

# Terroir



## Small is BEAUTIFUL

Among the Corbières vineyards, a dynamic duo is helping to transform winemaking in Languedoc-Roussillon, finds **Dominic Rippon**



**Dominic Rippon** has many years' experience in the wine trade, both in the UK and France, and now lives among the vineyards of Languedoc-Roussillon

**W**hen the vineyards of Languedoc-Roussillon began to gain international recognition in the 1990s, big cooperative cellars and merchant houses made large quantities of temptingly priced vin de pays d'Oc, while only a handful of private estates crafted impressive boutique wines for devoted amateurs.

Local entrepreneurs like Jean-Claude Mas and Gérard Bertrand then set about building impressive winemaking empires, buying up undervalued

vineyards to make everything from reliable supermarket plonk to top-end blends.

Meanwhile, a stream of foreign ex-financiers invested in dilapidated wine estates, ploughing the fruits of their first careers into new lives amid the southern vines.

More recently, a new phenomenon has emerged: that of the *micro-négociant*. A *négociant* is a merchant wine producer that buys grapes, juice or even finished wine, to bottle and sell under its own labels. The biggest players, like Bordeaux's Philippine de

Rothschild and Beaujolais' Georges Duboeuf, dominate large-scale wine production in their respective regions.

The *micro-négociant*, by contrast, is much smaller, selecting only the best fruits from individual vineyard parcels that are owned by trusted partner growers. *Micro-négociants* are well-established in Burgundy, where vineyard selection has a long history, but in Languedoc-Roussillon they are still a novelty.

Among this new breed of *micro-négociants* is Calmel & Joseph, a dream team of

winemaker Laurent Calmel and Jérôme Joseph, who joined forces in 2007 to develop a self-consciously Burgundian approach to winemaking in Languedoc-Roussillon.

Calmel & Joseph make wines everywhere from Collioure near the Spanish border, in Roussillon, to Terrasses du Larzac, in eastern Languedoc.

Individual tanks and barrels of wine are chosen from among a pre-selection that starts in the vineyards while the grapes are still ripening. These are then blended together until the required flavour and balance is achieved.

The Calmel & Joseph range is an intriguing reflection of how

the region's quality hierarchy is developing. Their 'Villa Blanche' wines are attractive IGP Pays d'Oc single varietals, while the slightly more expensive Terroirs is a range of mostly *appellation*-controlled wines. The Crus are a step up again, from *appellations* Laurent and Jérôme judge to be exceptional; and the high-end Cuvées Rares are bottled from only the best individual vineyard parcels.

In 2015, Calmel & Joseph bought their own estate, Domaine la Madone, in the westernmost hills of Corbières where 20 hectares of organically grown vines nestle between olive and almond groves at an altitude of up to 300 metres.



**Above:** Laurent Calmel blending in the vineyard

**Left:** Vineyards of partner growers

The wines produced from these vineyards are Calmel & Joseph's crowning achievements, culminating in La Madone, a single vineyard Corbières of exquisite elegance, power and complexity. ♥

## Dominic's choice

### CALMEL & JOSEPH

Domaine la Madone  
Tel: 0033 (0)4 68 72 09 88  
domaine-calmel-joseph.com

#### Choice one: Villa Blanche Grenache Rosé 2019 IGP Pays d'Oc

A blend of 70% grenache gris and 30% grenache noir grapes, this is a delicately coloured rosé, with a mouthwatering array of aromas, from raspberry and ripe lemon, to blossom and peach. Full on the palate, with a hint of spice. €10/bottle.

#### Choice two: Faugères 2017 (Terroirs range)

From the fashionable Faugères *appellation*, in

eastern Languedoc, this syrah-grenache-carignan red blend typifies the elegance that springs from its schist soils.

Violets, spiced cherries and cigar box on the nose, with cocoa and liquorice flavours, a silky texture and a slight tannic bite on the finish. €12.50/bottle.

#### Choice three: L'Épicurieux Rouge 2019 'Ams Tram Gram' IGP Pays d'Oc

A flirtation with vogueish New World branding, this full-bodied red is an idiosyncratic blend of malbec with the obscure Bordeaux variety petit verdot. It is a rich, extroverted wine with

blackcurrants, crushed pepper and exotic spices on the nose. Juicy dark fruit flavours and ripe tannins are kept fresh by a nervy thread of acidity. €12/bottle.

#### Choice four: Terrasses du Larzac 2017 (Crus range)

A red blend of mourvèdre with syrah and grenache, grown on gravelly clay-limestone soils beneath the Larzac Plateau. The wine exudes refinement, with floral cherry aromas, delicate spices and a hint of smoke. On the palate, intense red fruit flavours develop into a long, slightly toasty finish. €17/bottle.

#### Choice five: Les Elmes 2017 Rouge AOP Collioure (Les Cuvées Rares)

This is a wonderful expression of the grenache grape, blended with a little syrah and mourvèdre. Delicate red berry fruit aromas with a hint of tanned leather. On the palate, there are juicy ripe raspberries seasoned with wild herbs. €22/bottle.

