



France, Languedoc: The Latest and Greatest featuring Chateau Ollieux-Romanis reviewed by Joe Czerwinski

May 2019

Even after various European Union initiatives, the sprawling Languedoc still includes vast areas of vineyard acreage. And while at one time, the purpose of these vineyards was to simply satisfy French thirst for inexpensive vin de table, today, many producers have shifted focus to producing limited quantities of top-flight wines.

As I wrote last year, there's no reason to hold onto any antiquated notions of Languedoc wine quality. Or, indeed, of pricing. The best wines are increasingly priced according to the market and perceived value by the producers. Triple-digit pricing does indeed exist here.

For the most part, serious wine lovers can focus on the region's five crus: Corbières Boutenac, La Clape, Minervois La Livinière, Pic Saint Loup and Terrasses du Larzac, but many other appellations produce notable wines. Top options include Corbières, Faugères, Fitou, Minervois and Saint Chinian, but there are many estates outside these areas making excellent wines. Many of the vineyards in La Clape boast a view over the Mediterranean.

Producer is key. Is the producer committed to doing what needs to be done to make high-quality wines? Or are they content to pursue high yields, evaluate ripeness based on numbers rather than by flavor, not sort their fruit and fail to follow hygienic practices in the winery? Many of the most innovative producers increasingly produce wines outside the various AOP regulations, choosing to produce wines under the more permissive system of IGP or going even further and labeling their wines simply as Vin de France.

For the most part, vintages here are fairly consistent, with slight variations in style (of course, there are always exceptions based on geography and unique weather events). The 2015 reds, mostly reviewed in previous years, tend to be concentrated, tannic wines, many of which could still benefit from additional bottle age.

The 2016 reds, from a mostly warm, sunny year, are largely approachable already, while the 2017 reds, which saw crops reduced in many areas by spring frosts, are also ripe and rich, despite the cooler summer.

2017 Chateau Ollieux-Romanis Corbières-Boutenac Cuvée Or

The estate's top cuvée is the 2017 Corbières-Boutenac Cuvée Or. A similar blend to the Cuvée Prestige—in this case, 44% Carignan, 23% Grenache, 23% Mourvèdre and 10% Syrah—it's aged entirely in new oak yet doesn't seem overdone. Hints of mocha accent cassis fruit in this supple, full-bodied red. It's concentrated and rich yet isn't heavy, retaining a fine sense of balance on the long, elegant finish. At the estimated retail price of \$23, it's a terrific value. **(93 points)**

2017 Chateau Ollieux-Romanis Corbières-Boutenac Cuvée Prestige

A ripe, gently oaked (10% new) blend of 40% Carignan, 25% Grenache, 25% Mourvèdre and 10% Syrah, the 2017 Corbières-Boutenac Cuvée Prestige offers up hints of leather, clove and allspice on the nose, plus scents of cola and raspberries. It's medium to full-bodied, supple and charming, with a long, smooth finish. **(91 points)**

