



# GARNACHA/GRENACHE

SPANISH GARNACHA AND FRENCH GRENACHE:  
SAME GRAPE, MYRIAD WINE STYLES.

BY DEBORAH GROSSMAN





## Roussillon, famous for vins doux naturels

The five Roussillon AOPs for *vins doux naturels*, fortified sweet wines, have been well-known in the wine world since the appellation was defined in 1935: Rivesaltes, Maury, Banyuls, Banyuls Grand Cru and Muscat de Rivesaltes (white only). The sweet wine AOPs range from light-colored Ambré, Tuilé, Hors d'Age to Rancio and Grenat (garnet).

High above the seaside village in Collioure, Vincent Cantié launched Domaine La Tour Vieille in the 1980s. Kermit Lynch of Berkeley, California, has imported Cantié's wines for 30 years, partly because of the winery's mission of following what nature gives their grapes rather than following the market. His mix of red, white, rosé and *vin doux naturel* has garnered him a wide reputation.

Dan Davis, wine director at Commander's Palace in New Orleans, has one of the largest lists of *vin doux naturels* in the U.S. He surprises guests by pairing a Domaine La Tour Vieille *vin doux naturel* with natural fruit flavors and acidity with courses during the chef's tasting menu. Yet he also appreciates the growing number of dry wines from Roussillon, such as La Tour Vieille La Pinède, which he pairs with rustic dishes such as quince-lacquered quail.

La Coume du Roy in Maury is another Davis go-to fortified sweet wine. Agnes Bachelet, the 6th-generation vintner, nurtures wine in barrels that her father made and also watches over barrels she has set aside for her children.

Davis values the care and Maury traditions that Bachelet follows to produce well-balanced fortified wines. "I like to use these wines in place of more 'common' sweet wines like Sauternes," he says. He finds that the red fruit and undertones of nuttiness bring something special to dishes such as chef Tory McPhail's *foie gras du monde*. "The dish possesses savory notes to balance the sweet elements, and it's gorgeous with the Domaine de la Coume du Roy Maury."

When guests ask for Spanish wine at One Market in San Francisco, they usually mean Rioja or Albariño, says Tonya Pitts, wine director. "They may not know that Spanish garnacha is the same grape as French grenache. Yet they are open to pairing Spanish white garnacha with chef's grilled octopus atop 'chorizo' puree."

Jeffrey Perisho, wine director at the Plumed Horse, Saratoga, California, listens to guests talk about grenache as a blending grape of Rhone's Châteauneuf du Pape. "I like the fruitiness and depth of old vine garnacha, and recently listed one by the glass," he says. "But I'll sell a dozen bottles of California pinot noir every weekend before selling much garnacha or grenache on its own."

Often, says Dan Davis, wine director at Commander's Palace, New Orleans, single varietal garnacha and grenache appear at the bottom of the "Other Reds" wine list. But he advocates for and sells Roussillon grenache *vin doux naturel* (fortified sweet wine), often missing on American wine lists.

The U.S. market for quality single varietal garnacha/grenache has grown in the last decade. Provinces such as Aragon and Catalonia in Northeastern Spain and Roussillon in Southeastern France possess ideal growing conditions for this sun-loving grape. Passionate winemakers create a variety of garnacha/grenache wines, from white and red to rosé and sweet.

Garnacha/grenache is extensively grown in Spain and France with 97% deriving from the Mediterranean countries. Surpassing popular tempranillo, garnacha is the most widely planted grape in Spain. For the past two decades, many producers have focused on careful planting and harvesting which results in higher-quality wines.

OPPOSITE: Mas Amiel winery vineyard.  
ABOVE: Secastilla vineyard.





### New cocktails with Roussillon fortified sweet wines

New ways to consume Roussillon wines are expanding, thanks to the creativity of mixologists in France and the U.S. The RivTonic made from Rivesaltes Ambré fortified sweet wine and tonic has gained fame globally. In San Francisco, H. Joseph Ehrmann of Elixir Bar develops recipes highlighting the complexity of wines from appellations such as Banyuls, Maury and Rivesaltes.

Ehrmann created the Banyulserac, a twist on a Sazerac, with Banyuls Rimage. The classification *rimage* refers to local dialect meaning “vintage.” These wines are only made in outstanding vintage years. Domaine La Tour Vielle winery in Collioure produces a well-known Banyuls Rimage.

Ehrmann’s recipe highlights the botanical nature of the Banyuls Rimage and pairs it with the spice and character of rye whiskey.

#### Banyulserac

2 oz. Banyuls Rimage  
1oz. rye whiskey  
0.25 oz. absinthe  
2 dashes Peychaud’s bitters

## SPANISH GARNACHA: KEY APPELLATIONS (DENOMINATIONS OF ORIGIN OR DO)

### Cariñena DO (Aragon)

Though the name refers to the cariñena/carignan grape, most wine produced in the region is garnacha. The largest Spanish growing region of garnacha with many old vines, Cariñena is home to many large producers around Zaragoza, Aragon’s capital city.

The oldest winery in Cariñena, Bodegas San Valero pioneered careful harvesting by small vineyard plots. Pedro Fatas, general manager, calls its Particular garnacha range a *vin de soif*, an easy-drinking wine.

At The Lexington, a modern supper club restaurant in St. Paul, Minnesota, chef/partner Jack Riebel began listing Bodegas San Valero in 2017. “Our guests look for more than California cabernet—they want wines that are different and ‘cool.’ Particular fits that bill with its bright-red fruits pairing well with Polynesian spare ribs in huli-huli sauce.”

The largest winery in Cariñena, Grandes Vinos produces more than 20 brands, including Grandes Vinos Anayón Corona d’Aragon. “My mission with this limited-selection wine is to show how the fruit and oak aging can be harmonious,” says Marcelo Morales, director of winemaking. The Grandes Vinos brand Beso de Vino, with a large bull on the label, and El Circo Acrobata, a fruity rosé, are both garnering accolades.

### Calatayud DO (Aragon)

A more recently designated DO, Calatayud is becoming known for well-structured, full-bodied reds and lively rosés. With the most vines more than 50 years old, the appellation has a more rugged terroir than Cariñena.

Bodegas Alejandro is a large winery in Calatayud with more than 120 winegrowing members. The rocky sloped vineyards inspired Yolanda Diaz, managing director, to name the first export brand Las Rocas, widely distributed by E. & J. Gallo.

The flagship brand of the winery is Evodia, a Greek name meaning “perfume.” Picked from old vines on pure schist with minimal soil at high elevation, the wine carries a unique aroma of spices, minerals and cherry. The label is owned by Diaz, Eric Solomon of Eric Solomon Selections, and Jean-Marc Lafage, a well-known consulting winemaker/vintner from Roussillon.

### Campo de Borja DO (Aragon)

Northeast of Cariñena, the Campo de Borja DO has roots dating back to 1134 from Cistercian monastery vineyard records. Known as the “Empire of Garnacha,” the area’s long, hot summers and cold winters yield wines with power and finesse.

ABOVE, LEFT: Chateau Les Pins Grand Cru du Roussillon.

ABOVE, RIGHT: One Market octopus dish.

PHOTO CREDITS Above, left to right: Deborah Grossman, One Market; opposite, Deborah Grossman



Launched in 1984, Bodegas Aragonesas, sells about 50 brands, from Aragonia to Coto de Hayas and Fagus. The winery has helped overturn garnacha's reputation for inability to age because of naturally low tannin levels. Because of careful integration of oak, the winery's Galiano label has gained repute for aging. The garnacha vines for Coto de Hayas Garnacha Centenaria are nearly 100 years old.

Sommelier Rebecca Connelly finds the Fagus brand fits well with the seasonal, full-flavored menu at The Market, a wine-oriented restaurant in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Though she stocks 300 bottles of Spanish wine, she often turns to garnacha for its bold robustness, high acid to pair with food and earthy, leathery aromas.

A key pairing factor for garnacha, says Connelly, is its ability to stand up to fatty foods. The Fagus is a full-bodied, red fruit-driven wine with aromatics of tobacco and herbaceous spice. "Fagus pairs exceptionally well with charred pork belly over collard greens with pork 'caramel' glaze drizzled on top. The fat component is well-tempered by the Fagus."

### Somontano DO (Aragon)

The name of the northernmost Aragon DO means "at the foot of the mountains." Somontana borders the Pyrenees and evokes the winemaking prowess of Italy's Piedmont, and the area is garnering a reputation to match. The small DO with 32 wineries produces red wine with a depth of fruit and chocolate spice influenced by red sandstone and clay soils.

Andrew Sinclair, fine wines manager for González Byass USA, Chicago, has observed sommeliers starting to embrace the Somontano region. Known more for Tio Pepe sherry, González Byass was attracted to Vinas del Valero in Somontano for its sustainably farmed, high-altitude Secastilla vineyards and winemaking skills. Vinas del Valero has other labels, but the Secastilla brand has evolved into the flagship wine.

### Catalonia: Terra Alta DO (Catalonia)

Catalonia lies east of Aragon province. In the rural Southern region, the Terra Alta DO is home to several wineries producing quality red and 80% of Spain's and a third of the world's white garnacha.

Cellers Unió is a large co-op group with four wineries in five Catalan appellations, including the highly rated Priorat DO. The winery experiments with white garnacha production to yield a softer, creamier style with the Clos Dalian label. The Clos Dalian pairs well—and is a major ingredient for—traditional white Catalan risotto served at the picnic area in the Terra Alta vineyards.



ABOVE, TOP: Grandes Vinos *migas* (toasted breadcrumbs) with eggs and grapes at the winery.

ABOVE, MIDDLE: Bodegas Aragonesas tasting room with jamon serrano.

ABOVE, BOTTOM: Cellers Unió vineyard in Terra Alta.



## Roussillon attracts famous vintners

The unique schist soils of Roussillon have attracted well-known vintners to launch estates. The quality-minded approach of French winemaking consultants François Lurton and Jean-Luc Thunevin has helped elevate winemaking in the region.

### MAS JANEIL

Lurton is a celebrated “flying winemaker” and vintner who owns wineries in France, Argentina, Chile and Spain. In 2006, attracted by the schist soils located at the bottom of a limestone cliff near Corbières by the Mediterranean, Lurton purchased Mas Janeil. He likes the freshness of the schist reflected in the wine. The mule on the label of the flagship Mas Janeil wine reflects the Catalan name for the animal, *janeil*, and the hard work of the winery team. Lurton and his team preserve the garrigue aromas from the bushy, fragrant plants of the terroir by nurturing yeast during fermentation and adding minimal sulfur. The result is a wine with smoky, licorice notes and minerality from the schist, which pairs well with a peppery steak.

### DOMAINE THUNEVIN-CLAVET

As a young winemaker, Jean-Roger Clavet worked in a large co-op. Later, he spun off to become a *garagiste*, or small-production vintner making wine in garages or borrowed cellars. In 2002, Thunevin took note of Clavet, and they launched the new winery. Thunevin gained fame as a *garagiste* in Bordeaux. Later, he launched Château Valandraud in St. Émilion with his wife, and began consulting with many wineries. Intrigued by the unique terroir and old vines of Roussillon, Thunevin brought the methods of St. Émilion to the partnership. Thunevin and Clavet prefer to harvest riper grapes and age the wine in new barrels. The results are full-bodied ageable wines such as Hugo and the elegant Trois Marie.

## FRANCE: ROUSSILLON, A GRENACHE LEADER

Roussillon, Southern partner of the Languedoc-Roussillon wine region, is the sunniest French wine region. It’s shaped like an amphitheater and fronts the Mediterranean with mountains on three sides, which protects it from harsh weather.

With 2,800 year-old artifacts manifesting ancient wine production, the region has strong winemaking traditions and five AOPs (appellations of protected origins, formerly AOCs) dedicated to fortified sweet wines. Roussillon produces 80% of France’s famous *vins doux naturels*. Close to Catalonia in culture, language and winegrowing, the area is selling more quality dry red, rosé and white grenache from eight dry wine AOPs.

Founded in 1895, Domaine Cazes is a heritage estate with organic certification for more than 20 years. Wine ambassador Emmanuel Cazes’ grandfather planted the vines for the estate. The flagship Clos de Paulilles brand ranges from the salmon-colored rosé to the sweet Grand Cru Banyuls. Cazes innovates with modern labels such as Alter and Ego, with a range of descriptors from fresh and fruity to wooded and powerful.

Mas Amiel is a grand mix of history and innovation in Maury. The late-19th century aging cellar adjoins the modern tasting room. The fortified wines are aged outdoors in traditional glass demi-johns, where the change of temperature, sunlight and barometric pressure result in a one-third loss of wine during aging. New owners helped initiate the Maury AOP for dry wines and increased dry wine to half of production. With organic-certified vineyards, the winery is focused on biodynamic certification. Origine is the top-selling wine, and popular Vertigo is crafted from steep schist-laden slopes.

Vignobles Dom Brial is a co-op winery representing 2,046 growers from seven villages. The tasting room and labels are modern and the cellar has an optical grape sorter to select the highest-quality grapes. Yet the Les Pins and Co. label references the Château les Pins winery located in a historic building in Baixas village. The winery produces both dry and fortified sweet wines from the well-known Rivesaltes AOP.

Victor Gardiès, the 7th-generation winemaker of Domaine Gardiès in Espira de l’Agly, uses modern techniques. “We young winemakers talk about the spice of the juice from our rugged terroir at the edge of limestone cliffs—we aren’t so interested in smooth wines,” he says. The winery’s Clos des Vignes Red Côtes du Roussillon Villages Tautavel offers a freshness and vibrancy that Gardiès says pairs well with daube marinated in a red wine sauce. Gardiès produces his *vins doux naturels* with minimum sugar to pair well with spicy Asian food.

After working with Gina Gallo of E. & J. Gallo in Chile and other global consulting gigs, Jean-Marc Lafage returned to his home region around Perpignan, the central town of Roussillon. At Domaine Lafage he focuses on grenache, producing mostly dry wines from prime grapes from his estate and his friends’ vineyards within the Côtes du Roussillon AOP. Lafage designed the winery, the shape of the tanks and a special cooling system for gentle processing. His Miraflores Rosé label has a large U.S. presence, as does Lafage Narassa and the Saint-Roch Chimères blends.

## GARNACHA/GRENACHE ON A SINGULAR PATH

At The Market, Connelly finds growing appreciation for garnacha. “There are so many styles of the wine, because of variations in growing regions, that there is much room for it to be noticed and loved around the world,” she says.

In the Roussillon area of Collioure, vintner Vincent Cantie of Domaine La Tour Vielle likes to compare wine to people. Grenache, he says, “is like Buddha, a chubby good friend who is dominant yet elegant, and always there for you.” ■



ABOVE: Domaine Lafage tasting room.

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