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SFGate

Languedoc - France's lab for a new wine wave

Jon Bonné - Sunday, January 8, 2012

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Languedoc-Roussillon has become France's bane and its great hope.

Bane because this massive southern region, with 740,000 acres in vine, or half again as much as all California, has long been a wine lake - a source for oceans of industrial wine to slake thirst in Europe and the Americas alike.

But let's focus on the hope. For two decades, it has also enjoyed a renaissance as a region that blends Old World tradition and New World freedom. Here is the one place in France where rules are still being written. It seemingly wants to say you can have it both ways: You can have big fruit in your wine, and you can have it without sacrificing the signature of place.

2009 Chateau de Lancyre Vieilles Vignes Pic St. Loup (\$24)

Syrah is the big player in Pic St.-Loup, and this estate, which dates to the 16th century, has blended its older vines with 35 percent Grenache for an inky, stoic take aged in stainless steel. A green-peppercorn scent signals its base material, and accents of tar, roasted meat and strawberry round out a muscular wine.



2010 Le Cirque Vin de Pays des Cotes Catalanes (\$18)

This effort from the co-op in the Roussillon village of Tautavel shows the virtue of the area's old vines when not masked with too much stylish wine-making. A blend of 50 percent Carignan, plus Mourvedre and Syrah, yields a tight-knit, complex bottle. A pleasing rooty bite mixes with black olive, thyme, huckleberry and lemon oil for a stunning value of a wine



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