

Maury, Roussillon, France

FOR MANY REASONS, Roussillon is often linked with Languedoc, its larger neighbour to the north. Although the viticulture of the two regions is similar, Roussillon has a distinct identity, both geographically and culturally. The culture is Catalan and the locals identify closely with their 'cousins' in Spanish Catalonia on the other side of the Pyrenees.

Collectively Languedoc–Roussillon is arguably the largest vineyard area in the world, making up one third of the total vineyard area of France. Roussillon alone has 37,000 ha¹. Wine has been produced here since well before the Christian era. The ancient Romans recognised the benefits of this region for viticulture—they were attracted by both the warm, sunny climate and its coastal location. Rivesaltes has been known for muscat-based wine since the 14th century.

Roussillon is found at the eastern end of the Pyrenees, the mountain range that separates France and Spain. The main city, Perpignan, is in the east, approximately 12 km inland from the Mediterranean Sea. The Agly, Têt and Tech rivers flow from the Pyrenees to the sea, and have created long, west-to-east valleys that provide some protection from the cold northerly winds. Vines and olives are virtually the only crops that can be successfully cultivated on the arid slopes of these valleys. This is, perhaps, the hottest and driest part of France. The MJT² for Perpignan is 23.7°C³ (similar to Mildura) with an annual rainfall of 570 mm (similar to the Barossa



Vineyards in the small appellation of Maury



Peter Dry
Vineyards of the World

Valley). Soils of the slopes are typically infertile, stony schists.

The varieties, viticulture and wine styles reflect the Spanish influence; for example, Carignan Noir makes up one third of the vineyard area. Carignan Noir comes from northern Spain where it is known as Cariñena or Mazuela. However, France has the largest planted area: in the late 1990s there were 100,000 ha in Languedoc–Roussillon alone⁴. It is only suitable for regions with a dry, warm to hot growing season because it is late ripening and very susceptible to fungal diseases. Although this variety has been extensively planted in California, principally in the Central Valley, it is almost unknown in Australia.

The main production of this region is non-appellation wine, i.e. vin de table and vin de pays. The latter has the higher quality rating of the two. Eighty-five per cent of the vin de pays production of France comes from Languedoc–Roussillon and it is predominantly red wine. Vin de table in France is typically a light-bodied red wine produced in Languedoc–Roussillon

¹ Robinson, J. (ed) (1999) Oxford Companion to Wine. OUP

² Mean July Temperature

³ Johnson, H. and Robinson, J. (2001) The World Atlas of Wine. Mitchell Beazley

⁴ Although Carignan Noir and Grenache Noir are usually abbreviated to Carignan and Grenache respectively in Australia, the names in full will be used in this context because the white forms of both are used in France



Above: Maury. Left: Mas Amiel.

from Carignan Noir. Yield of vin de pays is up to 13 t/ha whereas there is no yield limit for vin de table. By comparison, the yield limit for Appellation Contrôlée (AC) wine is 7 to 8 t/ha.

A relatively small proportion of the wine produced in Roussillon is AC. The oldest appellations within Roussillon are for fortified wines known as Vin Doux Naturel (VDN). More than 90 per cent of the VDN of France is produced here. These wines have a minimum alcohol of 14 per cent and tend to be consumed at a relatively young age. Rivesaltes AC is produced over a large proportion of Roussillon, mainly from Grenache Noir, Grenache Blanc and Grenache Gris. Muscat du Rivesaltes AC comes from the same zone but it is mainly from Muscat of Alexandria (Muscat Gordo Blanco), and some Muscat à petits grains (Frontignac). Banyuls AC is from a small area at the south-eastern extremity of Roussillon, produced from low-yielding Grenache Noir grown on terraces overlooking the Mediterranean.

Maury is a small VDN appellation, approximately 50 square kilometres, located 17 km northwest of Perpignan, in the foothills of the Agly valley. There must be a minimum of 70% Grenache Noir but in practice many of the wines are 100% Grenache Noir. Maximum permitted yield is 30 hl/ha (approximately 4.2 t/ha) but some producers such as Mas Amiel have vineyards with lower yields, e.g. 3 t/ha. Vine spacing is either 1.7 × 1.7m or 2.5 × 1.0. Most vines are non-trellised 'bush' vines with pruning to just four to five single-bud spurs per vine. Clean cultivation is the normal practice in the region and all vines are grafted to phylloxera-resistant rootstocks.

For table wines only, the Cotes du Roussillon and Cotes du Roussillon Villages appellations were founded in 1977. The latter has the higher rating of the two and is restricted

to the northern third of the region. Wines of Cotes du Roussillon can be either red, rosé or white whereas Cotes du Roussillon Villages is strictly for red wine. The same varieties are utilised for each classification but Villages vineyards have lower yield limits. For red wines, Carignan Noir must comprise 40% of the blend, and Syrah (Shiraz) and Mourvèdre collectively must be at least 50%. In addition, there is usually some Grenache Noir and/or Cinsaut. The areas of Syrah and Mourvèdre are increasing at the expense of Carignan Noir. Many varieties can be used for white wine including Grenache Blanc, Marsanne, Roussanne, Vermentino (Rolle), Maccabeu, Bourboulenc and Carignan Blanc—the first four named must make up at least 50% of the blend. New varieties are being planted, particularly on the plains, e.g. Chardonnay, Merlot and Viognier, but these can only be used for vin de pays or vin de table. An increasing amount of Grenache Noir is being used for red wine (vin de pays) instead of the traditional use for VDN. Grenache Noir can ripen as early as mid August in this region.

Domain Gauby is an innovative small producer with 14 ha of vineyards located 8 km northwest of Perpignan. This producer is somewhat unusual because it has a large proportion of Syrah. The oldest vines, e.g. Grenache Noir, are not trellised but the newer plantings, e.g. Viognier, Chardonnay and Syrah, are trained to a modified VSP. Other varieties grown are Grenache Blanc, Grenache Gris, Maccabeu and Carignan Noir. The main rootstock is 110 Richter but 140 Ru and Fercal are also used.

As is typical for this part of Roussillon, the vineyards are not irrigated and, in response to the low rainfall, yields can be as low as 1 t/ha for the Grenache bush vines. This producer has developed a good reputation for Viognier. Production includes Cotes du Roussillon Villages, Cotes du Roussillon (red and white), vin de pays (Chardonnay and Viognier) and Rivesaltes VDN.

DR PETER DRY is associate professor in the Department of Horticulture, Viticulture and Oenology, Adelaide University. He can be contacted by e-mail at: peter.dry@adelaide.edu.au