



SAINT
CHINIAN

SCHIST & LIMESTONE

Half schist, half limestone
Half sky, half valley
Half mountain, half plateau
Half mist, half wind
Half dark, half light
Half hamlet, half village
Half stream, half river
Half schist, half limestone
Half layers, half rock
Half jagged, half rock face
Half black, half red
Half primary, half secondary
Half trilobite, half dinosaur
Half bore, half capitale
Half maquis, half garrigue
Half holm, half kermes
Half arbutus, half mastic
Half heather, half apollinarthes
Half rosemary, half santolina
Half cistus, half thyme
Half cep, half truffe
Half maquis, half garrigue
Half dense, half scattered
Half short-toed snake eagle, half kestrel
Half two-tailed pasha, half mountain cornflower
Half big quaking grass, half mountain cornflower
Half wild, half orderly
Half immortelle, half orchid

Half schist, half limestone
Half feminine, half masculine
Half gem, half mount
Half taste, half flavour
Half spice, half fresh fruit
Half perfume, half scent
Half balsamic, half smoky
Half gentle, half rocky
Half spring, half fountain
Half pagan, half Christian
Half locality, half estate
Half chateau, half abbey
Half tradition, half skills
Half breeding, half for the love of others
Half festival, half market
Half laugh, half cry
Half legend, half secret
Half natural, half built
Half the call of the clouds, half the murmur of the wind
Half schist, half limestone
And as one – Saint-Chinian!
And if there were a chorus, it would be:
Half schist, half limestone
Half jagged, half light
Half beauty, half embrace
Half attitude, half knowing how to love.

Saint-Chinian is a land of antagonism and duality, that of schist and limestone. Of contrasting numbers – 300 winegrowers and 20 villages. And yet, they are the starting point of a unique ambition, and that is to express, in the very finest detail, every single nuance in the mother rock.

SCHIST LIMESTONE





SCHIST LIMESTONE

A GEOLOGICAL
MAYHEM

THE CRUX OF THE DUALITY

Languedoc-Roussillon holds a unique place in Europe in that it is teeming with multifarious landforms, soil types and parent rocks. 600 million years of history are recounted through our vineyard sites.

Right at the core of this mayhem is the Saint-Chinian hill chain which reveals what is referred to as an “unconformity”. Geologists travel the world to study it in situ. The folded, chipped and washed down terrain has flipped over and ended up upside down, creating an intertwined mass where the oldest layers cover the youngest.

This geological hotchpotch is now as much a feast for the eyes as it is for our palates.

Nearly 540 million years ago, sediment was deposited and built up on the bed of an ocean. Mud and sand became cemented to form limestone, clay and sandstone.

Gradually the ocean disappeared and a mountain range rose around 300 million years ago. The rocks were folded and displaced over tens of kilometres. Clay became schistose rocks that broke into layers and plates (J.C. Bousquet in ‘Un Terroir des Hommes Saint-Chinian’).

SCHIST IN THE NORTH

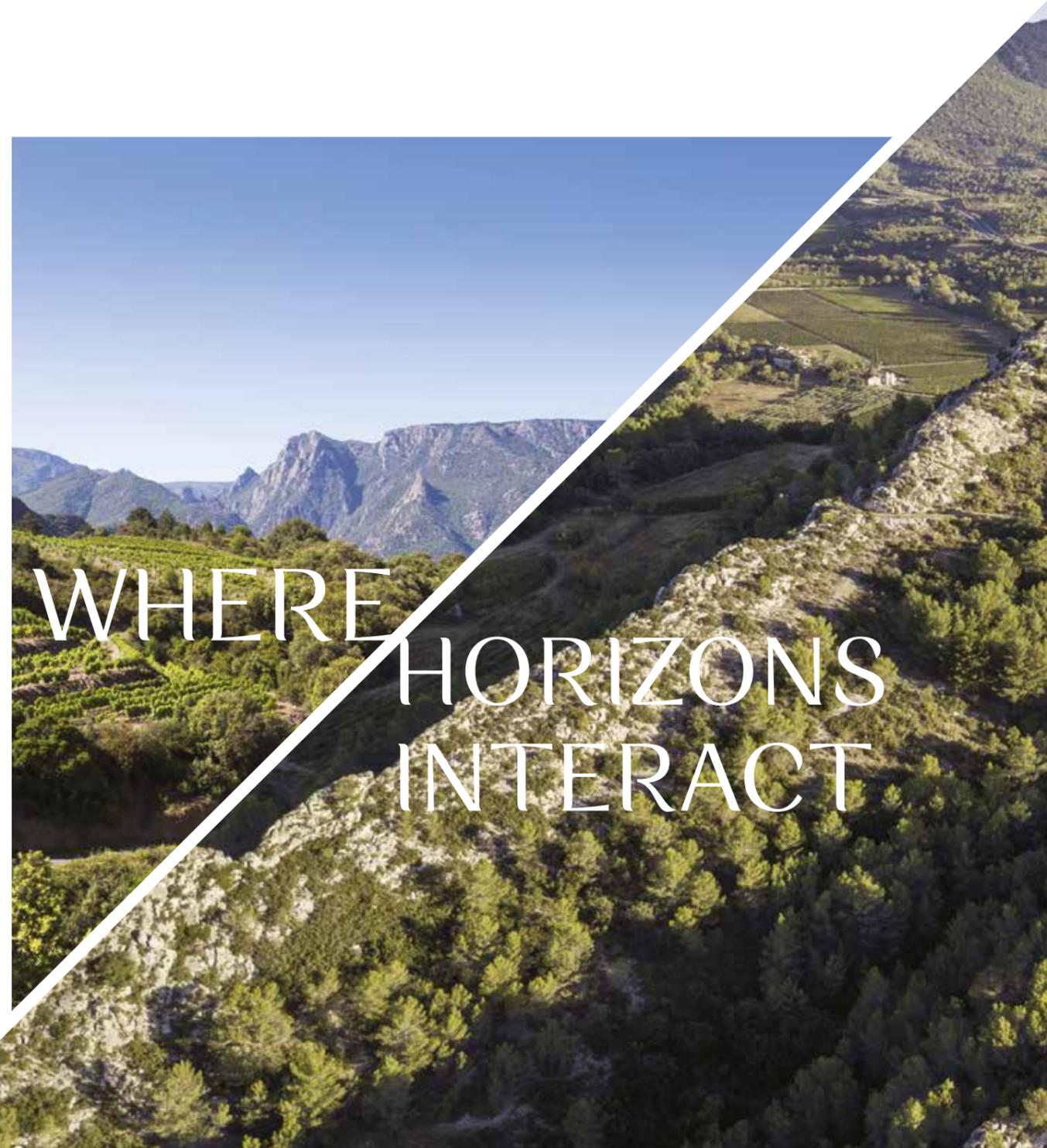
Schist, along with some sandstone, are in the vast majority and can cover as much as 90% of the subterranean area. These acidic soils store up heat during the day and radiate it back when night falls. Schist forces vines to put down deep roots, to places where rainwater and minerals accumulate.

Set in the heart of the schist area, two village-designated appellations – Saint-Chinian Berlou and Saint-Chinian Roquebrun – bear witness to the human factor in terroir. These two vinous odysseys recount the collective ambition of the local winegrowers. In the glass, you can still taste their characters and choices – one is a staunch supporter of Carignan, the other of Syrah.

LIMESTONE IN THE SOUTH

Here, limestone entwines with bauxite, clay and ‘reptile sandstone’. The layer of soil is extremely shallow and the stones are solid. The vines use every interstice to put down deep roots among the cracks in the folded terrain, looking for dampness.

The redolent plant life suffuses the wines with the perfumes of fresh garrigue. In this heady environment, each vineyard bears a unique olfactory signature stamp.



WHERE HORIZONS INTERACT

20 VILLAGES 2 MAJOR TERROIRS

A SHOT FROM TWO ANGLES

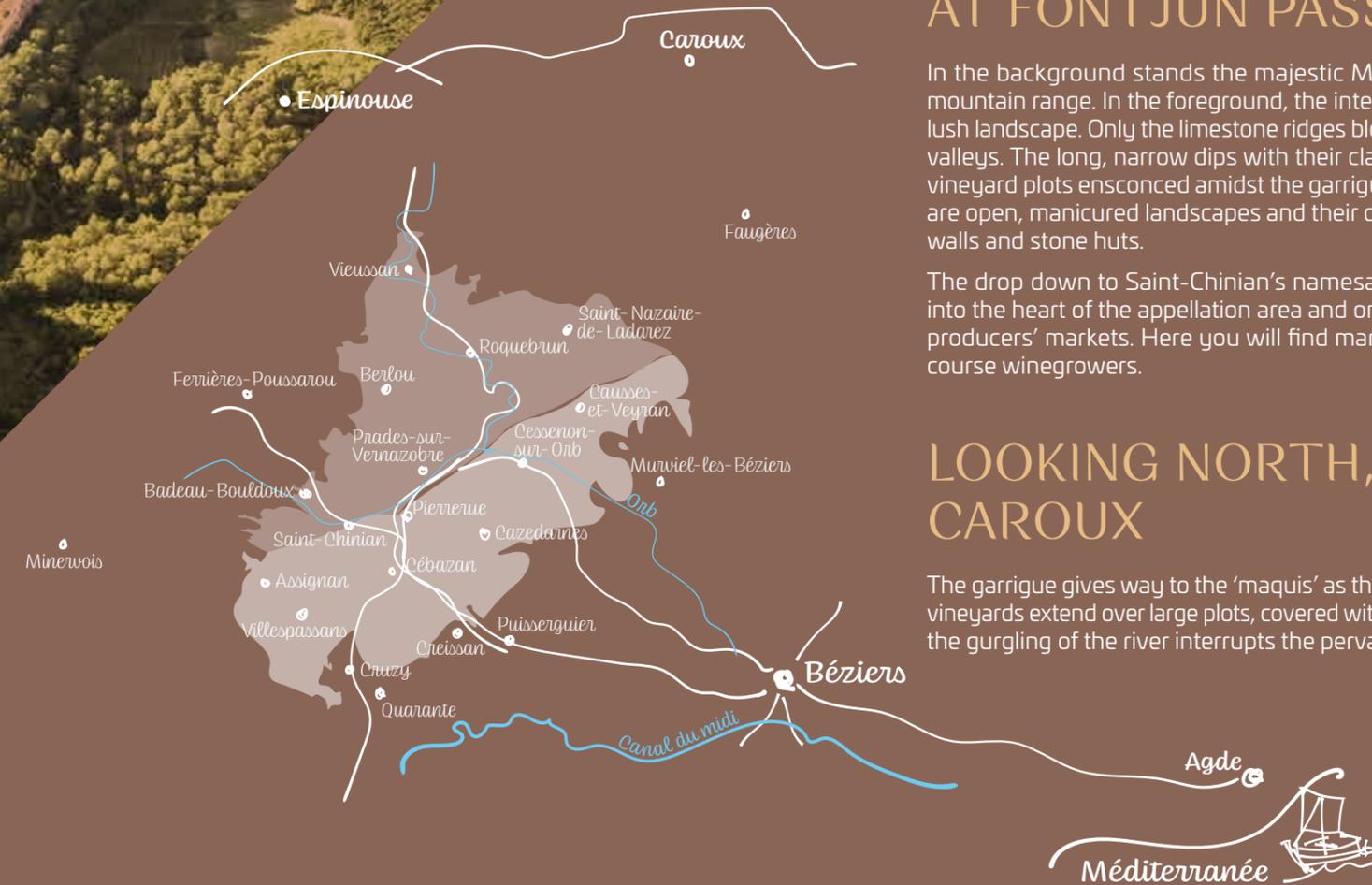
FROM THE SOUTH, ARRIVING AT FONTJUN PASS

In the background stands the majestic Mount Caroux and Espinouse mountain range. In the foreground, the interwoven paths draw us into the lush landscape. Only the limestone ridges block the horizon, dominating the valleys. The long, narrow dips with their clay-limestone soils are home to vineyard plots ensconced amidst the garrigue. Sandwiched between them are open, manicured landscapes and their combination of vines, dry stone walls and stone huts.

The drop down to Saint-Chinian's namesake village is dizzying, leading into the heart of the appellation area and one of the region's most famous producers' markets. Here you will find market gardeners, farmers and of course winegrowers.

LOOKING NORTH, TO MOUNT CAROUX

The garrigue gives way to the 'maquis' as the rolling hills rise gradually. The vineyards extend over large plots, covered with a mantle of schist sheets. Only the gurgling of the river interrupts the pervasive yet unnoticeable silence.





NORTH

MAQUIS IN THE NORTH

The name 'maquis' is a loan word. Derived from Latin, it means 'patch' and alludes to the mottled appearance of the 'maquis' scrubland landscape.

Its vegetation is extremely dense and low to the ground, and it forms thorny, labyrinthine thickets across the uneven terrain. It can only be found in four French departments, on acidic soils amidst crystalline massifs.

GARRIGUE IN THE SOUTH

This plant formation is well known in Mediterranean countries. Its Provençal name refers to the thorny shrubs that grow on this raw land.

Despite this, it was once a hive of human activity. Now the stomping ground of ramblers, it is still an Eden for winegrowers who can sense every one of its perfumes in their wines.

SOUTH

MAQUIS VERSUS GARRIGUE



TWO CHARACTERS IN THE GLASS

PINNING DOWN THE UNIQUE FEATURES OF SCHIST

Schist reds

Referred to as the 'velvet touch', these are bewitching, voluptuous wines with a fatal charm.

- ☞ A delicate, distinctive nose driven by notes of smoke, roasted coffee, cacao, liquorice and maquis
- ☞ A velvety texture
- ☞ Soft tannins

Schist whites

- ☞ Mouth-filling and rich
- ☞ Floral and sweet spice notes with faint toast
- ☞ Some mineral and menthol-like traces

Schist rosés

- ☞ An ample wine
- ☞ Toast notes

DELVING INTO THE ENDLESS DIVERSITY OF LIMESTONE

Limestone reds

The spectrum of limestone reds is limitless, ranging from extremely alluring wines in their youth to age-worthy, terroir-driven offerings. They offer an entire world of pleasure and emotion.

- ☞ Vibrant hues
- ☞ Fresh red fruits on the nose
- ☞ Structure and minerality
- ☞ Soft tannins over time

Limestone whites

- ☞ A clean, lively attack
- ☞ Fruit aromas of citrus and apricot
- ☞ Floral and dried fruit notes

Limestone rosés

- ☞ Great liveliness
- ☞ Aromas of red berry fruits

EVEN THE LOCAL RESIDENTS ARE TOTALLY DIFFERENT. THE BAT, SUCH A PRECIOUS ALLY FOR OUR VINEYARDS, IS CALLED THE LONG-FINGERED BAT ON THE LIMESTONE SIDE, AND THE WESTERN BARBASTELLE AMONG THE SCHIST.

TYPICAL SCHIST PLANTS

Around the vines, the vegetation is dense and often impenetrable. The woodland switches from holm oak and pine to chestnut and strawberry trees, home to the magnificent two-tailed pasha butterfly.

Farther down, the yellow-speckled vegetation is covered with green heather, brown-eyed and other types of rockroses, andryala, thorny broom and big quaking grass. It is ideal for picking sheep sorrel under the watchful eye of the short-toed snake eagle as it surveys its territory.

ABUNDANT LIMESTONE PLANTS

Here, the land is typified by rolling hills and more open landscapes that have been colonised by aromatic plants such as thyme, rosemary, cade, mastic, laburnum and mock privet.

These woodland habitats offer incredible biodiversity as well as protection for species that are becoming rare, such as the ortolan bunting and Bonelli's eagle.



BIODUALITY





300 WINEGROWERS
FIGHT TO PROTECT
2 SOIL TYPES



FACE @to FACE

NOW FOR THE CONFRONTATION

SCHIST//LIMESTONE

A comparative tasting of wines grown on schist and limestone. Winegrowers are happy to oblige. They describe in the utmost detail the technical itinerary of each wine: the vintage, the weather, the grape varieties, the elevation, the type of winemaking and ageing techniques... The purpose is to compare like with like. Duos can then be formed.

On the day, the room is packed to the rafters and the judges are restless. The glasses are filled, taste buds are already salivating and you could hear a pin drop. The sound of slurping gets louder. The first words are spoken, comments arise, and comparisons. Attentive up to that point, the winegrowers loosen up and transport us along a vinous road trip, from the vineyard to the winery, encouraging our taste buds and pupils to join them.

THE TRIO

THREE VINTAGES LAID DOWN

There is no doubt that Saint-Chinian produces emotion-inducing, age-worthy wines. Saying it is one thing, but proving it is better, hence the purpose of these workshops.

For each trio, every winegrower presents their finest plots, their top wines, over three vintages. With a few years' bottle time, their intrinsic features emerge, marked by the story of the vintage, and of the winegrower. As a living, sensitive product, a wine's maturity stems from its inherent energy.

THE VIRTUOSES

The winegrowers' Holy Grail has been given a name – the Virtuoses selection. We regularly invite independent judges with a honed and uncompromising palate – MWs, journalists, sommeliers and critics for example – to assess our top wines. An initial selection is based on technical management: the age of the vines, their yields, their aspect and maturation. Next comes a vertical tasting of three vintages (including at least one available for sale). The wines are examined and judged, leading to a choice of wines which is challenged with every new selection.

A cursory glance at a map of the soils in the Saint-Chinian appellation shows just how difficult it would be to distinguish between two outstanding and consistent areas. So another approach emerged and that is to select the finest wines and observe them to understand why they are so good!

- ☞ 2011/ 2012 – Saint-Chinian Wine Centre
- ☞ 2013 Virtuoses Chair: Andrew Jefford – Château des Carasses in Capestang
- ☞ 2014 Virtuoses Chair: Bernard Burtschy – Le Figaro – Paris
- ☞ 2015 Virtuoses Chair: Tim Atkin – Decanter - London
- ☞ 2016 Virtuoses Chair: Lauren Buzzeo – Wine Enthusiast – New York
- ☞ 2017 Virtuoses Chair: Elyse Lambert – 2016 World's Best Sommelier – Montreal
- ☞ 2018 Virtuoses Chair: Andrew Bell - American Sommelier – New York



THE VIRTUOSES

ANDREW JEFFORD, JOURNALIST WITH DECANTER AND WORLD OF FINE WINE, CO-CHAIR OF THE DECANTER WORLD WINE AWARDS, VICE-CHAIR OF THE DECANTER ASIA WINE AWARDS, ACADEMIC ADVISOR FOR THE WINE SCHOLAR GUILD

“ For me, Saint-Chinian is one of the most exciting appellations in Languedoc. It offers vibrant, generous and expressive wines, shaped by the sloping vineyards in an unspoilt, isolated Mediterranean landscape with soils of both schist and limestone. The themed Virtuoses tasting is an intelligent way of giving producers the motivation to always strive higher and as an exercise for collecting countless pieces of information to gain a better understanding of the terroirs. I am always delighted to take part, to update my knowledge of the wines and also to find out more about the character of this remarkable place.

LAUREN BUZZEO - EXCERPT FROM THE BOOK ‘UN TERROIR, DES HOMMES... SAINT-CHINIAN’ BY FLORENCE JARONIAK AND SHARON NAGEL.

“ ... Once a consumer does venture into the wines of the region, they are largely hooked thanks to their striking balance of bright red fruits and wild berries, earthy spice, ample acidity and fine yet supportive tannins that lend a satiny texture to the medium-bodied frame. Quality, balance and a pronounced sense of place – what more can you ask for in a wine?

Lauren Buzzeeo, managing editor of the Wine Enthusiast

BERNARD BURTSCHY - EXCERPT FROM THE BOOK ‘UN TERROIR, DES HOMMES... SAINT-CHINIAN’ BY FLORENCE JARONIAK AND SHARON NAGEL.

DOUBLE DEALING IN SAINT-CHINIAN

I have always like Saint-Chinian for the two aspects of its terroir – its clay-limestone soils, and its schist on the northern side. These two soils, stemming from different geological eras, produce very distinct wines: fresh and ethereal on clay-limestone, more elegant on the limestone part and more powerful on marl, they become profound and mellow on schist and even develop substantial ageability. That’s pretty amazing wouldn’t you say?

This dual personality, though, is not schizophrenic but a valuable asset. One aspect is often familiar to consumers and is a reflection of themselves. The other gives them a whole new continent of flavours to discover and explore. Their penchant for one style or the other speaks volumes about their own personality. Do you know many appellations that tell you more about yourself than about the wine itself?

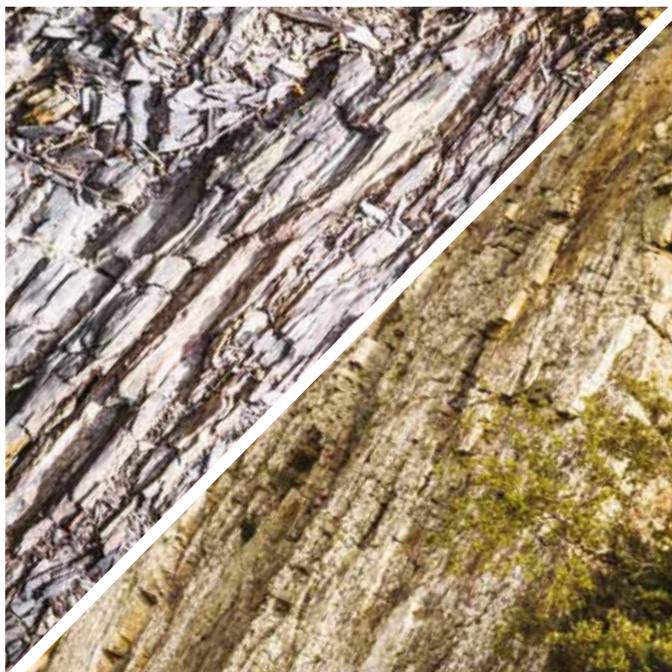
Bernard Burtschy, wine critic, journalist and chairman of the Wine Press Association

AWARD WINNERS FROM 2011 TO 2019

Château Castigno	Secrets des Dieux Château Castigno
Domaine du Sacré-Cœur	Jean Madoré Charlotte
Domaine de la femme allongée	Ad Gratiam Dei
Domaine La Servelière	Le Rêve de mon Père
Domaine des Païssels	Les Païssels
Domaine de Cambis	Carnet de Voyage les Jardins suspendus
Domaine Rimbart	Saint-Chinian Berlou
Domaine la Grange Léon	D'une main à l'autre
Domaine Pin des marguerites	Pétale pourpre
Borie La Vitarèle	Midi Rouge Les Crès Les Schistes
Château Fonsalade	Félix Culpa Château Fonsalade
Vignobles Foncalieu	Apogée
Domaine des mathurins	Carnaval des sens
Les Eminades	Montmajou Vieilles Canailles Cebenna Sortilège
Domaine Cathala	Absolue Cuvée A
Laurent Miquel	Les larmes des Fées Bardou
Château Bousquette	Prestige Absolue
Château Viranel	V
Domaine Canet Valette	Maghani 1001 nuits Ivresses
Mas de Cynanque	Nominaris Carissimo Acutum Amicytia Althéa blanc
Domaine Montplo	Louise
Domaine du Gabelas	Juliette Karrimour

Château Coujan	Bois Joli blanc Bois Joli Île de Corail
Château de Ciffre	Les Pins Terroirs d'altitude
Domaine Moulinier	Terrasses Grillées
Château du Prieuré des Mourgues	Grande Réserve
Domaine des Pradels Quartironi	Campanil Haut Priou
Vignoble Belot	Best Of Belot Argilière
Domaine des Jougla	Viels Arrasics
Domaine La Maurerie	Osvaldo Le Crestel
Château Milhau lacugue	Les Truffières Les Chevaliers
Château Gilbert et Gaillard	Château Gilbert et Gaillard Roc Blanc
Domaine de Pech Ménel	Château Pech Ménel
Cave de Roquebrun	Golden Vines Le Baron d'Aupenac Les Fiefs d'Aupenac blanc Seigneur d'Aupenac
Mas d'Albo	Or Brun
Domaine Lanye Barrac	La Rabidote
Domaine Boissezon Guiraud	Terre Promise
Cave de Saint-Chinian	Esprit de Renaud de Valon 8 secrets
Hecht et Bannier	Saint-Chinian
Domaine La Madura	Grand Vin Classic
Clos Bagatelle	La Terre de mon Père Je me Souviens Le Clos de la Mère
Mas Champart	Clos de la Simonette Blanc Causses du Bousquet
Château La Dournie	Elise Etienne
Domaine La Linqière	Le chant des Cigales La Sentenelle 310 Fleur de lin





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