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TASTING ARTICLES

LANGUEDOC

FRANCE



Languedoc round-up, summer 2024



Can't make it to the south of France this year? Tam finds a bevy of wines that can transport you there, such as those from Minervois winemaker Nicola Bojanowski at Clos du Gravillas, shown above.

In all my years of reviewing Languedoc wines, I have never heard the song of the Languedoc so clearly coming from so many wines. In the tasting notes below, the two groups headed 'Languedoc blends and varietals' (one white, one red) are shining examples of what I'm talking about. Most of us (me included) are not yet at the place where we can tell a Faugères from a Minervois. But tasting these wines, one thing became clear – producers using native varieties, blended or not, grown in vineyards surrounded by native forests and flora, are making wines that are unmistakably Languedoc. Together, these wines were an orchestral paean to what this region can and does do. There's lots of experimentation and variety, make no mistake – you'll find plenty of diversity in grape varieties and winemaking techniques. But none of it detracted from this very special timbre that comes only from this mountain-to-Mediterranean curve of southern France.



Clos du Gravillas Les Bonnes vineyard

I'm less certain about the Languedoc wines made from non-local varieties, which is why I've grouped them separately. Some producers are making unmistakably good Chardonnay and Pinot, decent Sauvignon Blanc and even rather interesting Tempranillo and Albariño. But good as these wines are, they don't have the canticle of the mountains and herbs and stones and restless winds.

On the other hand, the orange wines I've tasted from the Languedoc seem to be on the ascendent. I tasted only three for this round-up but they were all outstanding, managing to pivot into that magic convergence of bright juicy fruit with spicy tannins. They're brilliantly food friendly as well.

Languedoc champions for me, this time, were: Clos du Gravillas (Nicola Bojanowski is pictured with her hound in her Minervois vineyards at the top of this article), Domaine de la Dourbie, Terre des Dames, Domaine Jones, Gayda and Domaine Begude. There are so many more great wines and producers I haven't managed to taste this time, so please check our [tasting notes](#) for a rich treasure trove of Languedoc producers doing glorious things with their unique and often old-vine vineyards. [Coincidentally, earlier this week I tasted a half-dozen wines from the famous Languedoc property Mas de Daumas Gassac. You can find my tasting notes [here](#) – JR.]

One more positive thing worth pointing out: a third of these 113 bottles were just over 1,100 g full-bottle weight, which means that these producers are using bottles in the lightest range possible. Another 20% were around the 1,200 g mark, which puts more than half these wines in the lower carbon-emission bracket when it comes to bottle weight. Just four still wines clocked in at over 1.5 kg – I hope those responsible for this choice come around to seeing the futility of this vanity. In the meantime, *santé* to the producers who are doing the right thing.

The 113 tasting notes below are grouped by style (sparkling, white, orange, pink and red). But I've also subdivided the whites and reds because I want to highlight the blends and varietals which 'belong' to the region and, I believe, best tell the story and reflect the beauty and complexity of Languedoc. Because there were a number of Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs, I've given each of these varieties their own group so you can compare like for like. The other non-native varieties are split into a red and white group, as follows:

- [sparkling](#)
- [Languedoc white blends and varietals](#)
- [Chardonnay](#)
- [other white blends and varietals](#)
- [orange/amber](#)
- [rosé](#)
- [Languedoc red blends and varietals](#)
- [Pinot Noir](#)
- [other red blends and varietals](#)

White

Languedoc blends and varietals

Clos du Gravillas, Emmenez-moi au Bout du Terret 2023 IGP Pays d'Hérault Côtes du Brian 16.5

Full bottle 1,154 g. Certified organic (Ecocert). 100% Terret Gris from the Bojanowski's estate in Minervois.

It's dry, but the first impression is honey. Then flowers – honeysuckle, jasmine, dandelion. Then a ping of lime green and a whisper of bergamot. Then apricots, full and juicy, eaten with a crunch of rock salt and pepper. A lovely dustiness just on the finish, as if a little gust of wind blew some stone dust on the boxes of picked grapes. (TC) 12%

Drink 2024 – 2028

Clos du Gravillas, L'Inattendu 2023 Minervois 17.5

Full bottle 1,171 g. Certified organic (Ecocert). Blend of Grenache Gris, Grenache Blanc, Maccabeu.

Clotted cream and vanilla, grilled mango and richness and then wave after wave of exquisitely precise, glittering, crystalline mica-mineral dust and sweet-orange acidity. This is exceptional. The combination of expansive richness, high-voltage but super-ripe acidity, smoky minerality and mosaic of flavours fills every corner of the mouth with thrilling vibration. Another Gravillas white wine that was knee-bucklingly good with Gruyère cheese. (TC) 13.5%

Drink 2024 – 2030

Clos du Gravillas, Mademoiselle Lily 2023 IGP Pays d'Hérault Côtes du Brian 16.5

Full bottle 1,155 g. Certified organic (Ecocert). Blend of Viognier and Roussanne.

Peachy and honeyed with a marmalade richness and a little salty sting of citric Sichuan pepper. Something cool and leafily fresh on the finish. It's generous with fruit but not 'fruity'. It's straight upfront without frills but not simple. The perfect wine for smoked chicken or a caprese-style salad made with nectarines. (TC) 13.5%

Drink 2024 – 2027

Clos du Gravillas, Retour aux Origines Cépages d'Ici 2022 Vin de France 17.5

Full bottle 1,302 g. Certified organic (Ecocert). Piquepoul Gris, Terret Gris, Carignan Blanc from Minervois.

The maritime-salty intensity of this wine crashes in over a wide swathe of cooked-oats and baked-pear richness, bringing the sting and peppery-green taste of windswept herbs and summer dust. It has the texture of old, well-worn brick cobbles and bitterness grooved fine and deep into anise sweetness. Finishes as intense and fierce and flung wide as it started with a crystalline brilliance in the middle. (TC) 13.5%

Drink 2024 – 2030

Orange

Clos du Gravillas, À Fleur de Peau 2023 Vin de France

17.5

Full bottle 1,176 g. Certified organic (Ecocert). 100% Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, three weeks of skin contact, spontaneous fermentation.

Deep gold. I last tasted this wine in 2020 ([the 2018 vintage](#)) and this is just as gorgeous. Just as spine tingling. Racing ginger and turmeric spices, exploding with fireworks of intensity and drama. Quince and honey and saffron.

Clementine peel and candied lemon. Angelica and fennel flowers. Fennel seed. Treacle. Iodine. Changing every second in the mouth. But full of fullness and full of charm. So exciting that one sip and you're buzzing, two and you're Alice down a rabbit hole where the magic happens and anything is possible. A Michelin sommelier's dream. (TC) 13.5%

Drink 2024 – 2028

Clos du Gravillas, Happy, Comme un Dimanche à la Plage 2023 Vin de France

16.5

Full bottle 1,302 g. Certified organic (Ecocert). Winemaker John Bojanowski emailed me to say that this wine 'uses things we used to throw away, to make a very aromatic low-alcohol white (very unripe Terret Gris verjus from green harvest macerated in very ripe Muscat skins after pressing).'

It's deep gold and smells of jasmine and lychee and grilled mango skins. And it *tastes* deep gold and of jasmine, lychee and mango, but streaked with peppermint, lime and delicate bright-green matcha bitterness. So fresh, so playful, so quirky. And so clever! What a great way to use discards. I wish I had some som tam ingredients to hand – I reckon this would go really well with that sort of dish. Although maybe if you're sticking to the title of the wine, it should be paired with a plate of crispy whitebait. (TC) 11.5%

Drink 2024 – 2026

Red

Other varietals and blends

Clos du Gravillas, Côté Obscur 2023 Vin de France

17.5

Full bottle 1,163 g. Blend of Carignan and Cabernet Sauvignon from Minervois.

I don't know what the proportion of Carignan is to Cabernet, but it's the Cabernet that's loud and proud in this explosion of blackcurrant and cassis and brambly scramble of herb-laced tannins. It's Cabernet, too, that's poking its little green-pepper tongue into the corners and waving fragrant swathes of napeta and wild mint over the top. But you would never taste this and think anything other than Mediterranean. I'm not overly keen on Cabernet from the Languedoc (in bordeaux or southern-variety blends) because it so often is alcoholic and exaggerated and tastes as if it comes from nowhere or anywhere. The Bojanowskis, however, despite allowing the Cab to shine through with confidence, have retained a strong, authentic Languedocien accent *and* bottled a wine that is fresh, scrumptious and energetic. Bravo. (TC) 13.5%

Drink 2024 – 2032

Red

Languedoc blends and varietals

Clos du Gravillas, Alive 2023 Vin de France 16.5

Full bottle 1,152 g. Certified organic (Ecocert), agroecology. Blend of Piquepouls Noir, Gris and Blanc from Nicola and John Bojanowski's property in St-Jean de Minervois.

Pale, see-through crimson. It may be pale in colour and very light in alcohol, but this little wine has masses of life and punch. It lives up to its name – alive! Cherries and raspberry wine gums and pomegranate. Hip-hopping with energy. A buzz of cinnamon and juniper berry. Great line and refreshment. Greedy-gulp worthy. Gleeefully deee-licious and deee-lightful! (TC) 12.5%
Drink 2024 – 2026

Clos du Gravillas, Rendez-Vous sur la Lune 2023 Minervois 17

Full bottle 1,154 g. Certified organic. Blend of Syrah, Carignan, Cinsault, Grenache.

The Bojanowskis have managed to somehow capture the dark-fruited, dark-tannin, dark-mineral soul of Minervois in a wine that is soaring with lift and light. Limber tannins, lithe and sewing sine curves through really succulent, frank fruit. Obsidian minerality shining at its heart. Crushed fresh oregano on the end. And the acidity is so whole and fluid that it seems to circle everything like a halo, flooding the wine with freshness. I'd drink this young, because it's so damn yum right now. (TC) 13.5%
Drink 2024 – 2028

Clos du Gravillas, Sous les Cailloux des Grillons 2023 IGP Pays d'Hérault Côtes du Brian 17.5

Full bottle 1,155 g. Certified organic (Ecocert). Syrah, Carignan, Cinsault, Terret Noir, Grenache Noir. Hand-picked.

Dark-cherry fruit, cocoa and peppermint. Tiny flecks of graphite. A total heart-throb of fruit – throaty, deep, warming (not from alcohol, though) and lustrous. More intense tannins than any of their other 2023 reds have, but they're positive and mettlesome and add delicious fissured depth and contour to the fruit. (TC) 13.5%
Drink 2024 – 2033

Clos du Gravillas, Lo Vièlh Carignan 2022 IGP Pays d'Hérault Côtes du Brian 17.5

Full bottle 1,171 g. Certified organic (Ecocert). Centurion Carignan vines, planted in 1911.

Exceptionally plush for Carignan. Crushed ripe mulberries on hot stone wall. Cola notes and vanilla coffee. Supple and fragrantly spicy – dried thyme, dried mint, shiso, nutmeg, clove. Dry, strong, big tannins but they're tender, almost tentative, leaving all the space in the world for the fruit to shine, shine, shine. More than anything, this wine is the unmessed-with story of the fruit that this old vineyard is still so generously giving. It's wonderful, quite simply. (TC) 13.5%
Drink 2024 – 2032