

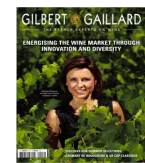
War of the Rosés

The wine regions of Provence, Corsica, the Rhone Valley and Languedoc have never had it so good in terms of reputation, but the real news is that the South of France is increasingly diversifying its wine styles. And in this particular battle, rosé is gaining even more traction.

By Christelle Zamora - Photographs: courtesy of the estates -

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ROSES – COMPETITION –

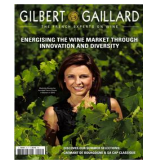


Philippe Pellaton, chairman of Inter Rhone

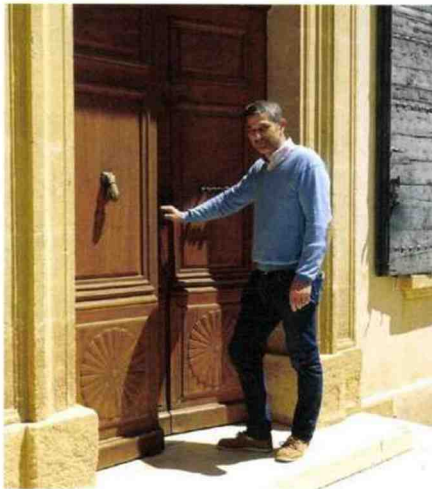
The Rhone is renowned primarily as a red wine region, but the market's appetite for rosé and white wines will lead them to gain ground", claims Philippe Pellaton, the new chairman of Inter Rhone. He estimates that within five years, the share of rosé wines in the region will rise to 25%, compared to current distribution of 75% reds, 16% rosés and 9% whites.

At the Luberon appellation winegrowers' organisation, Nathalie Archambault concurs: "We have always made rosé, but the colour has held a majority share since 2007. Rosé used to account for around 15% but from the 2000s onwards, the rate of production increased. The turning point came in 2013 when more than 50% of the wines were rosé. In 2020, reds will only account for 23%, whites 18% and rosés 59% of production".

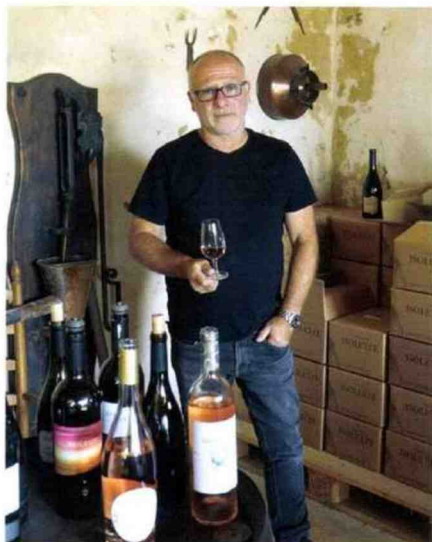
Within the appellation area, with its 3,400 ha under vine, 10 co-operative wineries produce 80% of rosé volumes. In terms of market distribution, a third of the wines are exported, a third are sold to wine merchants and the hospitality industry and a third in super/hypermarkets. These ratios are currently being shaken up by wine tourism and direct-to-consumer sales,



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Winegrower Thomas Montagne at Château de Clapier located not far from the village of Mirabeau



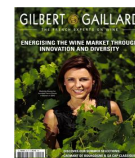
Olivier Rouquet is managing director of Château de l'Isollette

which are posting strong growth in the appellation's 59 independent wineries. In the east of the Luberon appellation area, Thomas Montagne farms vines surrounding around a house that once belonged to the Marquis de Mirabeau. In 1880, Thomas Montagne's family bought the estate at auction. After graduating from Purpan School of Engineering, Thomas Montagne took over Château de Clapier from his father in 1992. As an independent winegrower, he has built up a wide range of wines in all three colours, predominantly reds. Today, he produces three rosé labels, including 6,000 bottles of the Vibrato label, blended from Grenache and Cinsault for the entry-level range. The next tier up is his Soprano rosé with 1,500 bottles (€13) – this is an age-worthy rosé made using the 'saignee' method for the Grenache and direct-to-press for the Cinsault before blending. He also produces an offbeat sweet rosé made from Hamburg Muscat, selling just 200 bottles (€8 per 50 cl) under the Vin de France designation.

Recently, Montagne launched a fruity Tessiture rosé for super/hypermarkets. Rosé accounts for a third of the estate's production. "I sell a lot of wines direct-to-consumer but I don't sell much in export markets, with the focus more on wine merchants, hospitality outlets and local supermarkets. I now sell a little more to wine merchants", he comments. One of his issues is selling rosés from previous vintages – consumers often cannot imagine that a rosé can be kept for over a year.

EASILY UNDERSTANDABLE ROSÉS FOR CONSUMERS

This is one of the reasons that has driven the Rhone wine marketing board to invest in a technical centre. In the same vein as the Rosé Wine Centre in Provence, the technical institute should focus on rosé styles that consumers can grasp easily. Not all investments are home-grown though – foreign investors also come to promote rosé. Mariusz and Marta Gawron, who come from a business background, own luxury hotels in



Set between Bonnieux and Apt, Château de l'Isolette is a long-standing Luberon estate. It was bought by Polish investors

Poland. They bought Château de l'Isolette, part of the former Domaine de Mille – once owned by the Pinatel family - which was sold to a Franco-American couple. Located between Bonnieux and Apt, l'Isolette covers 45 hectares and has been producing rosé wine since 1987. Three of the estate's eighteen labels are currently marketed as AOP Luberon rosé, totalling 17,000 bottles. "The new owners have directed sales of rosés towards Poland, where they own a concert hall and hotels, and they are canvassing supermarkets", comments managing director Olivier Rouquet. Poland has a very different culinary culture to France, however. "Only the most privileged classes drink wine at the dinner table. The Poles like sweet, sparkling wines, which is why a sparkling rosé is produced at Château l'Isolette". The Gawrons have introduced wine onto the menus of their luxury establishments between Gdansk and





ROSES - COMPETITION -



The Luberon wine region is set in the heart of a national park. Its unspoilt location is home to incredibly popular rosé wines

Gdynia, and in the seaside resort of Sopot on the Baltic Sea. Maybe they will be successful at transforming beer into wine in the chic venues frequented by the Polish jet-set. This is a fairly tall order, to say the least, as Poland is currently one of the countries in Europe that drinks the least amount of wine.

ROSÉ-CRAZED LANGUEDOC

Rosé's second home after Provence is Languedoc. Over a 5-year period, between 2015 and 2020, Languedoc appellations shifted towards whites and rosés. In AOC Languedoc, rosé production has risen from 12% to 18% in 5 years. The Occitania region has already overtaken Provence by volume, which is no mere feat.

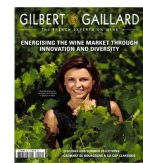
In the Minervois, Graham Nutter began renovating an estate after a career in finance. The English businessman has travelled a lot – as he likes to say, he always had a plane ticket in his pocket. When he was looking for somewhere to put down roots, the Minervois seemed the ideal place. After living in the capitals of the world, he fell for an estate that was not overlooked by other properties, had a forest and came with old buildings to restore, including an 11th century chapel on the pilgrim's route to Santiago de Compostela.

In 2001, the novice winegrower began replacing Carignan and Alicante with Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre, Caladoc and Cabernet-Sauvignon. For the whites, Vermentino, Roussane, Viognier and Marsanne followed. The 90-hectare estate boasts 26 hectares of vines in the Minervois appellation area surrounded by woodlands and orchards. Château Saint-Jacques d'Albas produces 90,000 bottles a year.

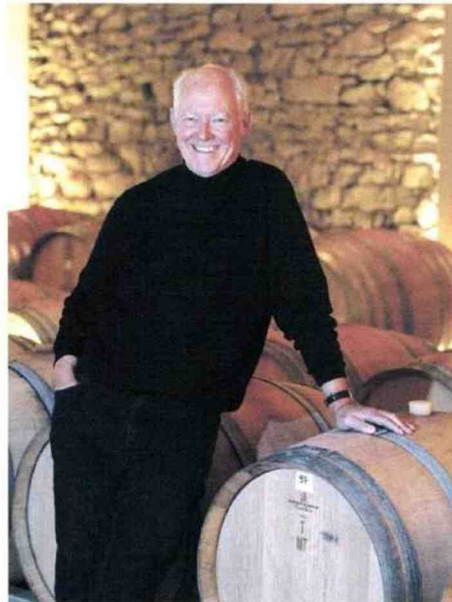
"I wanted to make wine but then I had to sell it. At the time, Minervois did not have a good reputation. I wanted to make a terroir-driven wine. So before deciding to go organic, I applied the Cusinié method to improve soil resources", recalls Nutter. Rosé production began with the 2005 vintage, but it was only later that the two labels La Chapelle en Rose and Le Petit Saint-



Domaine d'Albas in the Minervois



ROSES - COMPETITION -



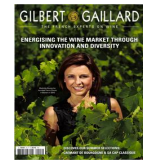
After travelling the world for business, Graham Nutter bought and restored an estate near Carcassonne in the Minervois

Jacques developed their ultimate style. To make them, he chose Grenache, a Rhone varietal, and Mourvèdre from Provence. La Chapelle en Rose (€12) contains more Grenache while Le Petit Saint-Jacques (€7) is Mourvèdre-dominant. "La Chapelle en Rose is very popular with Californians as it is a lighter rosé than the more typical Napa Valley wines and is also sold on Long Island, the equivalent of the French Côte d'Azur. We export 80% of production to 15 different countries", he adds.

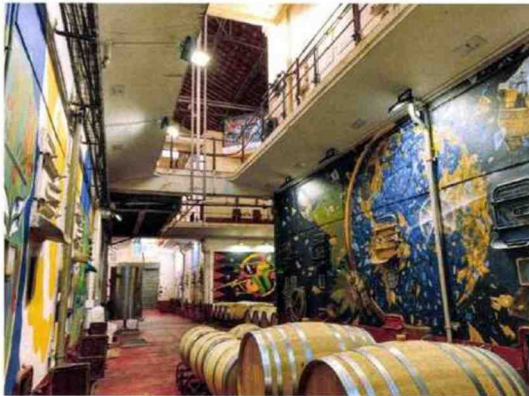
During the pandemic, the estate turned more towards direct-to-consumer sales. "We created a website and in our foreign markets we found buyers who do home deliveries of wine. Our sales mainly dropped in the United States. Fortunately, with our gîtes and music festival, our clientele has continued to come. 2020 is an excellent vintage, but in 2021 we lost 4.5% of our Grenache to frost, so we will produce a little less

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ROSES - COMPETITION -



The Saint-Chinian co-operative winery launched the Art en Cave concept where an artist is invited to paint a concrete tank and a dedicated label is created. The initiative is part of its wine tourism drive

Chapelle en Rose and more Petit Saint-Jacques". But what worries Graham Nutter most is the extreme heat and drought, which is why he has planted Cinsault. In the future, this variety could pick up the slack in blends of the estate's rosés.

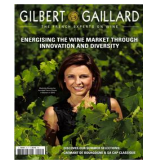
THE AMAZING STORY OF SAINT-CHINIAN

In Saint-Chinian, Geoffrey Boulade waxes lyrical about the rosé market, which has soared to such stratospheric heights that to disregard it would have been unthinkable. "Over the last 10 years, we have repositioned our rosé selection. We started with the L'Excellence de Saint Laurent range in 2010, launched at Metro. This was a real turning point, so much so that we now produce 1.5 million bottles per year", says the co-operative's communications manager.

The success prompted the winery to continue along the same tack. Its executives then designed a new PDO and PGI Raoul Mapoul range of fruit-forward wines for casual drinking. "The wines were launched in 2015, and soon broke through the 1-million-bottle barrier". Despite the already significant volumes, the small Saint-Chinian co-operative decided to continue producing bottled rosés, not bulk, as the winery's image remains of paramount importance. "In 2019, we created another range under the Vin de France designation, embracing modern single-varietals. We launched a 100% Mourvèdre without sulphites, a Syrah-Mourvèdre label, a Languedoc signature grape, Carignan, and a Sauvignon". Another project involves the Caractère label revolving around the five senses with packaging that highlights young co-operative winegrowers. Then there's the 1937 label, a nod to the year the winery was founded, which uses cues from the 1930s and in particular the main character from F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, *The Great Gatsby*", points out winery chairman Yves Borel.

In Saint-Chinian, the history of rosé is currently in the mtzing. All of the winery's rosés sell for under €10,





ROSES - COMPETITION -



In Maraussan, Nathalie Jeannot produces a high-end organic rosé at the Chapelle de Novilis estate

and have garnered appeal among young consumers who enjoy rosés with picnics. The winery markets 7,900 hl of rosés under AOP Saint-Chinian and 5,000 hl as PGI Pays-d'Oc and Pays-d'Hérault, though also sells 5 and 10 litre bag-in-boxes, two magnums of rosé and a jeroboam. "The format is aimed at private beach events. Provence rosés are so expensive that more affordable price tags have become sought after".

Nevertheless, Saint-Chinian rosés are quite deeply coloured, which does not quite fit with the pale Pantone trend for Provence rosés. "In our opinion, food-friendly rosés have a deeper colour and more body. We don't feel it would be wise to reduce the colour intensity of rosés in Saint-Chinian". The only cloud on the horizon is that frost affected 75% of vineyard acreage, and the winery will have to dip into red inventories so that it can prioritise production of its whites and rosés.

A few kilometres away, Nathalie Jeannot produces organic wines at Domaine Chapelle de Novilis. The winegrower took



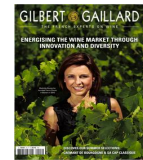


Domaine Alain Jaume has a strong wine tourism focus and produces two rosés, a Côtes-du-Rhône and a Tavel

over the vineyards from her brother-in-law ten years ago. "We had to raise the trellis wires, review pruning techniques, uproot vines that were too old and plant Viognier, Grenache Gris and Cabernet Franc", she says. She produces 8,000 bottles of a pale coloured rosé wine aged on the lees. "But with mildew in 2019 and frost in 2021, production is closer to 5,500 bottles out of a total 30,000". Her Cinsault (85%) and Vermentino (15%) rosé is very aromatic. "I harvest by hand with a refrigerated truck to keep the grapes ice-cold – at no point must the aromas escape. Pressing and skin-contact maceration get the same care and attention, because Vermentino is a fragile grape variety". For this sophisticated gourmet-style rosé, picking the grapes too early is out of the question. In fact, the fruit is only harvested when fully ripe. Château de Novilis rosé is sold within the year. The good news is that Jeannot sells 60% of her wines to private customers.

PROVENCE AND ITS JETSET

Situated between Orange and Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Christophe Jaume also produces rosés. And for the past two years, this



ROSES – COMPETITION –

renowned négociant has changed his tack. Traditionally, Domaine Alain Jaume produces a Tavel rosé and a Côtes-du-Rhône rosé. "In Châteauneuf-du-Pape, we are in Provence country, but the public does not identify our rosés as rosés from Provence", bemoans Jaume. He stresses the sea-change in the production of rosés – his father used to produce mainly 'saignée' rosés with a deep colour that no longer appeals to today's consumers. The reason Jaume produces a new-generation Tavel in the process of being converted to organic, with crushed fruit and intense strawberry flavours, is because he feels current trends favour lightly-coloured rosé with floral notes. "We have modernised the packaging of our classic label, renamed Bellissime, which is produced organically. On the label, the olive tree conjures up images of Provence, the colour remains light and the shape of the bottle is the main selling point in brasseries", he explains.

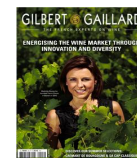
The Tavel rosé has a price tag of €11.50 a bottle, while Bellissime costs €8. Jaume sells 40,000 bottles of Bellissime and 4,000 bottles of Tavel in a variety of distribution channels: "Bellissime is sold in France while Tavel is exported to the United States". He is at a loss as to why the customer base for Tavel rosés is not getting any younger. He feels that his Tavel rosé, named Crétacé after a geological period, is a true terroir wine pairing with refined, spicy dishes. Though delighted with booming sales of rosé wines – which have successfully weathered the storm – he has high hopes that increasingly knowledgeable consumers will soon embrace greater diversity.

Between Mount Sainte-Victoire and the Sainte-Baume, not far from Aix-en-Provence, Charles Rouy has taken over the reins of the family estate. The owner of Château d'Ollières has followed his Burgundy instincts, focusing on stellar rosés yet not totally relinquishing either the reds or the whites. Boasting Provençal charm, the 35-ha vineyard has been replanted while woodland acts as a buffer for biodiversity. The cool, chalky soil and semi-



Château d'Ollières is located between the Sainte-Victoire and the Sainte-Baume in Provence





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Charles Rouy, owner of Château d'Ollières

continental climate give Ollières wines their distinctive character due to the elevation and diurnal temperature shifts. "This year, the spring frost caused such a cold snap that the vines seem to be slowing down, although growth in this vineyard is later than elsewhere. The already late harvest could stretch into November", predicts Rouy.

Château d'Ollières produces three very elegant wines – Classique rosé (€9.20), Prestige rosé (€13.50) and Haut de l'Autin (€16.70). All the rosés are matured on the lees because Rouy feels that rosé is a genuine Provence speciality. "We pioneered the cold chain and Burgundy-style barrel fermentation. We also add very sparing amounts of sulphites". Rouy works with pinpoint precision – he manages his vineyards sustainably and has his sights squarely set on quality. Consequently, Ollières wines are artisan offerings and flagships in the Coteaux-Varois appellation. His private clientele needs no convincing. "Despite the pandemic, the estate has continued to bottle its 35,000 bottles per month

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since January", and Rouy is keeping his fingers crossed that the trend continues. "In 2019, exports accounted for 45% of sales, but this dropped to 15% in 2020. For 2021, we are only expecting 30% of a normal year's revenue from exports, which are also being held back by lack of space on the boats and long delivery times".

In the heart of the Côtes de Provence Sainte-Victoire appellation area, Château Gassier is certified organic. The property belongs to the Advini Group and produces 99% rosé and 1% white. For the reds, the estate partners with Château Beaulieu. The defining feature of Château Gassier's rosés is that they are designed for the hospitality industry. "We produce lightly oaked rosé wines matured in Austrian barrels which do not instil oak influence in the wines. The maturation process does, however, improve the structure of the rosés which evolve well over time. Our two top-end labels, 946 and Elevae, can be kept for 5 to 10 years", says product manager Paul Alary. As an aside, 946 is the height of the cross on Mount Sainte Victoire, and the first vintage was produced in 2010. Annual sales total 10,000 bottles compared to 1,500 bottles for the prestige Elevae label. "Our wines are served on the finest tables in the world. Elevae is only released in the best years, and the last vintage was 2016. Providing the results are confirmed after the maturation process, we will release a 2019. Barrel ageing lasts for 24 months compared to 7 months for the 946 label, where only two thirds of the wines are matured in barrels".

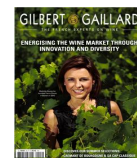
The estate has built up a strong image among wine experts and sommeliers and is developing wine tourism. Visitors come and see a film on a big, open-air screen, a glass of rosé in hand, whilst others dance to a lively DJ. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the estate developed an online store for private customers. Only 60% of the wines are exported. Château Gassier also produces 120,000 bottles per year of entry-level rosé, the highly successful Le Pas du Moine label. The three wines range in price from €15.50 to €33 and €60.



Guillaume Cordonis, the winemaker at Château Gassier



Château Gassier is located in the heart of the Côtes-de-Provence Sainte-Victoire appellation area



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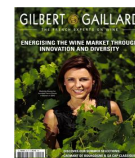


Estate director Olivier Souvelain took over management of Château Gassier in 2010

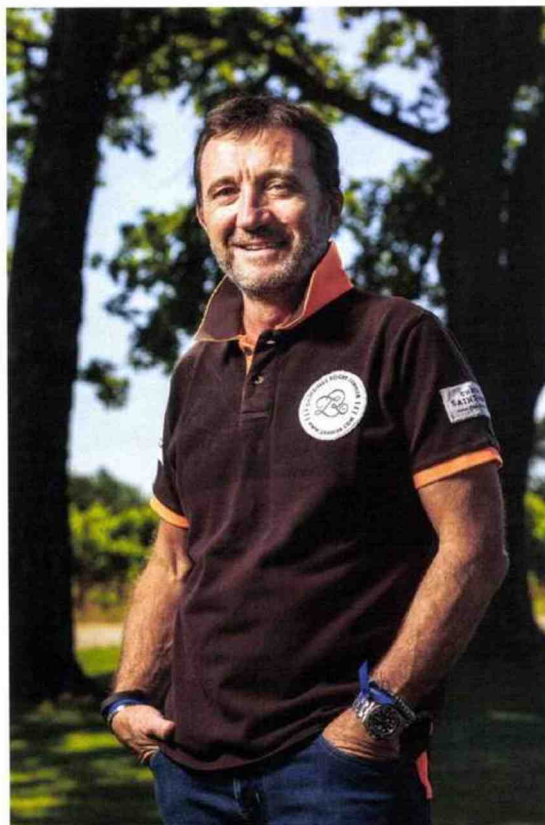
"For exports, the United States is the second largest market, but Provence is still less well known there than the French Riviera. For the past four years, we have been promoting the lifestyle spirit of Provence through local bloggers". Restricting sales to mature markets, however, is a definite no-no. "New markets like Switzerland and Australia are opening up, and we are beginning to perform well there. We enjoy working with restaurateurs who promote our wines. The young Japanese chef Ippei Uemura of the Tabi restaurant in Marseilles is one of our top ambassadors". If you want to indulge in some real pleasure, though, visit the estate and take the Sainte-Victoire footpath to discover the vineyards. Then there is the irresistible Saint-Tropez and Ramatuelle, names that resonate with parties, sunshine

% GAILLARD - THE FRENCH EXPERTS ON WINE





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Roger Zannier has handed over management of Château Saint-Maur to his son-in-law Marc Monrose

and blue skies and sea. Ten years ago, Roger Zannier bought Château Saint-Maur in Cogolin in the Gulf of Saint-Tropez. With his son-in-law Marc Monrose, they bought 60 ha including a 12-ha plot of Clos de Capelune from which they produce the single-vineyard range of this 1955-classified Cru. On the vineyard's schist and quartz soils, Syrah, Grenache and Rolle flourish at an elevation of 449 metres, the highest vineyard in Côtes-de-Provence. Forty hectares have been purchased in Le Cannet-des-Maures in order to expand the range and blends of rosés. Although Château Saint-Maur produces wines in all three colours, rosés hold pride of place. "Only 600 bottles of Clos Saint Vincent are produced in black bottles sold on allocation and in magnums for the limited edition. For the past 15 days, stocks





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The beautiful building at Château Saint-Maur between the Maures mountain range and the gulf of Saint-Tropez

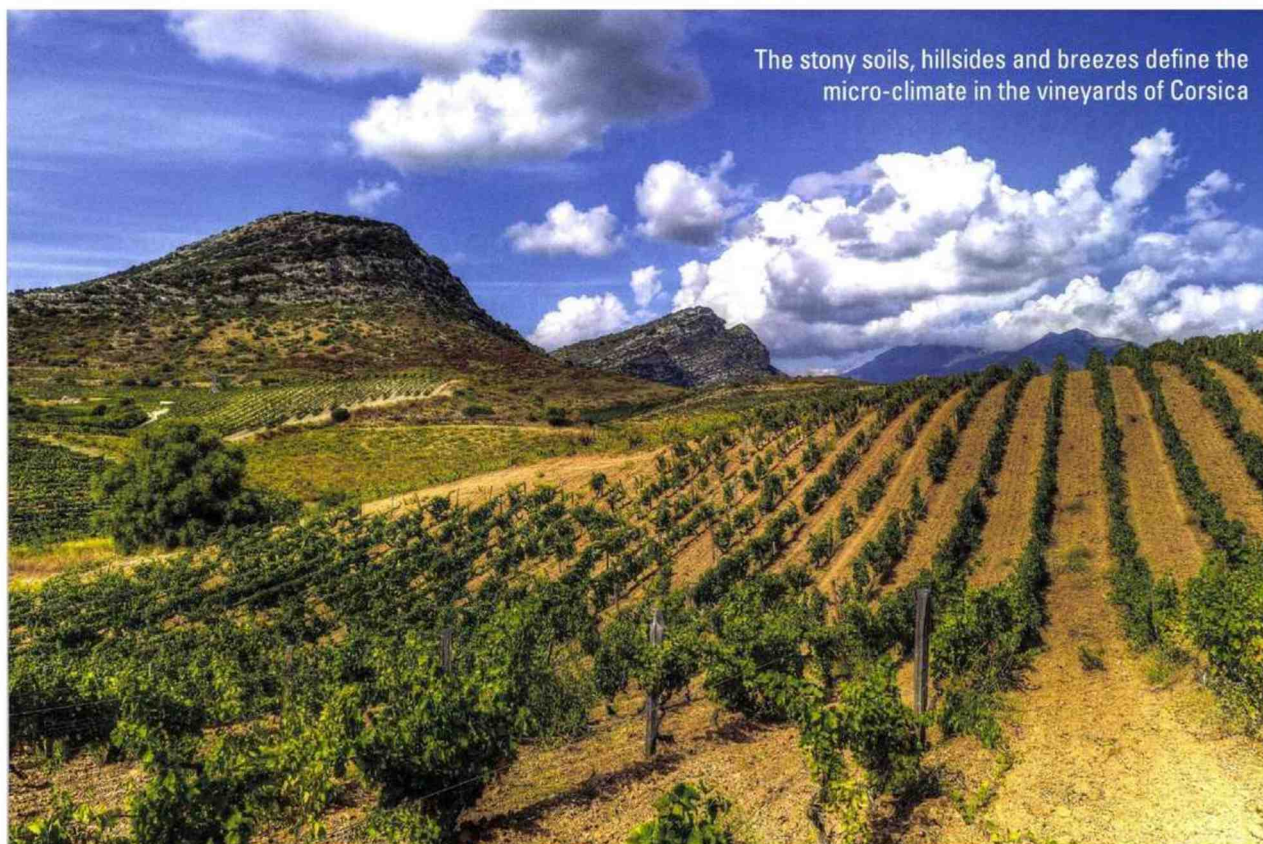
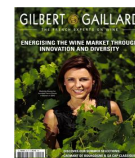
have been depleted", says director Myriam Hodge. Château Saint Maur has steered clear of the downturn and none of its wines can be found on supermarket shelves. The highly elaborate bottles are making a name for themselves in popular tourist locations such as Ibiza in the Balearic Islands. "In 2020, new markets were opened up in Ukraine, the Czech Republic and Switzerland and we expanded wine merchant sales in France. Although we market across Europe, we also sell about 350,000 bottles a year to China".

CORSICA'S FLAGSHIP COLOUR

Corsican wine production is no longer red-dominant. Corsica experienced a boom in rosé simultaneously with Provence, and pink wines now account for 70% of overall production. "AOC Corse Porto-Vecchio produces the most with a 41% share, while in AOC Corse Calvi, rosés remain in the minority (27%) after reds (43%) and whites (30%). PGI Ile de Beauté produces 79% rosés versus 11% reds and 10% whites", comments Caroline Franchi, marketing director of the Corsican wine marketing board. The island's wines are doing well by appealing to discerning wine lovers. For the four co-operative wineries, 81% of production is rosé, whilst the share drops to 47% for the 130 independent wineries. The challenge is to promote the wines. "An initiative was taken in 2017 with the launch of the Ile de Rosé brand, which was designed to group together the four co-operatives, in a bid to raise prices of the Corsican PGI. But four years later, only two co-operatives - Les Vignerons d'Aghione and the Marana co-operative - have actually joined forces to enhance the image of Corsican PGI rosés in supermarkets nationwide", explains Franchi. The economic situation gives no cause for concern however. In 2020, the co-operative wineries saw sales go through the roof on the French mainland. "They bought up rosé inventories from independent wineries. The marketing board was fearing a 70% drop but sales are only 25% down in the aggregate. And the independent wineries are expecting a good tourist season". Corsica



Vineyard views in AOP Patrimonio, in the north of Corsica



wants to preserve its quality red wine range, its magnificent whites and the endemic grape varieties that have established its reputation. Winegrowers everywhere are experimenting with maturation techniques. Although Corsican rosé seems to have a bright future ahead of it, the wines will go hand in hand with organic winegrowing, with 90 estates already practitioners. Patrimoine is one of the two appellations awarded specific AOC 'Cru de Corse' regulations. Located at the foot of the Cap, the vineyards are close to the sea and produce a remarkable range of wines. "The rosés are fresh yet robust, with a crisp fruitiness. The vineyards in the Patrimoine appellation area will go entirely organic in the near future", says Franck Santini, owner of the 50-hectare Clos Santini at the foot of Cap Corse, in the Gulf of Saint-Florent. "My rosés go direct-to-press, with marginal maturation and are not designed for ageing. In Patrimoine, the rosés are made from 75% Niellucciu and 25% additional grape varieties, and my rosés are distinctive, clear and fruity". With an unbroken hillside vineyard that has been organic since 2006, Franck Santini sells all his wines. And he has just planted 4 hectares of Niellucciu and Sciaccarellu, to make more rosé...

