



SAINT
CHINIAN

SCHISTES & CALCAIRES

SCHISTES

PRESS DOCUMENT

CALCAIRES

SAINT-CHINIAN

IN A NUTSHELL

In the heart of Languedoc, set amidst the maquis and garrigue, is a unique, uncompromising and highly characterful appellation – Saint-Chinian. A new, evocative tagline – ‘half schist, half limestone’ – encapsulates the fresh impetus injected by its 300 winegrowers with their two terroirs and 20 villages. The banner says it all – the dual nature of its soils, the uniqueness of the landscapes, the unspoilt natural surroundings, the highly distinctive wines, the firm local rooting, and a desire to produce mould-breaking wines.

This is an appellation to (re)discover, with its fusion of heritage and reinvention, far-removed from typical stereotypes, and get a better grasp of a region, its winegrowers and wines with their twin souls and authenticity.

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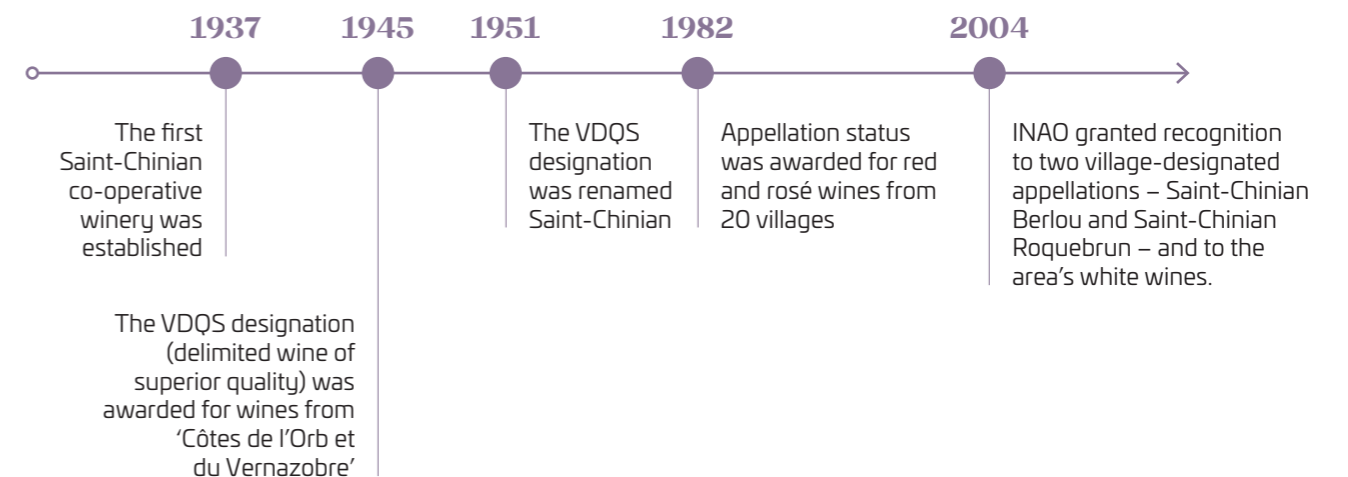
AN APPELLATION REINVENTING ITSELF

SOME HISTORY

One of the cradles of France’s winegrowing heritage, Languedoc has experienced a varied and eventful viticultural history. From the amphorae found along the Via Domitia to the barrels of Hérault wine transported on barges along the Canal du Midi, the ‘follies’ that broke ground thanks to mass wine production and the post-phylloxera uprootings, Languedoc has witnessed cycles of boom and bust, crises and revival.

The wine region of Saint-Chinian is an integral part of Languedoc’s winegrowing saga. It all began in the 8th century when monks from the Benedictine abbey of Saint-Chinian, founded by Saint Anian, planted the first vines. As the wars of religion raged, Revolutions (French and industrial) took hold, the railway era emerged and phylloxera loomed nearby, Saint-Chinian experienced prosperity by producing and trading in wine. Since the mid-20th century, it has focused on improving quality and seeking out stand-out typicity, primarily through its hallmark soils of schist and limestone. Official recognition for its endeavours came in the form of appellation status, granted on 5 May 1982.

KEY DATES



REINVENTING

RENEWAL AND MARKETING

Forty years after it was awarded appellation status, in a constantly evolving wine world and in the heart of fast-moving Languedoc, Saint-Chinian took a new marketing tack in 2020, or rather, decided to go back to basics – its *terroir*.

‘Schist & Limestone’ is thus the new motto of an appellation which is renowned yet unknown, ancient yet modern, and boasts unique dual-faceted soil types, with schist in the north and limestone in the south. This dual nature has now become its essence, its common thread, the image of the appellation, where just two words summarise the typicity of these outstanding wines. This simple, effective tagline makes them intelligible to all. This pared-down, impactful communications strategy echoes wines which relentlessly head towards greater elegance and balance – and offer a mirror to their *terroir*.

FROM PAST TO FUTURE: AUTHENTIC AND GROUND-BREAKING SAINT-CHINIAN

Saint-Chinian wines are not just about words and trends, though, they show a character that likely stems from the unique, rugged landscapes and soils and from the sunshine of southern France. It is undoubtedly underpinned by the determination of the winegrowers, both local and outsiders. Just like the soil types, Saint-Chinian wine production also has a dual aspect, with half the wines made by co-operatives – some of them eighty years old – and half by independent winegrowers, some of them 5th, 6th or 7th generation. Some estates are passed down from mother to daughter and they often recount impressive stories where new generations with bold ideas have taken over, and encapsulate a skilful blend of tradition and innovation, heritage and renewal.

As for the wines themselves, they are a fusion of typicity and modernity. To shatter the image of rustic, age-worthy wines often associated with long-standing appellations, Saint-Chinian now focuses on palatability and – ever more – on the original signature stamp of its outstanding, dual-natured vineyard sites. Saint-Chinian may well be reinventing itself, but it also remains true to its origins.

SAINT-CHINIAN, PIONEERING SUSTAINABLE WINEGROWING

To preserve its winegrowing heritage – its origins, vineyard sites and roots – Saint-Chinian is combining its present and future with sustainable credentials. It is drawing on the exemplary experience of its winegrowers – both men and women – and a set of beliefs that are perhaps more ingrained here, in this unspoilt, pollution-free mountain setting where a large chunk of the appellation area has never been tilled, than anywhere else. Half of the estates are currently organic, HVE-certified or in the switch-over phase, and Saint-Chinian has pioneered organic farming, with a 50-year lead over other regions. Biodynamic winegrowing, too, is blowing its (cow) horn! Research is being conducted into heat-resistant vine varieties and characterisation of vineyard sites that are naturally frost-free. The soils, which stem from a geological mayhem thousands of years old and have been protected from excessive human use, have always been dedicated to winegrowing, encouraging people to preserve existing resources and think about tomorrow.

BIODIVERSITY PROJECT WITH THE ÉCOLOGISTES DE L’EUZIÈRE

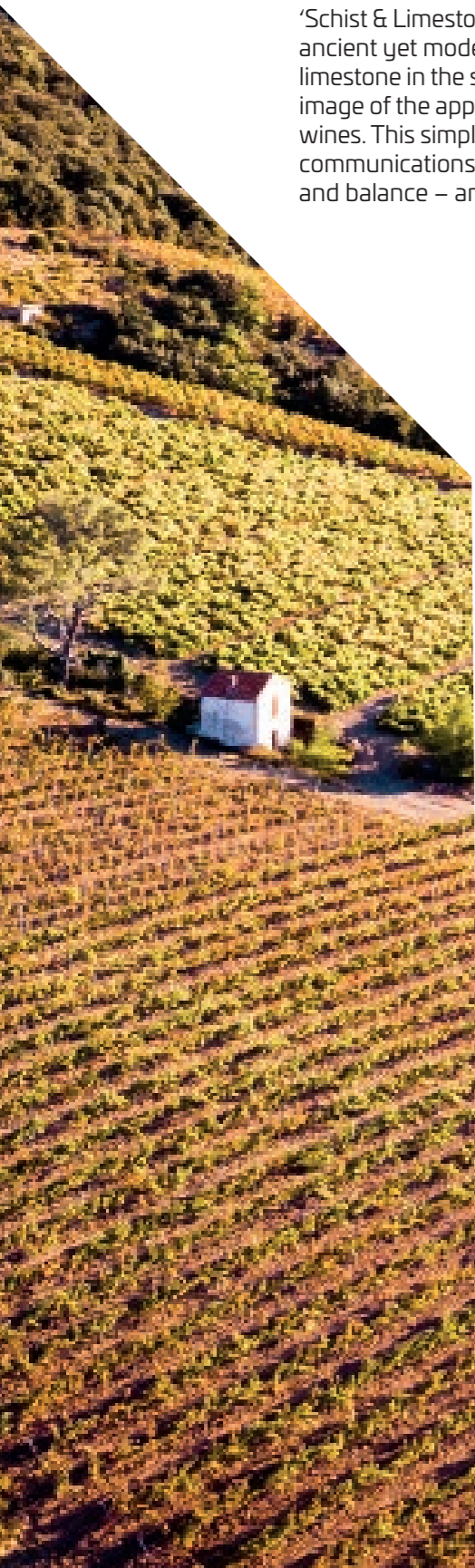
In 2019, the Saint-Chinian appellation commissioned the association Ecologistes de l’Euzière to compile an inventory of fauna and flora.

The idea was to get a clear picture of the biodiversity across the entire AOC Saint-Chinian appellation area. Biodiversity encapsulates the variety of surroundings the region provides. The different landscapes are largely shaped by vineyards so it was only natural that the types of vineyard sites conducive to different animal or plant species should be defined and characterised.

There are 2 major landscape and vineyard groups:

- The schist Avants-Monts and their maquis scrubland in the north
- The clay-limestone hill range with its garrigue in the south

The difference between these major groups in terms of flora and some animal species on farmland and moorland is very significant. So, for example, in the case of bats, the many caves in the limestone part promote the presence of cave-dwelling species such as the long-fingered bat, whereas the steep hillsides covered with woodland over schist terrain foster a greater profusion of woodland species such as the western barbastelle. Bats help reduce the number of pests such as the European grapevine moth. *Luc David, geologist.*





TWO SOIL TYPES FROM SCHIST TO LIMESTONE

AN OUTSTANDING REGION

From Mount Caroux and the Espinouse in the north, the Orb valley which winds its way down from the mountains, the Mediterranean in the south-east and the Canal du Midi which follows its course southwards, Saint-Chinian is ringed by a range of cliffs, hillsides and valleys – clad with maquis and garrigue – which set the tempo. Its landform is distinctively mountainous, yet its climate is Mediterranean. Winds – from the north-west which dry the morning dew – and the maritime breezes (mitigating the heat of the summer), along with sunshine and altitude are the defining features of this challenging region, making it conducive to growing vines and producing fine wines.

In addition to the soil types and weather patterns, Saint-Chinian's vineyards also have another distinctive character trait – their unspoilt, pristine setting in the heart of the countryside. Here, biodiversity is a reality. It lends the region a bucolic charm – with oak trees, pines, mimosa, butterflies, grasshoppers, bats, eagles, herons and swallows – but also instils the wines with its aromas, especially the strongly scented rock roses, juniper, rosemary and lavender which convey the perfume of the land to the grapes via their bloom.

Two Natura 2000 reserves cross paths within the appellation area, including a Special Protection Area for birds. Saint-Chinian is not only home to wines, it is – more importantly – a natural habitat.

SAINT-CHINIAN'S EPIC GEOLOGICAL HISTORY

The soils of Saint-Chinian are a patchwork, an unlikely jumble of layers and rocks, scientifically referred to as a 'geological unconformity' which has become a focus of research for geologists the world over. 540 million years ago, the area was home to an ocean laden with sediment and maritime fossils, which was replaced some 300 million years ago by a range of mountains. As the tectonic plates shifted and erosion ensued, the limestone became marble, the clay morphed into schist, the alluvium fossilised into coal and the sandstone changed colour due to iron oxide. The Secondary and Tertiary eras continued to shape the land, through marine invasions and the folding of the Pyrenees. The Saint-Chinian hill range stems from this series of events and now forms the boundary of these two unusual soil types.

TWO TYPES OF SOILS – FROM SCHIST TO LIMESTONE

SAINT-CHINIAN IS ONE APPELLATION BUT HOME TO TWO DIFFERENT SOIL TYPES, PARTLY SEPARATED BY THE ORB INTO A SIMPLE DIVISION – SCHIST IN THE NORTH AND LIMESTONE IN THE SOUTH. BOTH AREAS ARE HOME TO UNDULATING TERRAIN AND STONY SOILS, MAKING PART OF THE APPELLATION AREA UNSUITABLE FOR GROWING VINES BUT RATHER A RICH SEAM OF BIODIVERSITY WHERE NATURE AND VINES RESIDE COMFORTABLY SIDE BY SIDE.

Schist, maquis and altitude

Thinly layered schist with pockets of sandstone, elevations ranging from 100 to 400 metres above sea level, ubiquitous maquis scrubland and acidic soils are the defining features of the northern part of the appellation. Forcing vines to put down deep roots and rewarding them with excellence, the soils here provide minerals and protection against frost, and promote long hang times and heat radiance from the black stones. Rock roses along with heather, oak and strawberry trees are dotted across the steep landscapes, as the short-toed snake eagle and the barbastelle bat survey the unspoilt scenery. Vines grown on schist ripen earlier and produce supple, alluring wines with soft tannins and low acidity. The two village-designated appellations – Saint-Chinian Berlou and Saint-Chinian Roquebrun – are located in the northern, schist part of the appellation.

Limestone, valleys and garrigue

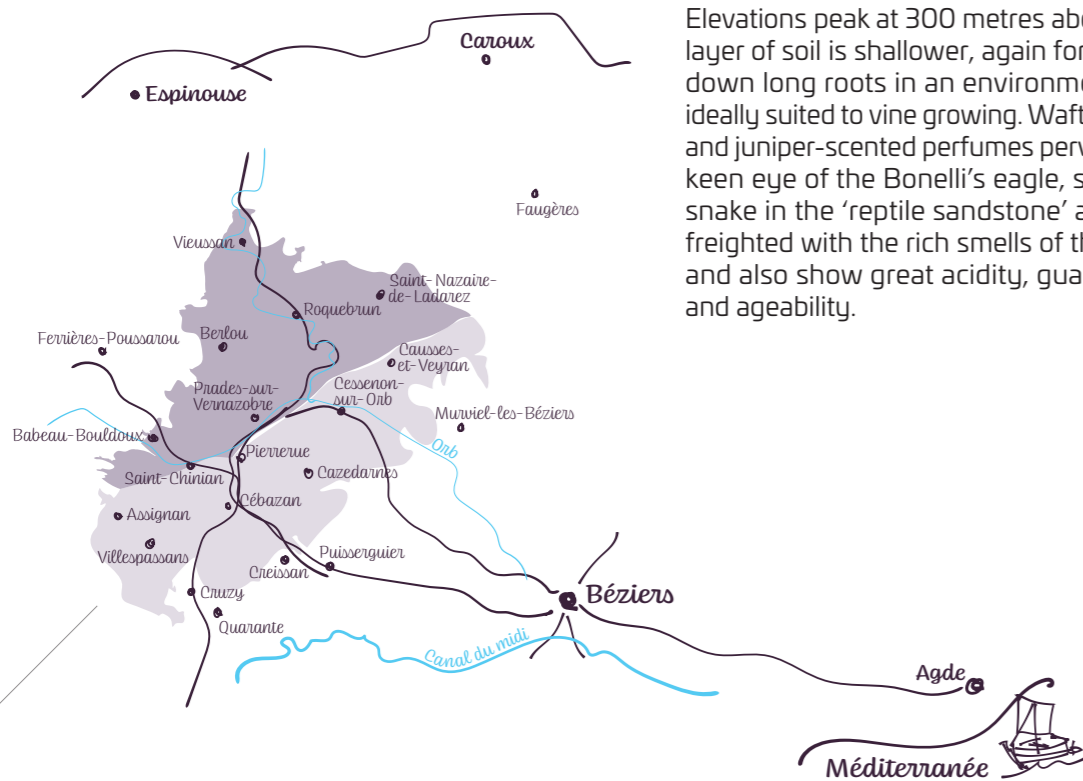
With their rolling hills, plateaux, clutch of streams and vineyard blocks ensconced amidst the garrigue scrubland, the sites in the south have a more southerly, open character and are less rugged.

Elevations peak at 300 metres above sea level and the layer of soil is shallower, again forcing the vines to put down long roots in an environment that is harsh yet ideally suited to vine growing. Wafts of thyme, rosemary and juniper-scented perfumes pervade the air under the keen eye of the Bonelli's eagle, surveyed by the odd snake in the 'reptile sandstone' areas. The wines are freighted with the rich smells of the luxuriant garrigue and also show great acidity, guaranteeing freshness and ageability.

BERLOU AND ROQUEBRUN – SAINT-CHINIAN'S 'GREAT GROWTHS'

The winegrowers of Saint-Chinian have made a pledge to promote quality and typicity and have identified two outstanding sites where red wines were awarded a village-designated appellation in 2005.

The decree defines the respective appellation areas as five villages and 250 hectares for Saint-Chinian Berlou and four villages and 400 hectares for Roquebrun. Here, the varietal range is more restrictive, the vines are older, short pruning is mandatory, the grapes must be picked by hand, yields are lower and ageing longer. Though they share the same schist bedrock, they have different aspects and, most importantly, differing proportions of grape varieties – Berlou focuses on Carignan (at least 30%) whilst Roquebrun is Syrah-centric (70% with Grenache and Mourvèdre).



MOVING, AGE-WORTHY WINES

COLOURS AND GRAPE VARIETIES

The Saint-Chinian appellation embraces all three colours – red (80% of production), rosé (15%) and white (5%). A rare occurrence in Languedoc, the white Saint-Chinian appellation, awarded in 2004 (officialised by a decree dated 4 February 2005) stems from many years of dogged determination by convinced Saint-Chinian winegrowers to draft a precise set of specifications allowing them to produce chiselled white wines that have become recipients of the typicity of schist and limestone soils.

The Saint-Chinian varietal range is classically southern and Languedoc in style, with old-vine red Carignan, voluptuous red and white Grenache, ‘mesmerising’ Syrah and peppery Mourvèdre.

RED AND ROSÉ SAINT-CHINIAN

- ☞ Main grape varieties: Grenache noir, Syrah, Mourvèdre, Lledoner Pelut
- ☞ Subsidiary grape varieties: Carignan, Cinsault

WHITE SAINT-CHINIAN

- ☞ Main grape varieties: Grenache blanc (min 30%), Marsanne, Roussanne, Vermentino
- ☞ Subsidiary grape varieties: Viognier, Clairette, Carignan

SAINT-CHINIAN, ONE SPIRIT, TWO STYLES

The appellation rules strictly define the appellation area, varietal range, yield, vineyard management techniques and winemaking and ageing methods, but Saint-Chinian’s style stems primarily from its soil type or rather types, and the visionary men and women who have fought to secure recognition for the quality of these hillside wines that fell out of favour when high-yielding vines were the norm. The hillsides, terrain and rocky soils coupled with environmentally-friendly techniques and talented winegrowers lend these terroir-driven wines pronounced authenticity and typicity. Slow and relatively late ripening promoted by altitude invariably instils Saint-Chinian wines with freshness and elegance, but also complexity and abundant aromas. Both in the vineyards and the winery, the tendency today is to let the terroir and fruit express themselves and to produce the most natural, fresh and elegant wines possible which can be enjoyed immediately or mature because they combine instant gratification with substantial ageing capacity.

Two flavour experiences

These are wines that encapsulate their origins, the perfumes of their vineyard sites. Their flavours reveal a genuine correlation between the surrounding plants – especially the famous rock rose that grows on schist soils – and the aromas in the wine. Red wines grown on schist soils are supple or even velvety due to their rounded tannins and they develop smoky, toasted, empyreumatic, amber-like notes along with black fruits, spices, violet and olive paste. Their colour borders on brown, reflecting the bedrock. Conversely, the limestone-born red wines in the south of the appellation display a beautiful dark purple hue and notes of red fruits and garrigue.

The increasingly renowned though still boutique-scale whites have inherited this dual personality with Roussanne the star of the high elevation sites and the more floral Grenache blanc.



THE VIRTUOSES

Despite its well-established reputation, Saint-Chinian felt the urge to showcase the modernity and excellence of its wines by launching a one-of-a-kind competition in 2011 – the Virtuoses tastings. Three wines are presented by each estate (one commercially available plus two older vintages) to journalists and buyers at a prestigious, touring wine tasting in venues such as Saint-Chinian, Paris, London and New York. An enthusiastic and enchanted panel of experts have thus been able to discover some wines made from hundred-year-old Carignan vines. The purpose of this top-end tasting concept is to benchmark with foreign palates and consumer expectations, and present the finest terroir-driven offerings, so that the wines can be geared to market needs whilst retaining their soul and their identity.



WINE TOURISM IN SAINT-CHINIAN

Set against the Haut-Languedoc national park and located within just a short distance of the Mediterranean, the Canal du Midi, Carcassonne and Narbonne, the Saint-Chinian wine region offers an excellent opportunity to indulge in a wine tourism road trip (or bike trip) filled with history, charm and engagement with others. Saint-Chinian is not only a land of wines and vineyards stretching as far as the eye can see, but also one filled with history and heritage, outdoor sports, culture and celebration, amidst pristine natural surroundings.

Although all roads lead to Saint-Chinian, there are two main access routes – one that follows the Orb valley sandwiched between gorges, hillsides and distant cliff faces; and the former Roman way linking Italy to the Narbonne area, punctuated by vineyards, pine groves and chestnut forests at the foot of the mountains. Along these bucolic routes, over 90 wineries and wine estates offer an endless choice of walks, rides and activities to introduce visitors to their wines and their scenery.

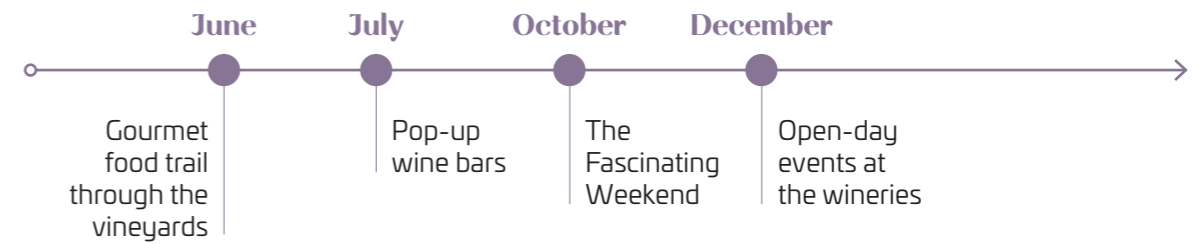
There is no end to the range on offer, from admiring orchids flowering at the end of spring, crafting a herbarium to illustrate the biodiversity of the garrigue or the maquis, enjoying a trail run through vineyards and forests, watching near-extinct birds or travelling along the Canal du Midi's major canal pound by barge or bike to Saint-Chinian. All of them cater to everyone's tastes, from the sporting to the contemplative types, alone or with family. With its rolling hills, Saint-Chinian is the ideal place for ramblers, its signposted cycle paths make it perfect for cycling whilst its dyed-in-the-wool local winegrowers offer limitless possibilities for engagement. Here, there is something for everyone and all tastes, whatever the season.

SAINT-CHINIAN, WINERY ART

Transforming grey concrete tanks by drawing on the creativeness of renowned artists is the principle behind 'Art en Cave', the arty initiative by the Saint-Chinian co-operative winery which has paired a contemporary work of art with an outstanding wine label every year since 2012. This refreshing, inspiring blank canvas provides the opportunity to host sound and light performances and electro evenings, laying the foundations for ambitious plans to create a 'museum in a winery'.

WINE TOURISM IN SAINT-CHINIAN KEY DATES

All year round, the Saint-Chinian wine region celebrates its wines and lifestyle through key events:



SAINT-CHINIAN, SOME EXTRA SPECIAL GETAWAYS

Epitomising the vibrant local spirit and appeal of this spectacular, unspoilt region, two outstanding venues offer similarly charming opportunities to indulge in a luxury getaway.

In Assignan, the Castigno wine village was created a few years ago and embodies the concept of the 'multi centre hotel' designed by a Belgian investor who fell in love with the location. With its designer suites or wine-focused rooms, its Thai and gourmet restaurants, swimming pool, picnic areas and wine school along with a remarkable, bottle-shaped winery, Assignan is a colourful, funky, one-of-a-kind wine resort offering friendly, experience-driven getaways.

Slow wine tourism may sound like a tautology but at the magnificent Château des Carasses in Quarante, owned by Vignobles Bonfils, it takes on a whole new meaning. Built in the Renaissance style, with its Eiffel-inspired conservatory located in extensive grounds, it offers rooms at the chateau or villas with a swimming pool in the former winery buildings – a luxury, intimate approach to wine tourism.

In a bid to champion their values and the appeal of their outstanding vineyards and surroundings, three neighbouring and complementary wine regions have partnered under the 'Minervois, Saint-Chinian, Faugères and Haut-Languedoc' banner and the Vignobles & Découvertes scheme.

FACTS & FIGURES ABOUT SAINT-CHINIAN

- ☞ 2 terroirs
- ☞ 20 villages
- ☞ 3,100 hectares declared under the appellation
- ☞ 4,050 hectares planted
- ☞ 6,000 hectares in the appellation area
- ☞ Average annual production: 100,000 to 110,000 hectolitres
- ☞ Average yield: 40 hl / ha
- ☞ 4th appellation by volume in Languedoc
- ☞ 85 independent wineries
- ☞ 7 co-operative wineries (with around 270 producers)
- ☞ 30 organically farmed estates and 10 in the switch-over phase
- ☞ 15 estates certified HVE 3



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 jagged, half rock
 Half jagged, half rock face
 Half black, half red
 Half primary, half secondary
 Half triobite, half dinosaur
 Half borie, half capitale
Half maquis, half garrigue
 Half holm, half kermes
 Half arbutus, half mastic
 Half heather, half aphyllanthus
 Half rosemary, half santolina
 Half cistus, half thyme
 Half cep, half truffle
Half maquis, half garrigue
 Half dense, half scattered
 Half short-toed snake eagle, half kestrel
 Half two-tailed pasha, half spoked magician
 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 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.



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Syndicat Cru Saint-Chinian | Maison des vins

Avenue Charles Trenet - F. 34360 Saint-Chinian

Tel. +33 (0)4 67 38 11 69 | communication@saint-chinian.com

Press contact: Sarah Hargreaves | Tel. +33 (0)6 13 61 17 84 | sarah@inthemoodpress.com

www.saint-chinian.com