands, and West to East from the Golfe de Gascogne (*aka* the Bay of Biscay) on the Atlantic coast to the upper Lot, the Corrèze and Languedoc in the East.

The climate is classified as Oceanic but includes the Basque and Pyrenean microclimates.

Origins.

Viniculture was most probably brought to South West France by the Romans who knew that the presence of *Quercus ilex* (holm oak) signified a climate sufficiently warm to allow full ripening of wine grapes. The first mention of viticulture in the region appears in a report to Augustus by Strabo (64/63 BCE to 24CE), in his, "*Geographica*", [1 BCE/1 CE], in which he noted the absence of vines along the Tarn, and that wines supplied to Burdigala, (Roman Bordeaux), actually originated in the Gaillac region in the Midi-Pyrénées. Archaeological evidence dating to the reign of Augustus, (reigned 27 BCE to 14 CE), suggests that large numbers of amphorae were being produced in the Gaillac region.



Roman terra sigillata, Gaillac.

The Appellations.

It is unsurprising that within such an extensive area, embracing its various *terroirs* and grape varieties, there are 30 classified as *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée* (AOC) or *Appellation d'Origine Protégée* (AOP), and 14 classified as *Indication Géographique Protégée* (IGP):

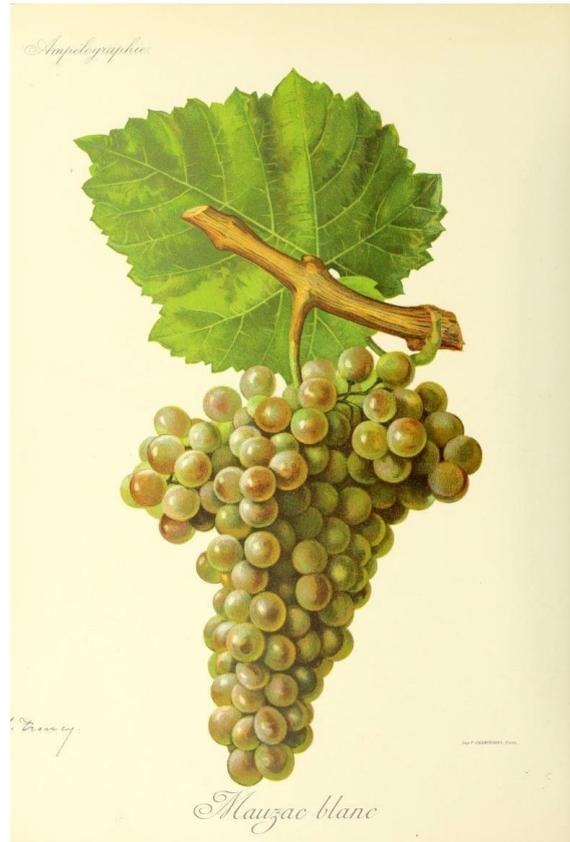
30 AOC - AOP labels	
Côtes de Quercy	Béarn
Bergerac	Brulhois
Buzet	Cahors ** AC
Côtes de Bergerac	Côtes de Duras
Côtes de Millau	Côtes de Montravel
Côtes du Marmandais	Entraygues - Le Fel
Estaing	Fronton
Gaillac ** AOP	Premières Côtes
Haut-Montravel	Irouléguy
Jurançon ** AC	Madiran ** AOP
Marcillac	Monbazillac
Montravel	Pacherenc du Vic-Bilh
Pécharmant	Rosette
Saint-Mont	Saint-Sardos
Saussignac	Tursan

14 IGP	
Agenais	Ariège
Atlantic	Aveyron
Tolosan	Côtes de Glanes
Côtes de Gascogne	Côtes du Lot
Côtes du Tarn	Gers
Lavilledieu	Périgord
Thézac-Perricard	Vin de Corrèze

At this Luncheon a mere four of these appellations will be featured (as indicated above **).

FEATURED GRAPES

Mauzac blanc.



***Mauzac blanc.* Jules Troncy. "Ampélographie: traité général de viticulture", P. Viala & V. Vermorel: 1901-1910.**

The earliest reliable reference to *Mauzac blanc*, a variety specific to Gaillac, was in 1736 under the name *Mausat*. A grape of unknown identity or colour called *Mausague* was recorded in the 16th Century. The name *Mauzac* (*Mausac* in Occitan) may derive from one of two villages in the vicinity of Toulouse: one called *Mauzac*, the other *Meauzac*. There is a colour mutation called *Mauzac Rose*: neither of these grapes is related to *Mauzac Noir* that comes from the Tarn and is genetically linked to *Fer*. *Mauzac Blanc* is vinified in dry, sweet and sparkling styles exclusively in Gaillac and in Limoux (Western Languedoc). *Mauzac Blanc* can have a pleasant rusticity, but more importantly a characteristic apple flavour provided that it is not picked too early. An important distinction is made between the sparkling *Méthode Ancestrale* which must be 100% *Mauzac* (*Blanc* or *Rose*); *Limoux Méthode Ancestrale* which must be 100% *Mauzac Blanc*; *Blanquette de Limoux* which requires at least 90% *Mauzac Blanc*; and *Crémant de Limoux* which increasingly contains *Chardonnay*. Total plantings have been declining over the last 60 years despite the efforts of the best producers, notably from the 1980s by Robert Plageoles of Domaine Plageoles, [*vide infra*].

Gros Manseng.



Gros Manseng, Jurançon.

The name “*Manseng*” may derive from “*mans*”, meaning a mansion. *Gros Manseng* and *Petit Manseng*, [vide infra], are morphologically close and are classed in the *Mansien* ampelographic group. A text in Occitan, dated 1562, recorded “*vinhe mansengue*” but provides no further indication as to varieties, which were not distinguished until 1783/84. *Gros Manseng* is probably the grandchild of *Savagnin* and the first generation progeny of *Petit Manseng*.

Resistance to botrytis bunch rot, thick skins, and the very small berries with high sugar levels of *Gros Manseng* all lend themselves to late harvesting for the production of sweet wines. However *Gros Manseng* has typically been deployed more for production of dry white Jurançon wines and, until recent years, plantings of *Gros Manseng* were almost thrice that of *Petit Manseng*. Whereas *Gros Manseng* yields more grapes, those of *Petit Manseng* are richer and more elegant. Growing popularity of sweet white wines has led to some reversal of the proportions of plantings of these two varieties.

Gros Manseng brings flavours of apricot, spices and some floral notes. In addition to Jurançon sec, *Gros Manseng* is included in some cuvées of Pacherenc du Vic-Bilh, Béarn, and Irouléguay. Notably good examples include the cuvées vinified by Clos Lapeyre, [vide infra], and Domaine Cauhapé.

Petit Manseng.



Petit Manseng. Jules Troncy. "Ampélographie: traité général de viticulture", P. Viala & V. Vermorel: 1901-1910.

With berries even smaller than those of *Gros Manseng*, and with thick skins arranged in small, loose bunches this variety is both mid to late ripening and very resistant to botrytis bunch rot. Exceptional concentration of sugars and retention of high acidity provide for vinification of high calibre aromatic sweet wines from shrivelled grapes harvested in November or the first weeks of December.

Petit Manseng is the principal variety in the wines of Jurançon and also in Pacherenc du Vic-Bilh. Domaine Cauhapé and Alain Brumont being notable exponents of the former and the latter respectively, [*vide infra*].

Petit Courbu.



Courbu blanc. Jules Troncy. "Ampélographie: traité général de viticulture", P. Viala & V. Vermorel: 1901-1910.

Petit Courbu is grown only in South West France and is distinctly local to Jurançon. A late ripening and not very productive variety with small bunches of diminutive berries. It is generally used as the minor component in blends with Gros Manseng and Petit Manseng such as Clos Lapeyre's, "*Vitatge Vieilh*", [*vide infra*]. Its potential for producing an almost single varietal wine of real finesse is realised in rare examples such as Alain Brumont's Château Bouscassé, "*Les Jardins Philosophiques*", [*vide infra*].

Camaralet (synonym - Camaralet de Lasseube).

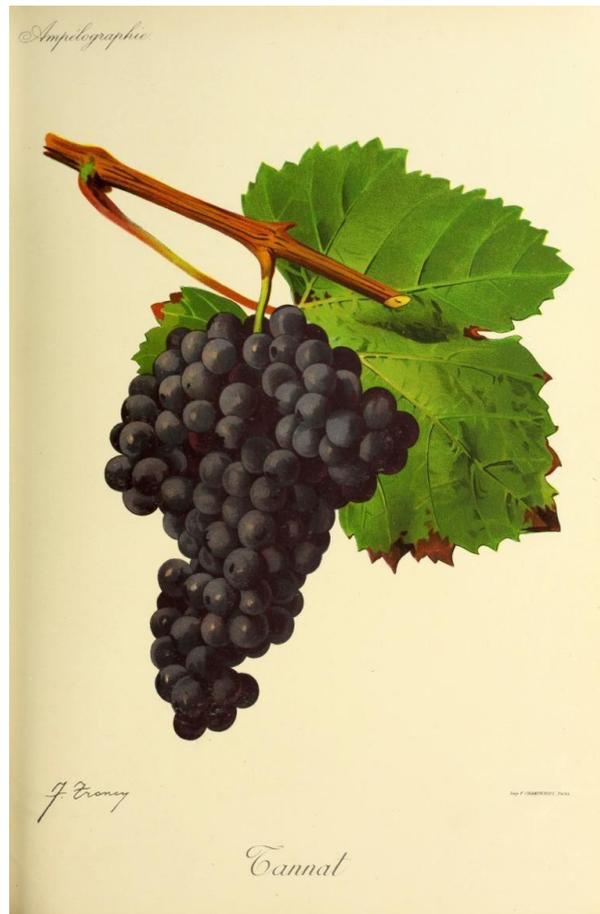


Camaralet.

Camaralet is the modern name introduced in 1920: quite probably synonymous to varieties previously known as *Camarau Blanc* and/or *Camaraou Blanc* in the Basque Region of Northern Spain and in the French Pyrénées-Atlantiques. The name *Camaralet* may derive from “*camarau*” in the Gascon dialect Béarnese referring to a commune in the Hautes-Pyrénées, or, intriguingly in viticultural terms, to the Gascon “*cama*” meaning “leg” or “trunk” implying a vine with a long trunk or even cultivation up trees.

The vine bears only female flowers: the consequent poor fertility and low yields led to its near abandonment, despite the grapes having full, honeyed, peachy flavours with aromas of fennel, pepper and cinnamon. Lower final alcohol levels than *Gros* or *Petit Manseng* admits *Camaralet* to blends in Jurançon Sec: hence constructive deployment by Domaine Cauhapé, which has three or four hectares of *Camaralet* which is blended with *Gros Manseng* and *Courbu Blanc* in its Jurançon Sec; and Clos Lapeyre which blends 15% *Camaralet* with 70 % *Petit Manseng* and 15 % *Courbu* in its exceptional dry cuvée, “*Mantoulan*”.

Tannat.

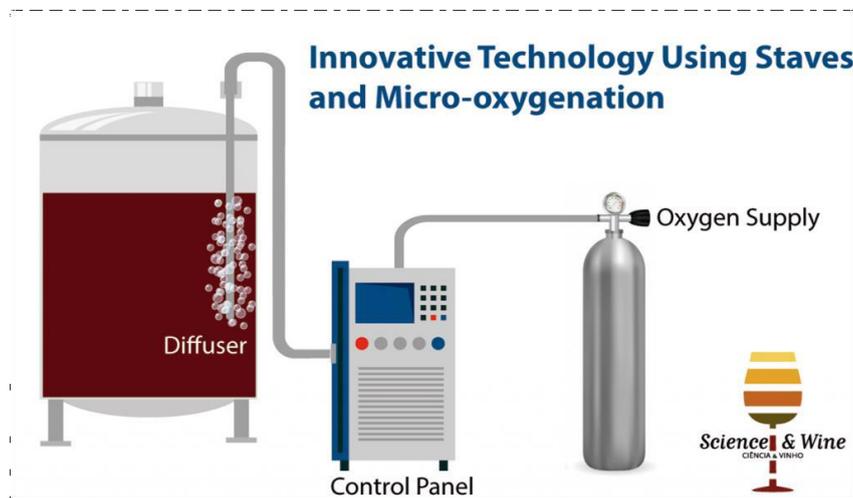


Tannat. Jules Troncy. "Ampélographie: traité général de viticulture", P. Viala & V. Vermorel: 1901-1910.

First mentioned in Madiran in 1783/4, *Tannat* most probably arose in the Hautes-Pyrénées region of South West France, deriving its name from the word "*tanat*", meaning "tan coloured" in the Béarnese possibly reflecting the dark colour of the berries and even the high tannin content. *Tannat* notably shares morphological features with other local varieties such as *Petit Courbu* and *Manseng Noir*: possibly having a parent-offspring relationship with the latter. The berries are relatively small compared to the large bunches.

Wines made from *Tannat* grapes raised in Madiran display deep colour, much tannin, marked acidity, and are both powerful and ageworthy, as well shown by Alain Brumont's Château Montus, "*Cuvée Prestige*", [*vide infra*].

In recent years, the technique of micro-oxygenation developed in the Madiran region, has been deployed to soften the tannins and reduce their sometimes rustic character. The high level of procyanadins, conveying alleged health benefits, have led to increased popularity of *Tannat* derived wines in the 21st Century.



Micro-oxygenation technology applied to wines.

Malbec (aka Cot).



Cot (aka Malbec), as grown in Cahors.

Cot (occasional alternative spelling, *Côt*) has its origin in the vicinity of Cahors in the South Western French province previously known as Quercy. The variety has numerous synonyms, especially in the Médoc and the Graves. These have included *Estrangey* or *Étranger* (“stranger”), and *Lutkens* (after an 18th Century Bordelais physician who planted it locally in Camblanes). *Cot* came to be called *Malbeck* after another individual who planted it in Sainte-Eulalie d’Ambarès, now in the Premières Côtes de Bordeaux. Following major losses in Bordeaux due to severe frosts in 1956 many vines were not replaced and the axis of propagation and vinification moved to Argentina where the grape was originally called *Malbeck*. The success and predominance of Argentinian wines, especially in the USA, led to the more frequent use of *Malbec*, even in France.

French plantings of *Malbec* are now principally in the South Western *département* of the Lot where any wine labelled Cahors must contain a minimum of 70% of that grape.

The grape is mid-ripening, but when ripe the grapes may drop. If less than fully mature when picked the resultant wine may be herbaceous with hard, bitter astringent tannins. Fully ripe *Malbec* can achieve a wine with substantial polish as achieved with Alain Brumont's Château du Cèdre, "*Le Cèdre*", [*vide infra*].

A Note on Pacherenc du Vic-Bilh.

Pacherenc du Vic-Bilh is not named for a town, place, or grape variety. The name is derived from the regional dialectal words "*paisheradas*" (meaning "vineyard rows") and "*vic-bilh*" (meaning "old country").

Pacherenc du Vic-Bilh is an *appellation* that occupies the left bank of the river Adour as it flows North in a region lying 40 km North of the Gascon towns of Pau and Tarbes. It occupies the same viticultural area as Madiran.

The label "*Pacherenc*" has been used for the region's wines since the 19th Century.

Both dry white wines and late-harvested sweet white wines are produced made from various combinations of *Petit Courbu*, *Petit Manseng*, *Gros Manseng* and *Courbu Blanc*, which comprise at least 60% of any vineyard in the region. *Arrufiac* and *Sauvignon Blanc* are accessory varieties but are limited to no more than 10% of plantings in any one vineyard.

The warm, dry autumns permit the delayed harvest that achieves grapes with the high sugar concentrations required for the production of the rich, sweet wines so engrained in the local culture. The dry and sweet examples produced by Alain Brumont at Château Bouscassé are both notable, [*vide infra*].



Gascon vineyard landscape.

THE VIGNOBLES AND THE VIGNERONS

Domaine Plageoles.



Domaine Plageoles.

In 1805 Jules Plageoles, a farmworker, purchased land and founded this unique Gaillac estate. Initially it was a mixed farming operation with vines, fruit trees and cereals. Subsequently the estate has been expanded and refined by seven generations of the same family: Jules, François, Emile, Marcel, Robert, Bernard, Florent and Romain Plageoles.

Marcel Plageoles began to replant native grape varieties such as *Duras*, which had disappeared from the region following the phylloxera crisis. His son Robert pursued the same course favouring indigenous, forgotten grape varieties some of which were found with local winegrowers and others by rapprochement with the ampelography conservatory of Marseillan in respect to grape varieties no longer existing in Gaillac, as was the case for *Verdanel* or *Mauzac Noir*.



Robert Plageoles



Bernard Plageoles

From 1983 Bernard Plageoles followed suit and replanted *Ondenc*, *Len de l'Ehl* (aka *Loin de l'Œil*) and *Mauzac Rose*.

Florent and Romain Plageoles were the first family members to undergo formal training in viticulture or viniculture.

Organic viticulture has been practised since the early 1990s, and certification was granted in 2010. Local humidity necessitates some working of the soil. Controlled wild grass cover maximizes the biodiversity. The vines are treated with herbal teas made from horsetail, meadowsweet, comfrey and fern such that use of sulphur and copper can be minimalised.



Organic viticulture in action at Domaine Plageoles.

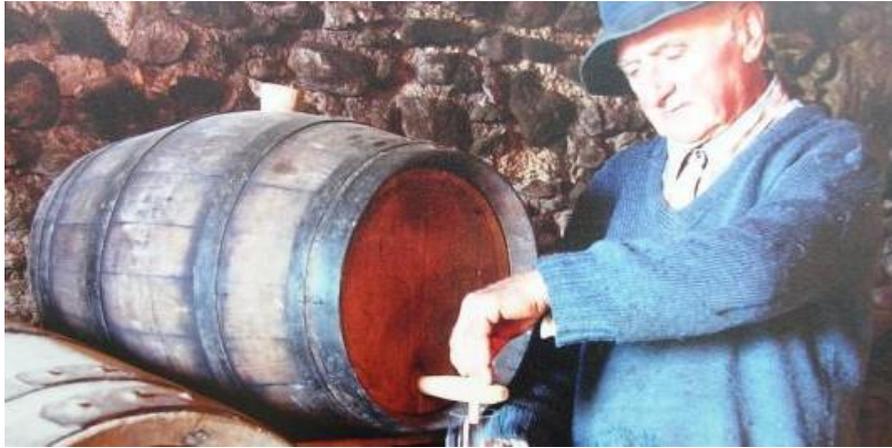
There are two separate properties, Roucou and Très Cantous: *Mauzac* or *Ondenc* are cultivated for white wines and *Duras*, *Braucol* and *Prunelart* for red wines. Aiming to offer the purest expression of local grape varieties, the estate vinifies 85% of its wines in single varietals. Notable cuvées include the sparkling *Mauzac Nature AOP Gaillac*, [*vide infra*]; the moelleux *Vin d'Autan, AOP Gaillac Doux*; and a tarry *Prunelart IGP Côtes du Tarn*.

[A number of amusing and informative short items featuring the Plageoles family can be found on “*YouTube*” by entering “*Domaine Plageoles Gaillac*”].



La Famille Plageoles.

Clos Lapeyre.



Jean Larrieu, purchaser of the original estate in 1920.

From the traditional background of mixed farming, that included strawberries and four hectares of vines producing grapes that were vinified in the local Gan cooperative cellar, the estate turned exclusively to viticulture in 1985 under the management of Jean-Bernard Larrieu, grandson of the purchaser of the original estate.



Jean-Bernard Larrieu

In 2000, the vineyard covered about 10 hectares. In 2004, it expanded with the takeover of the Nays-Labassère estate, a magnificent old vineyard of 7 hectares in the heart of Chapelle-de-Rousse.

The current estate occupies hillsides at 300 to 400 metres ASL including eight hectares of terraced vineyards on very steep slopes.



The Pic du Midi [at left], and as seen from the South facing Jurançon plateau of Clos Lapeyre [at right].

There is abundant rainfall in Spring and Winter; frequent thunder storms and even hail in Summer; but Autumn is usually mild, and dry under the influence of hot winds from Spain (the *Balaguer* wind). The temperature is moderated by the dual influence of the Pyrenees and the Atlantic Ocean at distances of 25

km and 100 km respectively. Maturation of the grapes benefits from the day/night thermal fluctuations arising from the altitude of the vineyards.

Total production is between 60,000 and 90,000 bottles *per* vintage.

A noteworthy marker of the care that is afforded to maturation of the wines at Clos Lapeyre is the use of Stockinger vats made by an Austrian family firm in the small town of Waidhofen. Founded in 1516 and said to be the oldest cooperage in the World, their casks are crafted from equal parts of Austrian, German, Hungarian and Romanian oak. Deployed by distinguished vigneronns in France and Italy, Stockinger barrels are revered as “*the wine maker’s Stradivarius*”.



Stockinger – “the wine maker’s Stradivarius”.

Alain Brumont.



Alain Brumont: La Tyre 12 ha vignoble, Madiran.

Alain Brumont (born 20 April 1946) is the formidable, highly driven, and high-achieving proprietor of properties in Madiran: Château Montus, Château Bouscassé, and Domaine Meinjarre.

Alain Brumont had no formal training from the age of 16 years when his father, Alban Brumont, made him leave school to work for him at his property Château Bouscassé.

In 1979 Alain Brumont took over Château Bouscassé.



Château Bouscassé.

In 1980 he purchased the abandoned Château Montus, planting 18 ha of vines.



Château Montus.

Historically, *Tannat* had been the major variety planted in the rural, hilly Madiran region. In the 1970s many were introducing Bordelais varieties to make up for the low-yielding *Tannat* and to mollify its fierce tannins. There was sparse interest in terroirs. *Tannat*, rather than *Syrah*, had been deployed by some Bordelais to improve poor vintages. Moreover, many farmers preferred to grow wheat in valley sites rather than address the hard work inherent to hillside terraced vineyards.

Alain Brumont was, from the start, a man on a mission, inspired by a visit to Bordeaux in 1979. In 1982 his first wine, Château Montus surpassed others in regional tastings. In 1985 he released the region's first pure *Tannat* for many years: his barrique-aged Château Montus, "*Cuvée Prestige*", which happily proved to be a sensation.

Thereafter, having identified 22 good hills in Madiran, Alain Brumont embarked upon acquisition of other vineyard sites in the region, recognising their heterogeneous characteristics and microclimates: as exemplified by Château Montus, a gravel hillside terrace of glacial origin, in contrast to Château Bouscassé with its rich clay-limestone with iron intrusions.

Despite occasional financial setbacks, a long series of battles with France's wine authorities, and two broken marriages, through perseverance and commitment Alain Brumont has mastered all the wine styles native to his region, (red, dry white, and sweet white), gaining international recognition.



Alain Brumont – Mission / ambition accomplished ?

Château du Cèdre.



***Jean-Marc Verhaeghe, Pascal Verhaeghe and his 2 sons,
Robin and Jules.***

The Verhaeghe family originate from Moorslede in the Flemish region of Belgium from which their ancestor, Léon Verhaeghe, fled by bicycle when his country was annexed in the First World War taking final refuge in the Lot. His son, Charles Verhaeghe, married Marie-Thérèse Rives from a farming family in Vire-sur-Lot. Self-taught, they planted their first vines alongside the lavender in their multi-crop farm in 1958. In 1973 their first wine bottling was undertaken alongside their distillation of lavender.

In 1987 Charles and Marie Thérèse Verhaeghe's sons, Pascal and Jean-Marc, took up the baton on account of their father's health problems. Pascal trained in viticulture and viniculture with the acknowledged master Jean-Marie Guffens

(Maçonnais and Luberon), and also in the Napa Valley. Jean-Marc trained at Premier Grand Cru Classé Château La Tour Blanche in Sauternes.



Jean-Marc Verhaeghe.



Pascal Verhaeghe.

Jean-Marc Verhaeghe cultivates the vines and Pascal Verhaeghe undertakes the viniculture, the maturation and the marketing. Pascal's sons, Jules and Robin, have brought new energy to the family team.

The domaine comprises three parcels of land that possess the two best soil types in the Cahors appellation.

On the hillsides of *Bru*, one parcel lies on a cone of limestone scree derived from limestone broken down by the quaternary ice-age and subsequent centuries, creating the soil of today's slopes. The grapes from this rare terroir are characterised by great finesse and aromatic complexity.

Two further parcels are located on two distinct, though geologically identical, ridges: the *Mindel* high terraces, formed 500,000 years ago from the river's alluvial deposits. This soil comprises rolled pebbles mixed with reddish ferruginous sand on the surface, overlying deeper levels of clay, and silica. The grapes from this terroir are characterised by great richness and density. The *Malbec* vines grown at these sites are 30 to 50 years of age.



Pebbles mixed with reddish ferruginous sand.

The specific micro-climate at Château du Cèdre is a substantial influence on its *terroir*. At equal distance from the Atlantic Ocean, the Pyrénées and the Mediterranean Sea, the climate is Oceanic until June, followed by Mediterranean from the month of July. In September, the river Lot cools the air, and the Autumn wind blows across the vines.

Château du Cèdre produces a number of red cuvées mainly from 100% *Malbec* from 15 to 50 year old vines, but also one with 5% each of *Merlot* and *Tannat*. The best *Malbec* goes into their *cuvée* “*Le Cèdre*”, [*vide infra*].

The domaine also grows some white varieties: *Viognier* *Chardonnay*, *Sauvignon Blanc*, *Semillon* and *Muscadelle*.

Domaine Cauhapé.



Henri Ramonteu: “grammairien du vin”.

A small rural property was registered under the name “*Caussapé*” in 1558 just five years after the future King of France, Henry IV, was baptised in Pau with the traditional blessing of garlic and a spoonful of Jurançon wine. In 1980 Henri Ramonteu established Domaine Cauhapé on the same property, then his parents’ farm, since when the 1 ha estate has grown to 47 ha.

The vines are planted on moderately steep, South to South East facing hillsides bordered by oak and chestnut woods on predominantly clay soil. 100 km from Biarritz, Domaine Cauhapé enjoys a temperate Atlantic climate in the rainy shadow of the Pyrenees. With the warm, dry *föhn* wind blowing in from the South and ventilating the vineyard, botrytis is not a factor.



Domaine Cauhapé - moderately steep hillside sites.

The estate is planted substantially to native varieties, *Gros Manseng* and *Petit Manseng*, together with a revival of three old native varieties: *Camaralet de Lasseube*, [vide supra], *Courbu Blanc*, [vide supra] and *Lauzet*. The vine density is 8,000/ha.

The earth is not worked, its clay content (up to 39%) and its compactness being prohibitive. Since 2021, the domain has deployed plant extracts to activate and protect the vineyard's natural defences, [phytotherapy]. The domaine's own secret methods are deployed to energize the soil to encourage the vine roots to explore the depths of the earth. The soil's microbial life is linked to the grass cover: the area under the rows is kept free of grass. Two months before the harvest, the grapes breathe the smell of warm soil. To keep this space free of grass, there are innovative applications of foam at 90°C.



Domaine Cauhapé - rows of vines free of grass



.... but with butterflies.

All vine work is done by hand and all the fruit is hand-harvested into small baskets and hand sorted. There is some skin contact for the dry wines. Fermentation is in stainless steel for the entry level wines and seasoned oak for the finer *cuvées*. There is extended lees contact and *élevage* from 5 months to 2 years depending on the wine being vinified.

The Domaine produces up to seven dry white wines and eight sweet white wines from local varieties, and one *rosé* from 50% *Tannat* : 50% *Cabernet Sauvignon*. Depending on the vintage, 10 to 12 *cuvées* are elaborated each year.

The Domaine produces an average of 110,000 bottles *per annum*.

[A number of illustrative “*YouTube*” recordings can be found on the Domaine’s website:

<https://www.jurancon-cauhape.com>]



Domaine Cauhapé - Manual vine care.

OTHER BEVERAGES

Whereas the *départements* of Charente and Charente Maritime, immediately to the North, can proudly boast of producing Cognac and Pineau des Charentes, the South West can rightly respond by championing Armagnac, Floc de Gascogne and *eau-de-vie de prune*.

Armagnac.

The home of Armagnac is between the Gascon rivers Garonne and Adour, where it has been distilled since the 14th Century, two centuries in advance of Cognac. A treatise, dated 1310, by a Franciscan Cardinal, Vital du Four, regarded as the founding forefather of Armagnac, extolled 40 distinct health benefits. The Gascons regarded double distilling as unnecessarily time-consuming and adopted the continuous still, the *alambic armagnacais*: granted a patent by Louis XVIII in 1818, this traditional technology allows for greater preservation of aromas than distillation in the double toasting methodology employed for Cognac. Temperature fluctuations from manually-fed, wood heating bring additional character. Cellar-ageing in barrels for 20 to 30 years is regarded as optimal.

The *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée* (AOC) awarded in 1936 now permits use of 10 wine varieties, but in practice Armagnac is usually derived from *Ugni Blanc*, *Folle Blanche*, *Colombard* and the hybrid *Baco 22 A*.



Armagnac alambic continuous still.

Floc de Gascogne.

Floc de Gascogne is analogous to Cognac's Pineau des Charente and has been produced in Gascony since the 16th Century to traditional recipes: the name was only introduced in 1954 by a winemaker from Cravencères in the Gers, Henri Amor. "Floc", signifying a bouquet of flowers, is derived from Occitan.

It is a fortified wine, (a *mistelle*), produced by blending fresh grape must and young Armagnac from the same vineyard in the ratio 2:1, arresting the fermentation of the must, thus preserving natural sugar levels and aromas of fruit: it is a *vin de liqueur*. The blended liquid is matured in cellars for 10 months.

Blanc and *rosé* versions are produced: the *blanc* usually from *Gros Manseng*, *Colombard*, *Ugni Blanc*, and *Baroque*. The *rosé* from *Tannat*, *Merlot*, *Cabernet Sauvignon*, *Cabernet Franc*, and occasionally, also *Gamay* and *Malbec*.

Marcs, eaux-de-vie, liqueurs.

Some are produced by renowned vignerons, for example:

Château du Cèdre offers a marc from the *pomace* derived from grapes of 50 year old *Malbec* vines grown on the high terraces of the Mindel. The marc is matured for 28 months in barriques. From the same terraces, there is also a *vin de liqueur* from grapes of 16 to 30 year old *Malbec* vines which spends four years in barriques.

Clos Triguedina, Cahors has revived the tradition of heating the must from 100% *Malbec* grapes in a centuries old prune oven, prior to fermentation, to produce "*The New Black Wine*" which offers massive concentration of flavours.

The extensive and varied resources in the region provide for a range of alcoholic beverages by specialist artisanal producers of longstanding that include:

Marc as found in the Red and white *Marc de Raisin d'Irouléguy* derived from the *pomace* of the distiller's own estate-grown *Cabernet Franc*, *Cabernet Sauvignon*, and *Tannat* for the red cuvée, and *Gros Manseng*, *Petit Manseng* and *Petit Courbu* for the white cuvée.

Two outstanding producers are **Distillerie Cazottes** in Villeneuve-sur-Vère, and **Branas**, Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port.

SOME FOOD FACTS

As with the wines, the diffuse nature of “*Le Grand Sud-Ouest*” and its diverse cultures provides an extensive food resource and characteristic cuisine of which the items *pictured* are a random *souppçon*.

Fish.

With historic resilience, extending back to whaling between the 8th and 15th Centuries, Basque fishermen continue to maintain a fishing industry centred on Saint-Jean-de-Luz that is now reliant upon anchovies, hake, turbot, *saint pierre* (John Dory), restricted tonnage of red tuna, and *chipirones* (small squid).



La Claise fish market, Saint-Jean-de-Luz.

Dishes may incorporate red peppers, garlic and herbs to produce a spicy *escabeche*.

Freshwater species include crayfish, and trout which may be cooked in butter and served on a bed of spinach (*aux épinards à La Limousine*); sautéed with salt pork belly (*aux lardons*); or deglazed with verjus.

Fungi.

A wide range of wild mushrooms can be found in the deciduous forests dependent upon the season: *morilles*, *chanterelles*, *girolles*, *mousserons*, and *coulemelles*. Most associated with the South West is the *cèpe* that favours

forests of sweet chestnut, hot sun and a few days heavy rain. Local variations for cooking cèpes include sautéing in oil with garlic and parsley plus: shallot, verjus and breadcrumbs (*à la Bordelaise*); jambon de campagne and white wine (*à la Gasconne*); fresh belly pork (*à la Bigourdane*).



Pierre Bulliard (1752-1793). “Flora Parisiensis : Ou, Descriptions Et Figures Des Plantes Qui Croissent Aux Environs De Paris”. Paris: P.F. Didot, 1776-1783.

The most prized fungus remains the capricious black truffle of Périgord and Quercy that requires the trained nose of a sow or a dog to locate, typically in chalky soil sustaining only scrubby trees, juniper and wild herbs. Black truffles are deployed simply with eggs, either scrambled or in an omelette; in a sauce to accompany *ris de veau*; or cooked with goose or duck fat, shallots, white wine, armagnac and meat stock to accompany beef or veal (*la sauce Périgueux*). They can be preserved in goose or duck fat.



Périgord Black truffle: the hunt

.... and the reward.

Meat products.

The traditional rural economy of the region placed much reliance on the pig and *la basse-cour*, the latter providing chicken and rabbit, but most notably duck and goose: both of the latter being suitable for preservation in some form. The fat on duck and goose lends the meat to preservation as *confit*, often with addition of spices, for later use in dishes such as *cassoulet*. The fatty livers of goose or duck can be conserved as *foie gras*, although concerns regarding the necessary forced feeding of the birds persist in some quarters. France produces approximately 70% of the World's *foie gras* and although consumption in France has fallen substantially since 2010, it was 170 g *per capita per annum* in 2021.

Two strictly local varieties of ham are rightly prized:

Jambon de Bayonne PGI hails from piebald *Pie Noir du Pays Basque* pigs exclusively born and raised on around 740 pig farms from communes in the Adour Basin.



Pie Noir du Pays Basque.

Following manual salting with Salies-de-Béarn PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) spring salt, and a period in cool cellars, the hams are cured by hanging from beams. The minimum production time is nine to 12 months. The finished product is branded with the *Lauburu*, the four-headed Basque cross.



The Lauburu.

Jambon et Porc Noir de Bigorre is the product of a Gascon pig saved from extinction and raised in its natural and historic home at the foot of the Central Pyrenees. The legs are salted, rested, dried and matured, resulting in a delicate flavour reminiscent of nuts, grilled chestnuts, and mushrooms. The unsalted cuts have an intense red colour and are tender and juicy on account of an intramuscular fat content of 4%.



Noir de Bigorre in their natural setting.

Miscellaneous crops.

AOC Espelette Peppers.



AOC Espelette Peppers.

AOC Espelette peppers are cultivated in a number of communes in the Pyrénées-Atlantiques. Piment d'Espelette PDO is a spice produced exclusively from this Gorria variety of *Capsicum annuum* that was introduced into the Basque country following its arrival in France from Central and South America during the 16th Century.

Conditions are regulated with restricted irrigation and defined planting density. After harvesting, festoons of pepper are hung on balconies and walls to dry out. The product can be purchased as fresh or dried peppers, ground pepper, puréed or pickled in jars. Piment d'Espelette received its PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) in 2002.

The flavour is sweet, fruity, and berry-like with a mild heat of only 4,000 on the Scoville scale. In Basque cuisine the spice has replaced black pepper and is a key ingredient in piperade.



Annual Fête du Piment d'Espelette, late October.

Haricot Tarbais PGI.



Tarbais beans in their pods.

This bean, originating in the New World, was established in the warm, rainy oceanic plain of Tarbes in the Hautes-Pyrénées, close to the Spanish border, at the beginning of the 18th century. In 1986 it was retrieved from declining cultivation. Exclusively manual harvesting is conducted in stages: the fresh beans being picked in pods from the end of August to the beginning of September, and the dry beans being picked from the plant from 20 September to mid-November.

The Tarbais bean has a soft, melting flesh, and a delicate non-starchy texture. It is used with effect in local dishes such as *cassoulet* and *garbure*, both of which include *confits* of goose or duck, and pork in the forms of ham or sausage.



Cassoulet.



Garbure.

Pruneaux d'Agen PGI.



Prune d'Ente - Jérôme Capel's orchard, Cazes-Mondenard.

In the 12th Century plum trees entered South West France *via* the inland port of Agen on the river Garonne, having travelled along the Silk Road from their origin in China to Damascus in Syria where they attracted the attention of Crusaders. Monks at an abbey near Tonneins on the Garonne appreciated the commercial potential and by the 18th Century an extensive market had developed. The monks employed a plum from a specific tree, the *prunier d'ente*, an old term indicating a grafted tree. The purple plum, the *prune d'Ente*, is now grown on *Robe-Sergent* trees in the Lot-et-Garonne where the South-facing river banks benefit from hot Summers with frequent rain showers. The *prunes d'Ente* are converted into *pruneaux d'Agen* by drying, initially on trays in the sun and then in ovens at temperature near to boiling.



Pruneaux d'Agen Geants.

The culinary epithet *à l'agenaise* signals the inclusion of prunes which may be encountered in local dishes as varied as those based on rabbit (*La Compote de Lapin aux Pruneaux*) and eels (*L'Anguille aux Pruneaux*), in addition to the more familiar *Tarte aux Pruneaux*). Additionally, prunes may be stuffed with a smooth liver pâté, or a vanilla and Armagnac cream: they may be preserved in Armagnac or an *eau-de-vie*, and then deployed in creation of an ice cream.



Tarte aux Pruneaux.

**Domaine Plageoles, Mauzac Nature, AOP Gaillac, 2022. ABV
12.5%.**



Mauzac Rose.

- Grape:** 100% Mauzac Rose.
- Soil:** Clay, limestone, sand and silex. Cool maritime climate.
- Viticulture:** 5000 vines/ha pruned in goblet, yielding 40 to 45 hl / ha.
- Viniculture:** Manual harvest. "*Rural*", or "*Gaillacoise*" vinification. Direct pressing. Static settling (24 hours). Native yeast. Filtration on a handle is done when the wine reaches 30g of residual sugar to stop alcoholic fermentation.
- Maturation:** After 2 months in vats the wine is bottled. The bubbles are set about 3 months after bottling when there is between 5 and 10 g of residual sugar, and the alcohol has risen to around 11.5% to 12%.
- Ageing potential:** To be consumed young, within 2 to 3 years.
- Character:** Clear, pale gold in colour with excellent bubble formation. Distinctive aromas of green apples and citrus fruits on the nose. An exotic palate of bananas, peaches, toasted nuts and caramel. Excellent floral acidity and a toasty finish.
- Food pairing:** A different aperitif, but also suited to savoury potato pancakes, foie gras or spicy Asian dishes.



Florent and Romain Plageoles.

**Clos Lapeyre, Vitatge Vielh, Jurançon Sec, AC Jurançon, 2020.
ABV 14%.**



Terraced vineyards at Clos Lapeyre.

Grapes:

60% Gros Manseng, 30% Petit Manseng, 5% to 10% Courbu and Camaralet. Grapes from three plots of vines aged 60 to 100 years old.

Soil:

Three plots within the Domaine de Nays vineyard site. Clay, silt and sand soil on rich bed of pebbles and siliceous gravels, "*les poudingues de Jurançon*".

- Viticulture:** Massal selection. Organic viticulture recognised by the French Quality License since 2005. Biodynamic since 2014.
- Viniculture:** After slow pressing, the must is decanted and fermented in 600 litre oak casks of one to eight years of age and in Stockinger vats.
- Maturation:** One year on its lees with regular stirring in oak casks and six months in vats. Bottled two years thereafter.
- Ageing potential:** Six to eight years.
- Character:** Ripe, rich nose with aromas of candied fruits. Subtle palate expressing spices and grilled notes. Full-bodied, firm structure: smooth and complex.
- Food pairing:** Perfect with fish from sea or river, but equally well-matched with roast chicken, roast veal with a white mushroom sauce. Will accompany regional charcuterie or cheeses.



Jean-Bernard Larrieu.

**Château Bouscassé, “*Les Jardins Philosophiques*”,
2016. AC Pacherenc du Vic-Bilh Sec. ABV 13.5%.**



Château Bouscassé: the Estate.

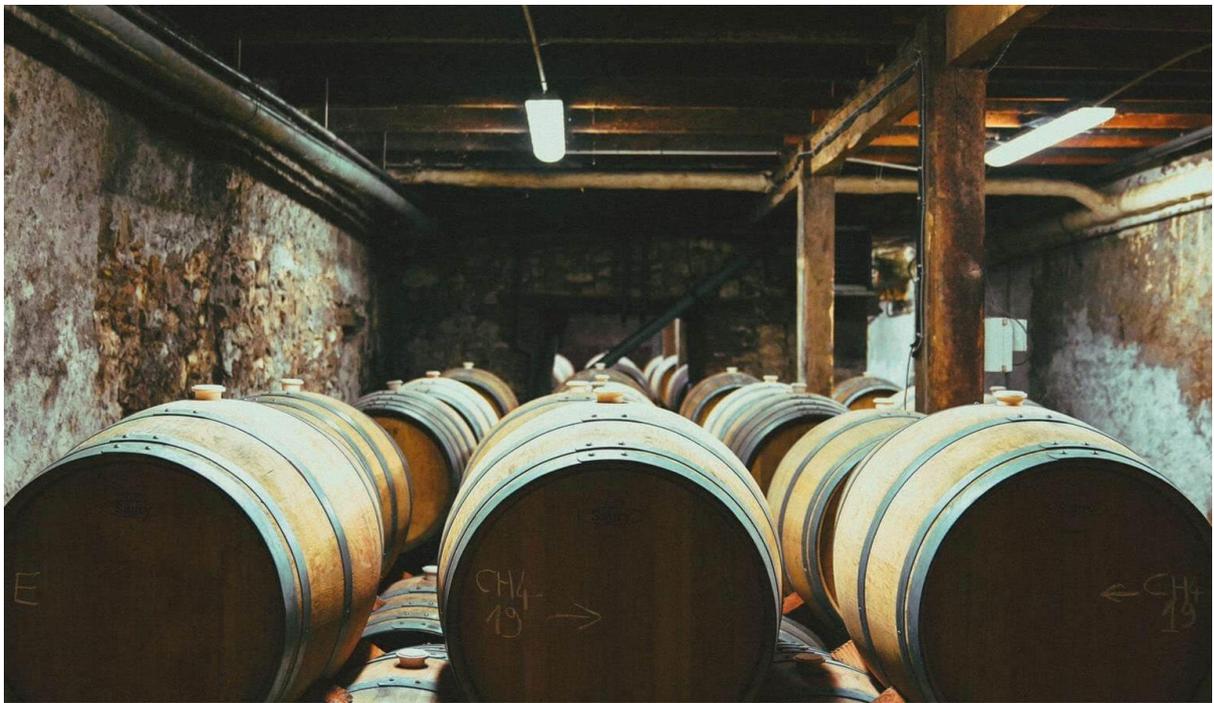
- Grape:** Almost 100% Petit Courbu with some Petit Manseng, both from vines aged 15 years.
- Soil:** Clay and chalk.
- Viticulture:** Grapes from specific selected *terroirs*.
- Viniculture:** Following very light pressure selected musts are run off and fermented at 16⁰ to 18⁰C in steel vats.
- Maturation:** 10 to 12 months on fine lees in steel vats with batonnage. No use of wood at any stage.
- Ageing potential:** Certainly up to 10 years.
- Character:** Fresh, elegant, lively with bouquet of meadow flowers and fruit. Full, smooth on the palate with some minerality.
- Food pairing:** Capable of crossing boundaries from aperitif, *via foie gras* and risotto to fish and sea food.

**Château du Cèdre, “Le Cèdre”,
2019, AC Cahors. ABV 13%.**



Château du Cèdre: the terrain.

- Grape:** 100% Malbec. 30 to 50 year old vines.
- Soil:** Calcareous bedrock and porous clay.
- Viticulture:** Organic. Cropped at yields of only 20hl/ha.
- Viniculture:** Indigenous yeasts. Gentle extraction over 30 days.
- Maturation:** 24 months in oak 57 hl casks and 500 litre barrels. Light addition of sulfites at bottling.
- Ageing potential:** Good for 20 years or more.
- Character:** Deep, inky purple. On the nose, blackberries, plums, and black cherries, with hints of violets, licorice, and a touch of graphite. The palate is full-bodied, robust, harmonious blend of dark fruit flavours, well-integrated tannins, and vibrant acidity providing balance and structure. Notes of dark chocolate, tobacco, and subtle earthiness. Long, finish with a persistent mineral undertone. Elegant and powerful.
- Food pairing:** Hearty, seasoned meat or game dishes and cheeses, or simply a *vin de méditation*.



Château du Cèdre: the cellar.

**Château Montus, Cuvée Prestige,
2002, AOP Madiran. ABV 15.5%.**



Château Montus.

- Grape:** 100% Tannat from 30 year old vines.
- Soil:** Steep slopes covered with rolled pebbles, brown and orange clay subsoil in strata.
- Viticulture:** 4 ha, South-facing, warm soils in the highest plots of Montus.
- Viniculture:** Maceration for 3 to 6 weeks. Malolactic fermentation at 28°C in wooden vats.
- Maturation:** Punching down. Aged in 100% new barrels for 14 to 16 months.
- Ageing potential:** Probably 30 years or even more.
- Character:** Unusual, distinctive, rich, opulent character. Complex fruit, balsamic, chimney tar, cocoa, and tobacco.
- Food pairing:** Diverse range of red meats, chocolate, red fruit desserts, and world-wide cuisines.

**Domaine Cauhapé, “Symphonie de Novembre”,
2021, AC Jurançon. ABV 13.5%.**



Domaine Cauhapé - after the harvest.

- Grape:** 100% Petit Manseng.
- Soil:** Clay and silica, with South East exposure.
- Viticulture:** “Approaching” Organic, [vide supra].
- Viniculture:** Manual harvest in successive *tries* into small baskets during the first 10 days of November. Hand selected grapes. Direct pressing. Fermentation in 1 and 2 year old barrels.
- Maturation:** 10 months in barrel followed by 6 months in tanks. Bottled after 2 winters.
- Ageing potential:** 15 years or more.
- Character:** Complex. Aromas of dried and candied fruits with fine, toasty notes. On the palate, ample and generous mouthfeel with vibrant notes of citrus fruits, yellow fruits and spice.
- Food pairing:** Equally enjoyable as an aperitif as with fresh or semi-cooked *foie gras*, nougat dessert, tarte tatin, fruit sabayon, apples, grapes, or ewe's milk cheese.



Domaine Cauhapé - les caves.

Members and Guests

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