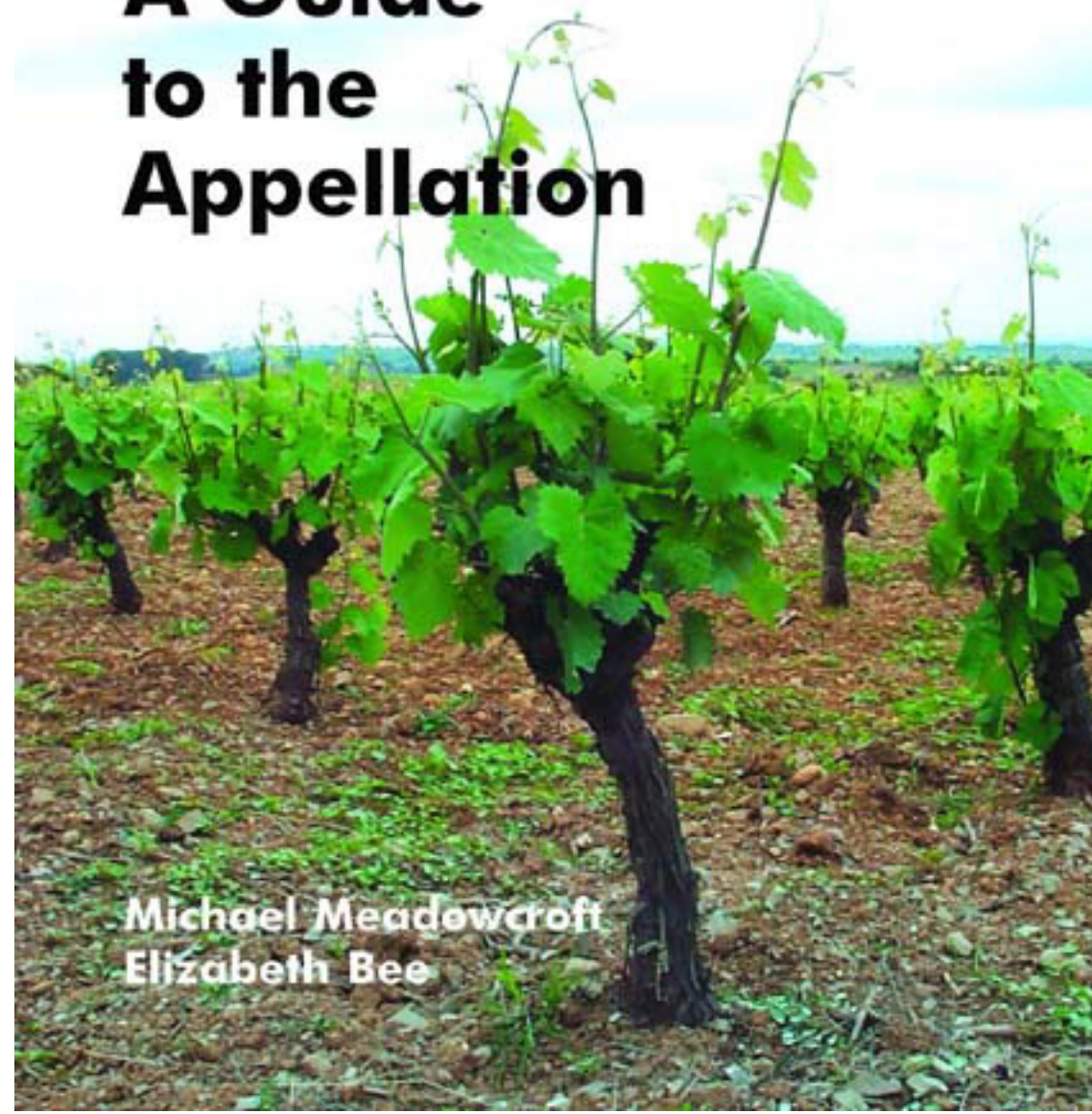


Faugères

A Guide to the Appellation



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Elizabeth Bee

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Contents

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Foreword

The British wine drinker is very spoiled. The range of choice at the average wine merchant, or in a major supermarket, is about the widest in the world. This is partly because we do not have a huge domestic wine industry with all the pressures to protect it commercially, but it is also a consequence of geography and history - we are close to major European wine producing countries and we have historic links to antipodean producers. Thus encouraged, the market becomes broader and more experimental and this in turn draws in producers from other regions, including the Americas and South Africa.

How then does your average wine browser develop his or her knowledge and, more importantly, a discerning palate? The most pleasant way is to keep trying different bottles and to note their characteristics and which please and which do not. If this is followed by reading up on the different types of wine being sampled, then it is possible to build up a knowledge of grape varieties and of wine regions. The next step is where this little book comes in. It is designed for two main readerships: first, those who are visiting the Languedoc and would like a 'companion' to guide them in depth through the villages and producers of one historic appellation. Second, it is aimed at those who have made the acquaintance of the wines of the region and want to delve further. In either case, if it doesn't also whet the appetite for the other delights of the area, it will have only partially succeeded.

Writing a guide to what is a successful and dynamic appellation is inevitably tackling a moving target as new producers start, and, occasionally, finish, year by year. By its nature it is a guide to what to keep and to how different producers' wines will probably develop over the years.

Many friends and colleagues have contributed to this guide, and have argued passionately over the recommendations, particularly at the annual Leeds social when scores of different Faugères are tasted and afterwards mysteriously disappear into the night! Two people in particular to whom we are indebted are Françoise Ollier and Sabine Daver, the past and present Administrators respectively of the Syndicat de l'Appellation Faugères, whose prompt help has rescued us from many errors of fact. Any that remain are ours alone.

FOREWORD

Readers' comments are always welcome. Faugères wines, as with others among the best Languedoc producers, are pound for pound and euro for euro the best quality wines in the world.

The region around Faugères has many other appellations and vin de pays producers. Most AOCs contain far more independent producers than the Faugères AOC and may therefore be more difficult to cover in a publication like this. Nevertheless it would be a benefit to all if this attempt to assist the appreciation of one area encouraged guides to other appellations to appear!

Elizabeth Bee

Michael Meadowcroft

Christian Viguier

The sad death of Christian Viguier in May 2005 deprived Faugères of one of its great characters. Christian had built up Domaine St Aimé and its associated marque, Château Petit Alain, at La Liquière over some twenty years and had a justified reputation as a fine wine maker.

In addition to being an excellent viticulteur he was also a great character. A larger than life bear of a man, he was also immensely generous. One year I arrived at the Fête du Millésime with the prospect of hours of serious tasting of the latest vintage ahead of us. Christian was the first producer I encountered. He leaned over conspiratorially and whispered, "When we've finished here, come back to my place and we'll try some real vintages." We did! Another time he invited us to his tiny cave at La Liquière. We arrived at 3pm, reckoning on perhaps half an hour's tasting to determine what we should buy. As we were leaving at 7.15pm, having gone through every vintage back to 1983, Christian said, "Next time we must do it properly."

Christian Viguier will be much missed by all who enjoyed his wines, his personality and his generosity.

MM

Glossary of French words and phrases used

AOC	Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée - the legally controlled area of production
calcaire	chalk or limestone
cépage	grape variety
chambres d'hôte	bed and breakfast establishments
château	strictly 'castle', but commonly any winemaker's base
chêne	oak
clos	vineyard
Commanderie	association of respected individuals to promote a product
commune	village, administrative unit
confrérie	strictly 'brotherhood' but generally as 'Commanderie'
coteaux	vineyard, strictly hillside
cru	vintage
cubie	strictly 'cubitainer', a large plastic container for wine
cuve	the vat or tank wine is matured in
cuvée	a particular vintage or selection of wine
domaine	vineyard
étiquette	label
fête	festival, celebration
fiche technique	technical data
fine	a high quality brandy made by distilling grape juice
flavescence dorée	an insect borne disease which attacks vines
fût	barrel or cask
garrigue	scrubland, roughly equivalent to moorland
IGN	Institute Géographique Nationale, or Ordnance Survey
liquide	cash
macération carbonique	fermenting grapes by reinserting the CO ²
Maître	Master, ie President (of Commanderie)
marc	remnants of grapes distilled to make a form of brandy
marque	brand particular to a producer
mas	farmhouse, usually large and often isolated
Midi	the South (of France)

GLOSSARY

millésime	year, vintage
oenologue	technical expert on wine
palais	strictly 'palace' but here 'hall' or 'centre', but also palate
pays	in wine sense, 'region'
schiste	literally 'shale', here land largely made up of stones
Syndicat	here (professional) association of producers
tabac	literally tobacconist's shop
terroir	the attributes of land that give special character to wine
Tramontane	strong wind blowing from the north or north west
trois tours	here the three windmills on the hill above Faugères
vendange	harvest
vieilles vignes	old vines, usually over forty years old
vigneronne	strictly (here female) 'wine grower'
viticulteur	wine grower (here male)
VDQS	Vin D'Élimité de Qualité Supérieur - a legally controlled area of wine production, at a lower level than AOC

Faugères - the Appellation

The village of Faugères is in the Hérault Department, in the Languedoc-Roussillon region, twenty-five kilometres north of Béziers. It is on the edge of the Cévennes in the foothills of the Massif Central, and lies between the valley of the river Orb and the plain of Béziers. Its main market town is Bédarieux, ten kilometres to the north. The Faugères appellation includes seven communes: Faugères itself, Autignac, Cabrerolles, Caussiniojouls, Fos, Laurens and Roquessels. Within the commune of Cabrerolles there are two distinct hamlets, La Liquière and Lenthéric, which are important in wine terms. The total population is around 3,000. A century ago it was 4,750. Grapes are by far the most widespread crop in the area, indeed, in many places vineyards stretch in all directions as far as the eye can see! It has not always been such a monoculture but vines have dominated for two hundred years. Even in 1880, soon after the phylloxera disaster, vines occupied 120,000 of the 193,000 hectares then cultivated for all crops.

The Hérault department produces more wine than any other department of France. Traditionally it tended to be regarded as producing quantity rather than quality, and twenty years ago was responsible for several fathoms of the European Community's infamous wine lake. The transformation of this wine growing region and the disappearance of that lake is one mark of the success of European and of French national policies. Over the years new appellations have been created, often from a previous VDQS level, and there has been a conscious and successful attempt to upgrade wine quality, particularly by the increased use of grape varieties other than Carignan.

The area to be known as Faugères was delineated in 1948 and acquired VDQS status in 1955 for its red wine. Despite being quite small in scope, it graduated to AOC status for both red and rosé wines in 1982 and is increasingly known and well regarded in France. One indicator of this is that the number of bottles sold annually in Paris went from 600 in 1994 to 10,000 in 1999!

Though not the dominant village in size, Faugères was taken as the name of the VDQS and then the AOC largely because of the reputation of its distillery which had had a rare AOC for Fine - a brandy, similar to marc, made from distilling wine. Fine de Faugères was the only wine brandy, apart from Cognac

and Armagnac, entitled to be so called. The production of wine followed that of Fine, and commenced after the French Revolution. The Faugères distillery, founded in 1854, was situated near the railway station, but ceased operation some years ago.

An AOC for white wine was sought in 1995. The view was that this would reflect the increased interest in white wines of character and underpin the initiatives already taken by a number of producers to produce a distinctive Faugères white. The local AOC Syndicat realised that it would be a difficult task to persuade the national body, the INAO (L'Institut National des Appellations d'Origine) to validate a new appellation but it expected it to be in place by the year 2000. Dealing with the politics of wine proved to be much more of a struggle than anticipated and it was not until May 2004 that approval was given and the first vintage will be that of 2005. Part of the delay resulted from the concern of the large Coteaux du Languedoc appellation about the effect on it if Faugères achieved its own AOC for white wine and Faugères producers currently making Coteaux du Languedoc white wines left the Coteaux du Languedoc AOC. The concern was that there would be a knock on effect with others doing the same and thus weakening the existing Coteaux du Languedoc.

Faugères remains, geographically, one of three special crus within a broader AOC Coteaux du Languedoc which stretches from Nîmes to Narbonne - rather like AOC Bordeaux and the individual AOCs within it, such as St Emilion. Its continuing high standard has owed a lot to the expert and conscientious attention of its Syndicat, chaired for fifteen years by Guy Roque, from 1997 to 2004 by Bernard Vidal, and now by Michel Salles. Its current administrator is Sabine Daver.

The AOC regulations are strict on the maximum yield per hectare, but, by bringing more land into use, usually by tearing up woodland and then breaking up the surface stones, the amount of AOC Faugères has doubled since its inauguration. The terrain has to be schiste - literally shale - and if it is not schiste it cannot be Faugères! A glance at the geological map of the area - not as easy as it sounds as it is on the corner of three different IGN maps! - shows that there is not one single area of schiste but rather a number of different areas, not necessarily contiguous. Producers often use the parcels of calcaire terrain between the schiste to grow wine from other, often well known, grape

varieties, such as the Chardonnays of Domaine du Fraïsse and of Château de Grézan and the Merlot and Muscat of Domaine de la Reynardière.

The neighbouring, larger, St Chinian AOC includes some schiste land but is not confined to it. Some years ago three of its producers with schiste terrain considered switching to the Faugères appellation but the transfer was not pursued, mainly because of concerns as to what would happen to other St Chinian producers with similar terrain.

The French wine authorities are concerned at the recent decline in sales, particularly at the lower end of the market, and are seeking ways and means of meeting the challenge of New World competition. One suggestion being discussed is that of sub-appellations within AOCs, rather in the way that the villages of Pauillac and Margaux have their own AOCs within AOC Bordeaux. The idea being to encourage individual places to produce and market wines of distinctive character. One can see how this might have a relevance in an appellation such as neighbouring St Chinian which is on different soils, and where to identify areas within the appellation would help to inform consumer choice. In Faugères, however, which is on the one soil, and which is more homogeneous, the differences between the wines produced in the different communes, though subtly apparent, is more a consequence of the different styles of individual producers than of varying terroirs.

History

Phylloxera

The phylloxera aphid, which ravaged French vineyards in the last third of the nineteenth century, was first identified in the neighbouring Gard department in 1864. A Monsieur Borty imported American vine cuttings and with them, unwittingly, the deadly aphid which lay in their roots. Its effects were such that wine production in the Hérault declined from 15 million to 5 million hectolitres between 1872 and 1880. Over a period of twenty years hundreds of ideas for eradicating the pest were put forward, encouraged, no doubt, by the offer of a huge reward - 300,000 francs in 1874, which, it is said, still sits in the vaults of the Banque de France. Eventually it was realised that American vines were able to live with phylloxera and that the solution lay in grafting on to US root stock. A series of prodigious grafting programmes eventually brought the disease

under control - and grafting on to resistant root stocks is still carried out. However, by the time the new resistant vine stocks for grafting arrived many producers had become too poor to be able to afford to recommence production, particularly in the difficult terrain higher up the hills. This is the main reason for the many abandoned terraced slopes visible in the area. Severe weather conditions in the early years of the last century added to the growers' financial problems and led to a serious confrontation with the French government, involving massive demonstrations of those in the wine industry of the Midi.

1907

These demonstrations began on 11th March 1907 in Argeliers, then a commune of 1,425 inhabitants in the department of the Aude, and the home of Marcellin Albert, leader of the four month long revolt and still affectionately remembered by the wine growers of the area. Albert led a march to Narbonne where the local Mayor promoted a mass meeting. Further huge gatherings followed in Béziers, Perpignan, Carcassonne and Nîmes. All were attended by Mayor Ferroul of Narbonne who, at Nîmes on 2nd June 1907, called for action by the Government to rescue the struggling wine growers within ten days, otherwise the elected representatives would send back their mayoral sashes and close the Town Halls. A further huge meeting was held on 9th June at Montpellier attended by an estimated three quarters of a million people. The following day M. Ferroul was sacked.

As Town Halls across the region declared themselves on strike, other Mayors were removed from office. Eventually Georges Clemenceau, recently promoted from Home Secretary to Prime Minister, sent in troops. Five civilians were killed and over one hundred wounded when soldiers fired into the crowd at Narbonne. Many local soldiers deserted, particularly in Narbonne and Béziers, and joined the blockades. Marcellin Albert risked losing his support by travelling to Paris to speak directly to Clemenceau, and, despite promises given for his safe conduct, he was imprisoned in Montpellier on his return. It was some time before compromises were found and order restored. Albert himself, unhappy at the outcome and criticised from all sides, went to Algeria and worked in the vineyards there, before returning to the Languedoc towards the end of his life. Bitterness between the wine growers and the government lasted

for many years and prompted the formation of a strong federation to protect their interests.

There is still a strong independent and militant streak amongst viticulteurs in the region and there have been recent large demonstrations on the financial situation of the producers of vin de table. There is also a deep sense of community and when, in 2000, floods caused huge damage to vineyards in the Aude Department around Narbonne, the viticulteurs of Faugères, and of every other local appellation that had escaped the floods, went over to the Aude to help their struggling colleagues. Similarly in 2002 when one Faugères viticulteur suffered a serious motorcycle accident, other producers helped with the pruning of his vines.

Since the pre-First World War days, numerous co-operative, regional, national and, more recently, European organisations have subsidised the restructuring of vineyards and the promotion of better grape varieties in order to minimise the difficulties of weather and terrain and to facilitate the transformation from quantity to quality.

The 1939-1945 war took the young men away from the fields and up to half the local vineyards were abandoned by elderly parents too old to cope with the rigours of wine making. This situation was a catalyst in the rapid post-war expansion of the co-operative movement.

Fortunately for Faugères, there were a number of long established wine producers in the area who were determined to prove the quality and the distinctive character of the Faugères terroir. Individuals such as Gilbert Alquier, Bernard Vidal and Raymond and Guy Roque, took the broader view that a successful future for the wine required, first, proof that it kept well over a period of years, and, second, the development of an AOC. They succeeded with both aims. A further development was the inauguration, in 1995, of a Commanderie for the appellation to give it a formal status and visible presence at public occasions. Its first Grand Master, Fernand Pujol, was a convivial and passionate advocate for Faugères, right up to his death in October 2003. His place has been taken by Pierre Mégé of Domaine de la Reynardière.

The appellation today

The local co-operatives, in Faugères and Laurens (which has recently absorbed the former Autignac co-operative) have done an excellent job in producing wine to a reliable standard but an increasing number of independent producers - some of whom previously grew grapes for the co-operatives - are making and marketing their own distinctive local styles, many of which are of a very high quality.

Our impression at one stage was that, as growers left the co-operatives to produce their own wine, the co-operatives for a time had increasing difficulty in matching them for quality. Now many of their vine growers participate in a scheme whereby the grapes are examined in the vineyards in August and classified into four categories. They are thus able to produce a number of different grades of wine, including, for instance the quasi-organic 'Trois Tours' marque, and there is real quality amongst their top wines. Significantly, over half of AOC Faugères is still produced by the co-operatives. Françoise Ollier, the former administrator of the Faugères Syndicat, has made the valid point that it is the quality of the wine on the supermarket shelves which is the appellation's key shop window, and which is probably the most significant influence in encouraging the consumer to seek out the more expensive special cuvées. Much of the supermarket Faugères wine emanates from the co-operatives.

Bernard Vidal, former Chairman of the Faugères Syndicat, has argued that, because Faugères is a small appellation with a very specific type of soil, and that, as a consequence, the boundaries of the appellation cannot be extended, progress has to be seen as moving towards higher quality wines. Fortuitously this works well as a means of combatting the current gloom that is apparent amongst the wine industry generally in the area, and particularly amongst the producers of lower priced wine who are suffering from the decline in wine consumption in France and from the increased competition from New World wines. In 2003, for the first time, the New World, ie the Americas, Australia and New Zealand, and South Africa, exported more wine than did France - 161 million cases (of twelve bottles) compared to 148 million; the figures in 1998 were France 168 million cases, and the New World 88 million. One contributory factor is the trend towards vins de cépage, ie wines made from a single

grape variety, as opposed to the more complex wines that depend year by year on the balancing of different grape varieties within the rules of the appellation.

Currently the Faugères wine growers manage to sell virtually all of their wine, the vast proportion of it direct by the producers, and there is a continual expansion of new producers without there being any apparent jealousy. The total stock across all the producers is currently only around 79,000 litres, up from a low of 41,000 litres in 2000. 80% of Faugères is bottled on the producer's premises. Most of the established wine producing families, such as the Vidals, the Roques, the Louisons, the Olliers, the Sauris and the Mégés have involved succeeding generations, others, such as Alquier and Bénézech have broken up into independent units. New independent producers tend to be young - almost one third of them being under 35 - a profile likely to be maintained. The average age of Faugères producers is said to be youngest of any appellation in France.

Given that producers can sell most of their production within France there is, as yet, little incentive for them to undertake the extra hassle of exportation. The current economic pressures on the marketing of Languedoc wines may well extend to Faugères in the future and thus encourage a broadening of marketing policy. Currently only around 16% is exported, half of which goes to Belgium.

The wine

Until 2004 the Faugères appellation only applied to fairly weighty reds and some rosés. The grape varieties for the reds are Cinsault (maximum 20%), Carignan (maximum 40%), Syrah or Mourvèdre (minimum 15% together, with a minimum of 5% Mourvèdre), and Grenache (minimum 20%). Lladoner Pelut, which closely resembles Grenache Noir, is also listed for Faugères but is not as widely used, nor even known. Much work has been done to wean producers off the previously ubiquitous Carignan, which is why the minimum proportions of Syrah/Mourvèdre and of Grenache as varieties aimed at improving the final product - cépages améliorateurs - have steadily risen from an initial 5% and 10% respectively to 20% each, with corresponding reductions to a current maximum of 40% for Carignan, which is still respected for its 'body'. According to Bernard Vidal, Carignan is indispensable to Faugères.

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From the 1998 vintage the Grenache, Syrah and Mourvèdre varieties have had to make up between them a minimum proportion of 40%. Despite these detailed regulations our experience is that they are applied with considerable flexibility. Harvesting tends to be early, particularly for the Carignan, even sometimes beginning in late August, as happened in 1995. The Mourvèdre grape is the last to mature, but is seeing a revival in Faugères now that other areas of the world are putting more Syrah/Shiraz on to the market.

It is easily possible to learn what the different grape varieties actually look like as Alain Ollier has established a small field in Fos as a reference resource. It contains one row of each AOC grape variety - plus other local varieties. Each is clearly labelled and M. Ollier is always happy to show visitors this resource.

The principal grape varieties of the new AOC for white wine, none of which must comprise more than 70% of the whole, are Marsanne, Roussanne, Rolle (also known as Vermentino) and Grenache Blanc. Producers have to use at least two of these four varieties and there has to be a minimum of 40% Roussanne. To assist producers who have grown other varieties for many years, there are also ancillary grape varieties specified, none of which must be more than 10% of the whole. These are Macabeu and Carignan Blanc, if planted before 20 May 1998, and Bourbelenc, if planted before the formal commencement date of the appellation. Clairette can also be used. Apart from grape varieties, all the restrictions on the production of red wine apply to white, and there are strict rules on the planting and cultivation of the vines. A number of producers, including Frédéric Alquier, Alain Ollier, Ginette Coste and Michel Louison have been producing excellent whites from these grapes for some years as precursors of the proposed AOC. Ollier-Taillefer's excellent Cuvée Allegro is a particularly good example of what the Faugères AOC white will be like. Faugères is now one of very few AOCs which cover red, rosé and white wines.

A separate top-of-the-range cuvée was launched in 1993 under the Trois Tours label, with its own special shaped bottles, which include the Trois Tours logo engraved in the glass. The three windmills of Faugères, silhouetted on the hilltop above the village being its key distinguishing mark. This cuvée has its own charter, based on quasi-organic principles, with verification to be carried out by the Faugères Syndicat. Early signatories of the charter, with a first

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special harvest in 1995, were five well-entrenched and respected producers: Château Grézan, Domaine Ollier-Taillefer, Château de la Liquière, the Domaine du Météore and the co-operative of Laurens. A sixth, the cave co-operative of Faugères, joined in 1996. Producers only produce this top-of-the-range cuvée when they feel that it would be appropriate for a particular year on their terrain. For the 2004 vintage, for instance, only four producers – Château de la Liquière, Domaine Ollier-Taillefer and the two co-operatives – will make a Trois Tours wine. Early tastings, which suggested that Trois Tours would be more delicate and aromatic and likely to come to a peak quicker than the standard Faugères Réserve, have been confirmed as the style has developed. It is often carefully matured in oak which gives it a delicate background taste of vanilla.

Although rosé wine is only a relatively small part of the Faugères production, a number of producers have been determined to produce rosés of character. Traditionally produced mainly from the Cinsault grape, and very much the Cinderella of the range of wines, these producers believe that this does not have to be the case and are keen to have their recent efforts tasted and evaluated. Some of these interesting and worthwhile initiatives are referred to under the individual producers, including Ollier-Taillefer, Château des Estanilles, Château Anglade and Mas Gabinèle.

A totally organic producer, Laborie Fouisseau, appeared in 2002, with a contact address in Laurens, and its early vintages were excellent. The domaine was, however, sold in 2004 but it is understood that the new owner, Véronique Bergan-Vaquer, intends to continue to produce organic wines. Marc Roque, of Domaine Raymond Roque et Fils, is also very much a convert to organic methods and produced a first Cuvée Nature in 2002.

Fine

As mentioned earlier, the production of Fine ceased operation some years ago. However, it recommenced in November 2000 after a gap of thirty years, and there is now once again an 'Eau de Vie de Faugères'. The new Fine, at around 30 degrees of alcohol, is produced in the appellation's newly established distillery at Caussinijouls, under the management of the distiller, Mattieu Frécon, but is matured in barriques in Autignac. Recent tastings suggest that it will need some eight years before being ready for sale. The revival of its production has come

about through the initiative of fifteen Faugères wine producers, under the leadership of Jean-Luc Saur of Château Haut-Fabrègues.

Recent vintages

Each vintage is unique. The weather conditions that influence it are diverse and capricious. The levels of rain and when it falls; the variations of temperature; the amount of sunshine; and, potentially most dangerous of all, whether hailstones fall at key times, all affect a vintage. The micro-climates of the area are also very marked. One can be returning in pouring rain from, say, Lamalou-les-Bains just ten miles away only to discover that there has been no rain at all in Faugères itself. Most producers have parcels of land in a number of different areas and consequently have often to take different conditions into account - not only in terms of harvesting but also of blending. These days the technical support available is impressive and, faced with the critical decision as to when to commence the vendange, a producer can call in technical expertise to sample regularly the sugar and acidity levels of the grapes in order to inform that decision. Producers also belong to the Syndicat for the appellation, which publishes a monthly information bulletin and provides considerable practical advice, such as on outbreaks of mildew and the flavescence dorée disease and how to deal with them. The effect of all this is that, although, of course, some vintages are better than others, it is unlikely that there could be a disastrous year.

Bernard Vidal, the then Chairman of the Syndicat, described the 1997 vintage, harvested in mid-September, as one of choice, suggesting that it had its difficulties but was capable of being one of the better years, depending on the blend of grapes. There were differences between the yield of the Syrah, Mourvèdre and Grenache grapes in different areas, but the old war horse, Carignan, flourished everywhere. The 1997 vintage is well balanced and lighter in structure.

In many parts of the Languedoc the 1998 vintage was hit by severe storms and the production in the Department of the Aude, for example, was down by 17% on 1997, but Faugères managed to avoid the worst of the weather and almost matched the previous year's yield. It was a particularly good year for Grenache. By the time it was tasted at the 1999 Fête du Millésime, the 1998

vintage had an attractive colour, was already very open, well supported and very round on the palate. It was expected to mature quickly.

There were many fears for the 1999 vintage. In terms of climate, it was a very difficult year and there was considerable rain during the second half of the vendange. The earlier maturing Syrah was fine but producers had to keep making fresh selections of Carignan and Grenache grapes to cope with the conditions. It was said to be an average year, but some producers enjoyed the challenge of a chance to make individual wines of character.

The 2000 vintage was characterised by its great fruit and its rounded tannins. It was regarded as being more “harmonious” and better balanced than its immediate predecessors. It was said to have a good structure and therefore to be a good wine to lay down. “Better even than 1998” was one early verdict.

Despite some concerns that rain towards the end of the vendange caused some grapes to miss a little maturity, the 2001 vintage is increasingly appreciated as being a particularly good year. Producers and connoisseurs alike characterised it as being exceptionally smooth and harmonious, having great fruit and silkiness, and benefiting from being even more structured than the 2000 vintage.

Compared with the relative ease of the vinification of the 2001 harvest, 2002 was much more difficult. A cold and dry winter and a windy summer hindered flowering and the grapes themselves tended to be smaller than usual. Although harvesting began officially on 8 September, the varieties that take longer to mature, particularly Mourvèdre, were even later than usual. Production was some 8% to 10% lower than earlier years, but in terms of quality, in the words of Bernard Vidal, “it carries its status with dignity”! In terms of its lighter and more delicate colour, and its more assertive level of fruit, it “has a slightly different personality” than its predecessors. It may keep well, but no-one seems entirely sure yet. Tastings at regular intervals will no doubt assist.

The summer of 2003 was long, dry and exceptionally hot. In July we kept asking producers if they were worried about the harvest. “Not yet” was the general feeling, not least because the roots of vines on schiste extend far enough down to maintain a source of water, even in such a summer. Even so

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Bernard Vidal later admitted that there had been some concerns at the start of the harvest, though these had proved groundless. White grapes were harvested very early, some starting in late August, but producers generally held back in relation to their red grapes and were rewarded by rain from mid-August which was of great benefit. Vinification was delicate because of the high level of alcohol, and this concentration will probably make it a vintage to keep a little longer than the usual average of three to five years. In its earlier years it is also likely to be more tannic than usual - a deliberate decision made in the light of the effects of the heatwave on the vinification. As might be expected, quantity was down though only by 3%, but the quality is expected to be very high, in due course. Patience will be needed!

The prospects for the 2004 vintage are excellent, both in quality and quantity. The vendange began with the Syrah, Grenache and Cinsault in mid September - roughly two weeks later than in 2003 - with Carignan and Mourvèdre following from the end of the month. The vendange was completed towards the end of the first week in October - just as the Tramontane arrived! First impressions are encouraging, with a good balance of tannins, alcohol and acidity reported. The yield in the Languedoc as a whole is expected to be some 15% higher than in 2003.

There are around 2,000 hectares of vines producing annually some 70,000 to 76,000 hectolitres of wine, 95% of which is red and 5% rosé. Production is at the fairly low maximum of 50 hectolitres per hectare - compared with up to 250 hectolitres per hectare in the days of the undistinguished Vin de Table wines. Even with such a relatively low maximum permitted yield producers in general produce at a much lower level. In 2003 the average yield was 37 hectolitres per hectare.

Terroir

It is always said that the secret of the character of Faugères wine is the terroir. The nuances of this word are impossible to translate - "land" is far too inadequate. It means all that goes into providing a unique source of nurturing for the vines. One producer asserted that 90% of good wine making depended on what happened outside in the fields rather than inside the winery. Under the AOC rules there are strict rules controlling artificial watering of the vines. The

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vines are grown either on garrigue, land similar to the Yorkshire moors, or on lower plains, including in one instance, a bowl created by a meteor! All AOC Faugères terrain, however, is characterised by its schiste, the rough shaly surface.

One producer told us that making the vines seek deep roots on such apparently difficult soil was an advantage in that the plants would not be washed away in torrential rain. A further advantage is that the stones retain heat better than soil thus minimising the deleterious effects of low night temperatures. It is sometimes said that Faugères grapes mature in the night! The wine must be at a minimum alcohol level of 11.5% - which from our experience is no problem at all! It would be difficult to find any Faugères wines with less than even 12.5% alcohol.

There is considerable debate on fermentation methods. Producers have tended to use macération carbonique for the Carignan, not least to blunt its unpleasant edge, and have used traditional vinification for the other varieties. Some producers, such as Bernard Vidal at La Liquière, are keen on carbonic maceration, while others, such as Jean-Michel Alquier, use classic vinification for all of their crop. Fermentation times vary considerably from producer to producer, and, of course, on the style desired. Wines for earlier drinking (three to five years old) may have as little as five or six days in the vats whereas those for laying down for more years may have up to twenty-five days.

The heavier, more tannic, wines are traditionally vinified and need to be laid down for at least four to five years - and will generally last well beyond that. There has been a gradual increase in wine matured in oak, which the market - including us - appears to like, and this usually requires longer maturation in bottle. Faugères reds go well with meat and with most cheeses. They should be drunk at room temperature and very much benefit from being opened several hours ahead of the meal. Unfortunately most local restaurants' wine lists tend to offer these reds with younger vintages than we recommend here.

Buying and tasting

Relative to other country wines, the best Faugères appellation wines, at around six euros per bottle for a box of six, are thought - by the French, though not

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necessarily by visitors - to be rather expensive. Discounts can often be negotiated if buying, say, one hundred bottles. Many of the special cuvées are now priced at around twelve euros per bottle, with one or two as high as twenty-four euros, with only a handful of bottles allowed to each buyer. Magnums are often available and many of the top vineyards are - at last - also producing half-bottles for the restaurant trade. Some, such as Bénézech, Grézan and M. Vidal at La Liquière (Vieilles Vignes), will happily sell them to the public, and it is worth asking elsewhere. Some producers, however, are not putting their best wines into half-bottles. Visitors buying a number of cartons will often be presented by the producer with an extra bottle of a wine not purchased, or even tasted, "to drink this evening."

The co-operatives produce wine under numerous labels. They are available in most local supermarkets and also in bulk from their own selling points. Buyers who are interested in developing their awareness of different producers' wines can easily check the bottom of the étiquette, or label, to determine whether it is from a co-op or an individual producer.

The Bel Air garage, on the edge of Faugères, carries a very good selection of Faugères wines, as does the Faugères tabac, both selling at producers' prices.

In addition, there is now an excellent opportunity to taste Faugères wines in Faugères, at Le Cellier de la Vigneronne, the first building on the right at the entrance to Faugères from the Pézenas direction. There is an advertisement panel on every road into the village. Régine and Christian Godefroid have renovated a superb vaulted cellar to form a tasting room. They also have five chambres d'hotes. They are extremely knowledgeable and they stock almost every Faugères wine, plus examples of other Languedoc producers. Each day they offer a tasting of a different selection of whites, rosés and reds from their stock. You can also have lunch in the cellar accompanied by wines by the glass and buy at producers' prices. It is a very agreeable and sympathetic environment in which to sample a range of Faugères wines, and is a great asset to the wine connoisseur.

A particularly good selection of regional wines can also be found in the Languedocien wine section at the SICA du Caroux co-op next to Intermarché between Hérépian and Bédarieux. A high class wine merchant with the best

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stock in the area, and with the widest knowledge of regional wines, is Au Chai du Languedoc, 14 avenue Albert 1er, Béziers. This is situated on the right hand side of a one way street, just after the first traffic lights on the Béziers to Bédarieux road, on the fringe of the Béziers town centre. The same owners, Martine and Denis Andrieu, also have an excellent cave in Narbonne, Palais du Vin, on the outskirts of Narbonne, on the Route de Perpignan, near to the motorway junction.

Buying Faugères wine in the UK requires some persistence. Co-operative wine does occasionally make it onto supermarket shelves and the Wine Society usually has at least one Faugères on its list. Also, latterly, Oddbins and Majestic have listed one or more Faugères examples. However, it is to specialist wine shops or the internet that you need to go for a wider selection. Even so, most suppliers only stock wine from a couple of producers. Interestingly, there is now a specialist English merchant of Languedoc wines, including Faugères - Gemma Crangle runs Terroir Languedoc from a base near Skipton. Check her website: www.terroirlanguedoc.co.uk. Further details are given in the appendix.

AOC Faugères, made within the appellation but bottled in the Gard, actually appeared in a supermarket in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, when Michael Meadowcroft was there in 1997, and a Faugères AOC imported into Atlanta, Georgia, is bottled in Mireval, near Sète. Faugères reds are currently on sale in the two supermarkets in Kinshasa, Congo; one is a generic production from outside the appellation and the other is a Borie d'Aspré from the Faugères co-op! So it does travel!

Tasting events

On the first Sunday of July each year a Fête du Vin, Le Grand St Jean, is held in Faugères. Re-introduced in 1995 - the first such fête since 1946 - it is a great occasion, with residents opening their street level cellars to wine and food producers to provide space for tastings. Sadly, a few of the more successful producers have been conspicuous by their absence in recent years. The fête begins with a special mass in the Catholic church to which the Commanderie du Faugères processes. Later in the day there are parades and the introduction of other visiting wine and cuisine Confréries, a jazz group in the streets, an increasing number of artists and artisanale product makers, sometimes auctions of special bottles of wine and of historic vintages, and, in 2004 for the

first time, tutored tastings of earlier vintages. The whole busy day concludes, of course, with a communal meal. In relation to the 2004 fête, the newsletter of the appellation noted particularly that many English people were present. Probably because they have good taste!

The other key event is the Fête du Millésime held annually on a Monday in late April/early May. This is Faugères' shop window when the trade is invited to taste the latest vintage. Wine merchants, restaurateurs and sommeliers wend their way along the different wine producers' stands, tasting some wines taken directly from the barrique and others already blended. One of the Leeds Club's wine circles makes an annual pilgrimage to this grand occasion, arriving sufficiently early to make a long weekend of wine tasting. Someone has to do it!

The modern village hall in Faugères, called the Palais de Bacchus, includes a well appointed tasting room. Occasional public tastings are held there and are advertised on the various notice boards around the village. Many producers now hold open days, usually in late July or in August, to which they invite all previous buyers on their records to a buffet accompanied by entertainment and - of course - lashings of the home wine. There is also a growing programme of balades vigneronnes, ie rambles through the vineyards, starting and finishing at a particular producer or cellar. They are an easy walk of around eight kilometres with explanations of the various fields and techniques being used en route. There is a list of these walks in the relevant publications from the various tourist offices. A knowledge of French is not necessary but is valuable to make the most of the commentary.

Recommendations

Each January in Leeds, friends who have been to Faugères in recent years gather for a highly convivial evening. Around twenty wines are tasted and, though wine appreciation is very much an individual matter - and there is never unanimity - there is always a fairly general consensus on the top favourites. The comments in the guide on individual producers reflect that consensus.

Unless one can regularly taste virtually all the different wines of each producer it is always difficult to recommend specific vintages of particular producers. In any case, by the time one reads about or finds a recommended vintage it may

be beyond its best. For instance, Bénézech-Estève's Château des Adouzes 1988 was quite superb up to 1994 but thereafter, whilst still very drinkable, it had lost its wonderful aromas. Similarly Domaine Raymond Roque Grande Réserve 1988, for years one of the stars at tastings, suddenly lost its bloom and finesse, while the 1989 vintage performed better than first expected. It is also frustrating to readers to have a particular cuvée listed, such as Jean-Michel Alquier's Cuvée les Bastides 1996, which is now virtually unobtainable. Also some of the current producers only have AOC vintages which have not yet reached the optimum age but which are already showing great promise for future years. This guide hopes, therefore, also to encourage its readers to buy the younger Faugères reds recommended and to lay them down. We have endeavoured to indicate when these are likely to be ready to drink. The Faugères appellation Syndicat itself currently categorises 1985, 1986, 1988, 1989, 1995, 1998, 2000 and 2001 as great vintages. We believe that 2003 will also deserve to be added to that list.

We have deliberately kept our comments fairly general on the wines we have tasted, rather than being excessively technical. We were tempted to retain the comments from earlier tasting notes but, in the end, concentrated on our 2004 experience, with some comments from 2003. Leafing through our notebooks we became conscious that there were few of the wines tasted that we didn't like. We feel that this indicates the increasing level of quality rather than the dulling of our palates!

For Faugères AOC reds, of wines currently available, taking into account the oldest vintages from producers we have tasted so far, we would recommend as follows:

First choice: Domaine Raymond Roque, *Grande Réserve*; Ollier-Taillefer *Grande Réserve*; Jean-Michel Alquier *Les Bastides*, Moulin de Ciffre *Eôle*, Château des Estanilles cuvée *Syrah* and Mas Gabinèle *Rarissime*. Also two Trois Tours, Ollier-Taillefer *Castel Fossibus* and Château de la Liquière *Cistus*, are both splendid.

Second choice: Ginette Coste *Domaine du Météore, Réserve*; the Saurs' *Château Haut-Fabregue*, cuvée *Gaëlle*; Clos Fantine *Courtiol*, Château de Grézan cuvée *Arnaud* and Château de la Liquière *Vieilles Vignes*.

Third choice: Domaine de la Reynardière, fût de chêne, Vincent Fonteneau *Moulin Couderc*, Château Chênaie *Oblivia*, Domaine du Fraïsse *Fleur de Cuvée* and Château Anglade *Comète*.

The above are all top of the range wines, so for “Wednesday evening” drinking we would suggest Frédéric Alquier, Mas de Capitelles, Château des Peyregrandes, Domaine de l’Ancienne Mercerie, and the top wines of both co-operatives.

For non-reds we suggest the Mas Gabinèle and Haut Fabregues rosé, and the Château des Estanilles rosé Mourvèdre; Domaine du Météore Viognier; Domaine du Fraïsse and Château de Grézan Chardonnay; and Domaine Ollier-Taillefer cuvée *Allegro*. Finally, for something unusual and special, Domaine de la Reynardière Muscat.

Visiting

Of the thirty-seven current producers in early 2005, there are just five which either do not sell direct from their cellars or who are difficult to contact. The cellars are listed and numbered in a suggested visiting order but a map is attached so that they can be tackled in any order, largely depending on one’s inhibitions about spitting out, one’s alcohol capacity and whether or not the driver is also a taster. The tasting notes do not pretend to be comprehensive but only represent a selection of those wines which we happen to have tackled at the producer’s premises, in a restaurant, at the various fêtes or from a retailer. Most of the producers have more reds and whites - and some rosés - available than listed here and there is no substitute for doing one’s own tastings.

Although there is the vital deep fruit taste in every good Faugères, there are three or four different styles of Faugères and one soon begins to recognise them: simplistically “fresh”, “smooth” and “deep”. In addition there is a key difference also between oaked and un-oaked wines. Individual preferences rightly vary greatly but it is worth remembering that with few exceptions - where either earlier vintages are still available, or the wine has been deliberately made for drinking when young - the red wines available at a winery would need to be kept for at least three to five years and that the aim of tasting them is to make some prediction as to how they will turn out. Whatever the

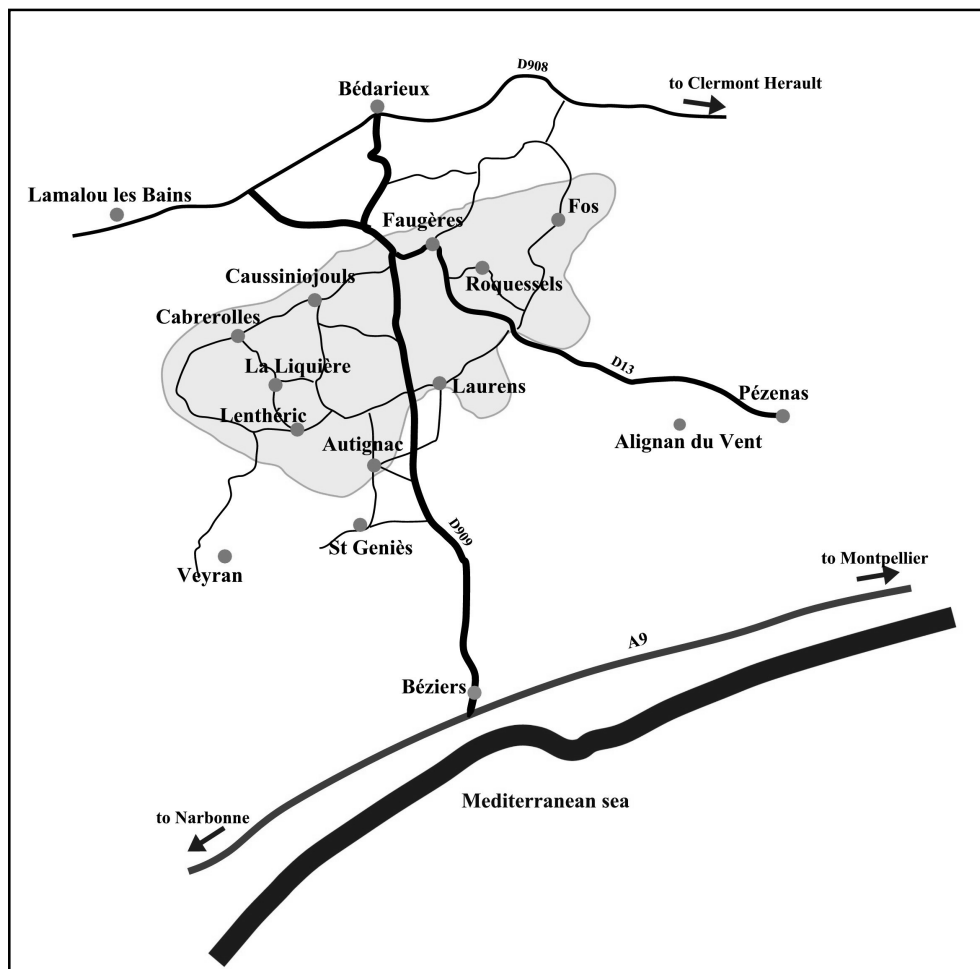
experts say, this is easier said than done, and the producers are usually the best guide as to when their top reds will be at their best. In the main they are somewhat cynical about the local restaurants’ reluctance to keep their vintages in stock until ready to drink and are therefore delighted to find potential buyers who are anxious to discuss such matters, and to buy discerningly. Many produce a technical sheet for each cuvée and are pleased to supply them to interested visitors. Just ask if they have the fiche technique. Some speak enough English to help but most do not, but this should not inhibit visitors, indeed, we have deliberately avoided identifying the linguists. Wine lovers will always communicate somehow, if only out of necessity!

The cellars are usually open each week day morning and afternoon, and sometimes on Saturday morning. Most are closed between 12 noon and 3pm - and even if not *formally* closed it is not recommended that one calls during these hours! A few are not open on Mondays. New directional signs were erected on the main roads in 2003 and these help to locate almost all producers.

If you are able to telephone in advance to make an appointment it is useful to do so, but if you feel that your French is not up to doing so, do not be inhibited. Just arrive. Most will welcome you, and at worst you will have had a pleasant, albeit thirsty, trip through the vineyards. Those producers with e-mail addresses like to use them. Essentially the etiquette of visiting is that there is no requirement to buy the wine but it is impolite to visit with no intention of doing so. We reckon to buy at least a carton of six bottles after a comprehensive tasting.

Paying

Producers increasingly take credit cards, particularly Visa, but do not bank on it. The Leeds Club group had an embarrassing experience at one cave. Having previously somewhat over extended our buying plans, we were not intending to go mad at this destination. However, the wines were fabulous and, following Oscar Wilde’s dictum, we were unable to resist temptation. The unspoken thought was that, given that the producer in question was one of the most modern, he would take the ubiquitous plastic. Alas no. In vain we tried to divvy up enough euros. We had to return the next day with the liquide. Check before stacking up the cases!



The suggested routes that follow begin in Faugères itself, wend southwards to Laurens, then north-east to Roquessels and Fos. Continuing southwards once more to Autignac they then take you north to Lenthéric, La Liquière, Cabrerolles and Caussiniojols. Finally, you are taken on a journey to the various 'offshoots' from Alignan du Vent to Veyran. Santé!

Route 1 - Faugères

- 1 Faugères Co-operative – Les Crus Faugères
- 2 Château Haut-Lignièrès***
- 3 Domaine Jean-Michel Alquier
- 4 Domaine Gilbert Alquier
- 5 Mas des Capitelles

Route 2 - Laurens

- 6 Cave Co-operative - Les Maîtres Vignerons du Faugérois
- 7 Domaine Laborie Fouisseau
- 8* Château de Sauvanes
- 9 Domaine Valambelle
- 10* Domaine Jean-Marie Fourrier***
- 11 Château de Grézan

Route 3 - Roquessel & Fos

- 12 Domaine Fonteneau, Le Moulin de Couderc***
- 13 Domaine Bénézech-Boudal, Château des Peyregrandes
- 14 Château des Adouzes, Domaine Estève
- 15 Domaine Ollier-Taillefer

Route 4 - Autignac

- 16 Domaine de l'Ancienne Mercerie
- 17 Domaine du Fraïsse
- 18 Domaine Balliccioni
- 19 Domaine des Prés Lasses
- 20 Château Moulin de Ciffre***

Route 5 - Lenthéric & La Liquière

- 21 Domaine St Antonin
- 22 Domaine Léon Barral
- 23 Château des Estanilles***
- 24 Château Haut-Fabrègues
- 25* La Grange d'Ain
- 26 Clos Fantine
- 27 Château de la Liquière

Route 6 - Cabrerolles & Caussiniojols

- 28 Domaine de Météore
- 29 Domaine Raymond Roque
- 30* Le Mas d'Arlans
- 31 Château Chenaie
- 32* Château Anglade
- 33* Domaine de Cauvy

Route 7 - Offshoots

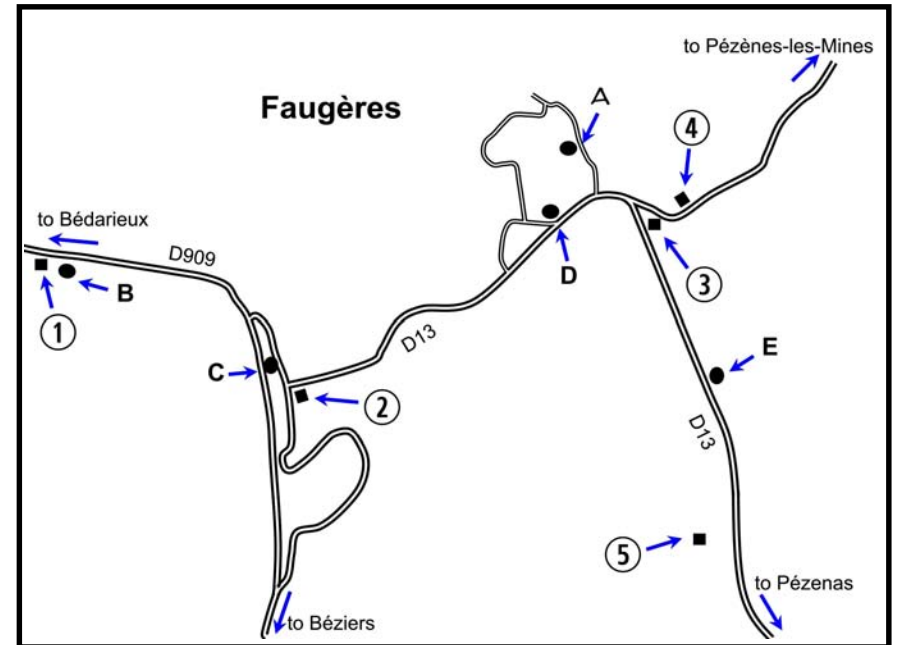
- 34 Abbaye Sylva Plana
- 35 Domaine du Rouge Gorge
- 36 Domaine de la Reynardière
- 37 Mas Gabinèle

* does not sell direct from the premises

See p.55-56 for complete list of producers and their domaine names.

*** = CHANGED OWNERSHIP

Route I - Faugères



The Faugères co-operative – **Les Crus Faugères** - is situated at Mas Olivier, just off the D909, near to the Bel Air garage and restaurant. The co-operative's selling point, the Caveau Vente Les Crus Faugères **[1]**, is slightly further up the D909 next to the Syndicat d'Initiative.

The co-operative produces an impressive range of wines and is constantly adding to the number of 'titles' it markets as it tries different blends and styles. Whenever one is tempted to become frustrated with the challenge of coping with the variety of co-operative wines one has to remember that the two co-operatives between them produce more than the sum of the thirty-five individual producers.

Much of the co-op's wine is aimed at the mass market and is a pleasant enough drink available in all local supermarkets at remarkably low prices. The co-

operatives have, however, been aware of the need to keep up with the trend towards higher class cuvées, particularly as there is a continuing exodus of producers leaving the co-op in order to produce their own wines, and have devised a method of inspecting and grading the vines in the vineyards during the year. Even so, don't despise the wine from the pump! It is even cheaper if you take a cubie to be filled up at the pumps at their selling point. Among the better examples of the co-op's efforts are the **Terrasses du Rieutor**, matured in oak, and the Trois Tours cuvée, **Les Tourelles**.

tel: 04 67 95 08 80 (Co-op)
fax: 04 67 95 14 67 (Co-op)
tel: 04 67 95 35 39 (sales point)
email: contact@lescrusfaugeres.com

[2] Château Haut-Lignièrès. Mme Elke Kreuzfeldt presides in a beautifully converted barn opposite the Bel Air restaurant at the western entrance to the village. The château got off to a bad start and its early vintages, 1994 and 1995, were unremarkable. Then a new wine maker arrived and has transformed the production. There is a pleasant rosé, made from Cinsault, Grenache and Syrah, and a number of red cuvées. We tasted the 1999 **Carmina Butis** in January 2004; it was pleasant but still slightly tannic and we felt that it would benefit from another year in the cellar. The 1998 **Romy** was classy, well balanced, with a good nose.

tel: 04 67 95 38 27
fax: 04 67 95 78 51
email: chateau@haut-lignieres.com
web: www.haut-lignieres.com

[3] Domaine Jean-Michel Alquier is situated in Faugères itself at the fork where roads lead to Pézènes-les-Mines and to Pézenas. Gilbert Alquier, Jean-Michel and Frédéric's late father, was highly respected locally and was credited with having played a leading role in the development and promotion of the Faugères appellation. The family has been making wine since 1870.

Jean-Michel Alquier produces both oaked and un-oaked reds. He has concentrated on producing wines at the upper end of the market and these are often

referred to by commentators, in particular the cuvée **La Maison Jaune**, but we have not found it as attractive as its reputation would suggest. The star of the Alquier range is their special cuvée **Les Bastides**, which is made largely from Syrah. It has great depth and is long lasting. In early 2004 the 2000 vintage was splendidly balanced and structured but it was considered that it would be even better in two years time.

tel: 04 67 23 07 89
fax: 04 67 23 93 28
email: jeanmichelalquier@yahoo.fr

[4] Frédéric and Valérie Alquier run **Domaine Gilbert Alquier et Fils** from Le Clos Timothée, just along the Pézènes-les-Mines road. Frédéric produces excellent basic Faugères wines as well as an attractive Roussanne-Marsanne white. Frédéric Alquier is a popular and regular presence at local events. His 1999 vintage was well appreciated at our January 2004 tasting as an example of a good, standard Faugères red for every day drinking. The 2000 vintage was equally attractive when tasted in July 2004.

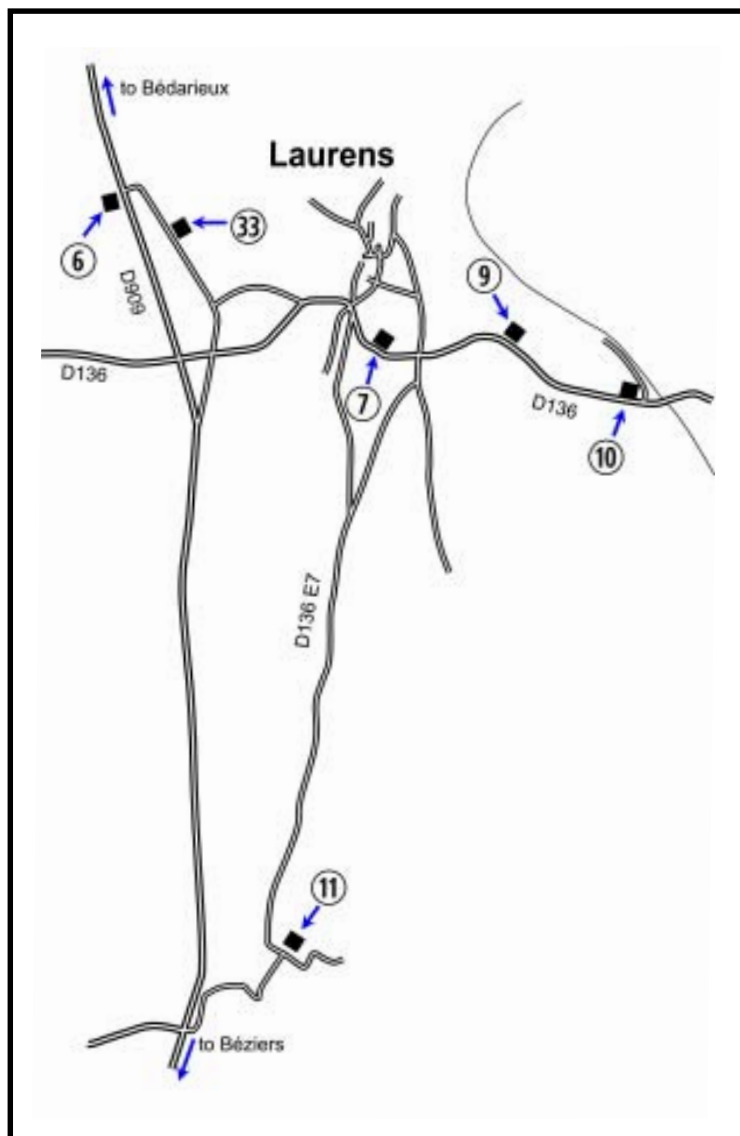
tel: 04 67 95 15 21
fax: 04 67 95 36 21
email: frederic@gilbert-alquier.fr
web: www.gilbert-alquier.fr

[5] Mas des Capitelles is set back from the Pézenas road, just outside the southern entrance to Faugères. Cédric Laugé and his father, Jean, have been producing pleasant and solid basic red wines since 1999. They are enthusiastic advocates for Carignan and deplore the current tendency to run it down. They are always welcoming to visitors. The family has always been very involved in all aspects of village life and both father and son have been recent members of the town council. In July 2004 their 2002 **Sélection** was a somewhat lighter style and pleasant red and the 2001 **Vieilles Vignes**, made with a substantial amount of Mourvèdre, needed longer to blossom.

tel: 04 67 23 10 20
fax: 04 67 95 78 32



Route 2 - Laurens



ROUTE 2 - LAURENS

The co-operative, which goes under the name of the **Les Maîtres Vignerons du Faugérois**, is situated in the village itself and there is a large modern selling point, Caveau des Schistes [6] at the side of the main D909 road. It includes a dedicated tasting area and the staff will provide a tasting of a range of wines on request. As with the Faugères co-operative, Laurens has tackled the challenge of grading vines in order to produce a range of quality products. It recently took over the running of the Autignac co-operative.

Probably the best known of the co-operative's range is its **Valentin Duc** which usually benefits from three years bottle age in order to soften the tannins. Its Trois Tour example, **Baron Ermengaud**, is well balanced and has a hint of vanilla. The **Baraque d'Amans** is also worth trying.

tel: 04 67 90 28 23 (Co-op)
fax: 04 67 90 25 47 (Co-op)
tel: 04 67 90 21 21 (Caveau des Schistes)
email: vigneron-dufaugerois@free.fr

[7] **Château Laborie Fousseau**, at 3 avenue de la Gare (the D136) has been producing organic wine since 2000. Its new owner is Véronique Bergan-Vaquier whose first vintage was 2003. She produces two cuvées from her seven hectares of vines - **Salamandre** and **Garance**. When tasted in May 2005 the **Salamandre** was felt to be drinkable now, the **Garance** would benefit from keeping for another year. The organic quality of the wine is regularly inspected and certified.

tel: 06 18 38 00 60
fax: 04 67 48 26 25
email: vaquerdago@aol.com

[8] **Château de Sauvanes**, is a little further down avenue de la Gare on the way from the centre of the village towards the station. Monsieur Vallat has recently bought the Château de Sauvanes from its former Belgian owner M. Gueens. Previously almost all the production was exported to Belgium, although we did once come across some bottles in the Pézenas Intermarché. They were unimpressive. M. Vallat's first vintages - 2002 and 2003 - tasted at the Fête du Millésime in 2004 and at the following Fête du Vin, were much

better. He is based in Montpeyroux and does not sell direct from his Laurens address.

tel: 04 67 96 64 06 (Montpeyroux)
 fax: 04 67 96 67 63
 email: vignoble.vallat@tiscali.fr

[9] Domaine Valambelle is the name chosen by Marie-Louise and Thierry Abbal, new and keen producers at 25 avenue de la Gare, Laurens. The family has been producing grapes for the co-operative since 1936 until, in 2003, the grandson of the founder encouraged the family to begin to produce its own wine. 2003 is their first vintage and is produced in four cuvées: one rosé and three reds. They have technical leaflets available for all four. Their cuvée Florentin Abbal, 80% Syrah, tasted very well at the two 2004 Faugères Fête tastings, but will need keeping for around three years. All four wines were tasted in May 2005 and were excellent examples of the appellation and good value for money.

tel/fax: 04 67 90 12 12
 email: m.abbal@tiscali.fr
 web: www.domaine-valambelle.com

[10] Domaine Jean-Marie Fourier is a relatively new producer and is extremely elusive! His location in the appellation is at 45 avenue de la Gare, previously Domaine du Colombier, but Jean-Marie Fourier and his English fiancée, Vicki Francis, are themselves based at Gevrey-Chambertin, Clos St Jacques, in Burgundy. Two of their cuvées, **Elegance** and **Finesse**, are available from Le Cellier de la Vigneronne in Faugères.

tel/fax: 04 67 90 31 15
 or 03 80 34 19 59 (Burgundy)
 email: c.laromance@wanadoo.fr

[11] Remy Fardel and Jean-Louis Pujol are the contacts at **Château de Grézan**. This is one of the largest and most commercially effective producers in the area: a number of its wines have won prizes. The château itself is very impressive and there is a dedicated tasting room. If you make an appointment for a formal tasting, plan to spend a good hour as there is a remarkable and

attractive range of wines. There is also an excellent restaurant, situated in a converted outhouse in the superb twelfth century building. Coming from Faugères take the left turn marked to the château on the main D909 road to Béziers.

One of the best and best-known of the Faugères AOC, the château's top red wine is the **Cuvée Arnaud**, the best vintages of which should be kept between six and eight years. It is made from Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre and old Carignan grapes and spends a year in oak. Like all 'big' Faugères reds, it needs to be opened and at room temperature for at least three hours before drinking. **Cuvée Arnaud** is a very complex, deep red, long on the palate with a trace of tannic bite. The 2002 and 2003 vintages were tasted in May 2004 - they were classy and well balanced, with good fruit. We reckoned that they would both benefit from another three years in the cellar.

There is also a **Vieilles Vignes** cuvée which is a great wine, and one to keep. It is an assembly of grapes from old vines of Syrah, Carignan and Grenache, and it spends eighteen months in oak. We tasted the 2001 and 2003 vintages in May 2004. They had great depth and structure and probably need keeping for a further two and three years respectively. Grézan's wine under the Trois Tours marque, called **Les Schistes Dorés**, is also splendid, with the 2003 having tremendous character and being well worth laying down for, say, three years.

Grézan also produces good basic Faugères reds, and cheaper second wines - including a Merlot, a Gamay and a Pinot Noir under Vin de Pays labels - plus a rosé and reliable, light, dry whites. There are two excellent Chardonnays - one unoaked and one oaked - the former possesses the smallest label ever seen! When tasted in May 2004 the 2003 Rosé, made mainly from Cinsault, was extremely pleasant.

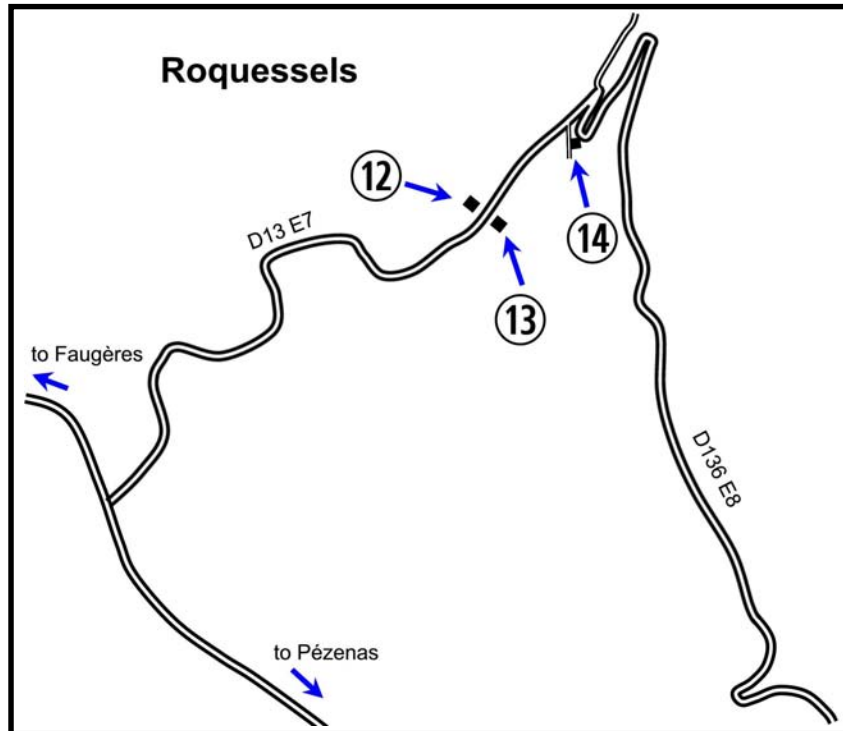
tel: 04 67 90 27 46
 fax: 04 67 90 29 01
 email: chateau-grezan@wanadoo.fr

CHANGED OWNERSHIP



Route 3 - Roquessels and Fos

Roquessels



[12] Domaine Fonteneau, Le Moulin de Couderc: follow the well signposted left turn from the D13 Faugères to Pézenas road. Vincent Fonteneau's cellar is a modern building on the left at the entrance to the village. His first vintage was 1990 and since then he has consistently produced solid and pleasant red wines, both with and without oak. M. Fonteneau is a convivial host and a favourite with the Leeds Club wine circle's annual visit to Faugères. He is currently the senior vice-chairman of the Faugères Syndicat.

M. Fonteneau produces the full range of wines. He has a pleasant, easy drinking white, a slightly tougher rosé, a Tradition red, and an oaked red, **Moulin de**

ROUTE 3 - ROQUESSELS & FOS

Couderc. This latter cuvée is a favourite. It needs to be kept for at least four years and will last a good deal longer. It has a pleasantly smoky tinge to its taste and is very typical of oaked Faugères red wine.

tel: 04 67 90 23 25

fax: 04 67 90 11 05

Bénézech-Estève is one of the most renowned names in Faugères wine making. Mention wine to the locals and it is often the name mentioned first. One of the earliest wines we came across here was the 1988 Château des Adouzes and it remains in the memory as a superb, typically smooth, deep, dark, dry and complex wine, with a tang of oak and very aromatic. The 1989 showed promise but never quite matched the 1988. Now the Bénézech and Estève branches of the family are producing separate wines.

[13] Mme Marie-Geneviève Boudal, is the proprietor of **Domaine Bénézech-Boudal, Château des Peyregrandes.** She has a splendid new tasting room set up in her winery directly opposite Domaine Fonteneau. Mme Boudal produces wine under two marques – Domaine Bénézech and Château des Peyregrandes. At our tastings the standard château Prestige has always been thought pleasant, if not particularly profound. In July 2004 we tasted most of the range. The domaine rosé 2003 was almost orange in colour, quite powerful on the nose and on the palate, whereas the château rosé 2003 was rather sharper. The château red 2000 was excellent and long on the palate.

tel: 04 67 90 15 58 or 67 90 15 00

fax: 04 67 90 15 60

email: info@chateaudespeyregrandes.com

web: www.chateaudespeyregrandes.com

[14] Jean-Claude Estève of **Château des Adouzes, Domaine Estève,** has retained the Château des Adouzes label. To find his cave, follow the road further into Roquessels. The house and cellar is on the right, down a track off the main street, just before the road twists downwards out of the village. His 2003 non-appellation rosé makes a splendid apéritif. Four reds were tasted in May 2004. Like most vintages of the oaked **Château des Adouzes,** the 1999 needs at least five years, and probably six, to achieve the potential that early

ROUTE 3 - ROQUESSOLS & FOS

tastings suggest. The domaine red, predominantly Syrah, was pleasant. His special cuvée, **Marie Laurencie**, 2001 was excellent.

tel: 04 67 90 24 11
fax: 04 67 90 12 74
email: adouzes@tiscali.fr
web: www.a-21.com/Adouzes/

Fos

[15] Fos is the smallest of the seven Faugères communes and is the home of the Ollier family at **Domaine Ollier-Taillefer**. It is an attractive village and well worth a trek out to what one wine guide called a “backwater”! The Ollier-Taillefer cellar, is signposted, as is Fos, from the D13, Faugères to Pézenas, road. The large doors of the room containing the barriques are visible on the left at the far end of the village; there is a bell to sound, which produces one or more of the family who then opens up the tasting room opposite. Ollier-Taillefer has a policy of selling vintages very young then taking them off the market until much later when they are nearer their peak.

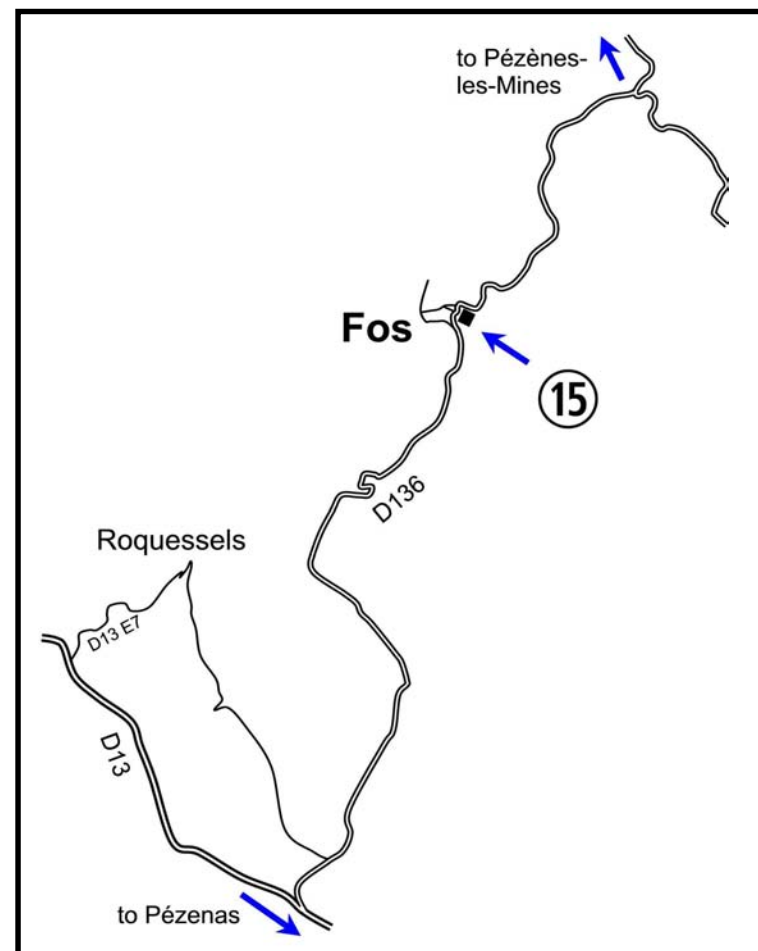
Alain Ollier is a great enthusiast for Faugères in general and for his own wines in particular. If they so wish, he will spend time taking new visitors to the highest point of his vines in order to demonstrate the different methods of training the vines on wire, and the techniques of pruning them. He also has a small parcel of land containing one row of each of the Faugères grape varieties, plus other local varieties, as a reference aid. Ollier-Taillefer is very much a family domaine with son, Luc, and latterly, daughter Françoise now playing leading roles in the operation.

The cuvée **Allegro** white is terrific! For some years this has been a precursor of what the white appellation will be like. The basic rosé and red are pleasant enough but the star is the **Grande Réserve** red. Long lasting, with great fruit and structure, the 1998 was thought in January 2003 still to be a year or two from its peak - a view borne out by the unanimous verdict of those at the January 2004 event. Ollier-Taillefer was one of the first signatories to the quasi-organic Trois Tours cuvée. The first vintage under this etiquette, **Castel Fossibus**

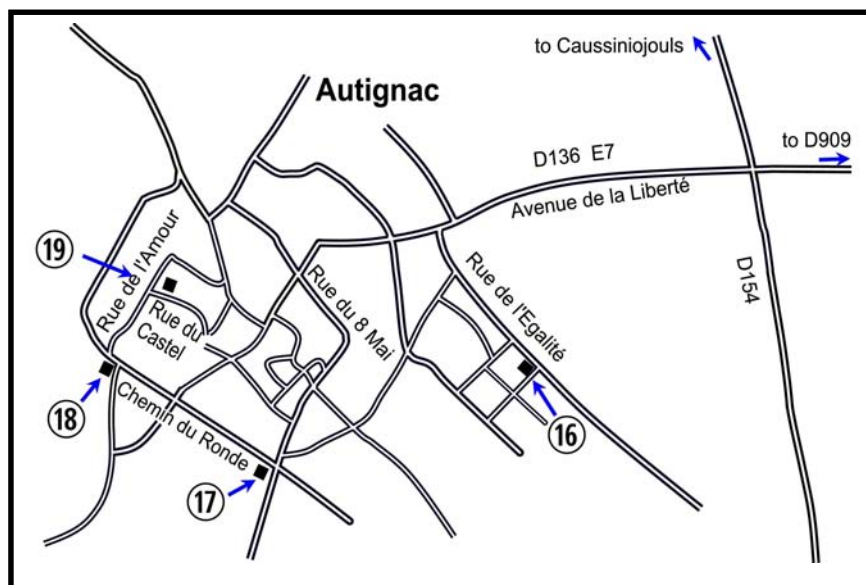
ROUTE 3 - ROQUESSOLS & FOS

1995, has a good nose, lovely balance, and a splendid oaky vanilla tang. Although made to mature slowly, it is already drinking well. In January 2003 the 1998 was beautifully balanced, with lovely fruit - an excellent wine. Ollier-Taillefer is often recommended by French wine writers. Written on our tastings notes for July 2004 is “all great - say no more”!

tel: 04 67 90 24 59
fax: 04 67 90 12 15
email: ollier.taillefer@wanadoo.fr



Route 4 - Autignac



[16] **Domaine de l'Ancienne Mercerie**, is exactly what its name suggests - a former haberdashery, to which the winery is attached at the rear. It is situated at 6 rue de l'Egalité and is also the home of Nathalie and François Caumette. They are a very straightforward and friendly local couple determined to make solid, good quality red wine. As with a number of other independent producers, the Caumettes previously grew grapes for the co-operative. The first vintage on their own was in 2000, which turned out to be a difficult year. Monsieur Caumette told us that, being very conscious of the heavy investment in equipment, they essentially vinified all the grapes of a sufficiently high standard and then blended the outcome with the varying quantities available of each variety. Madame Caumette willingly produced some bottles to taste, and it was fine!

They now produce two Faugères reds: the first, called **Les Petites Mains**, is usually made with a great deal of Carignan but in 2003, because it was such a good year, it has 40% Grenache with much of the Carignan harvest being used

ROUTE 4 - AUTIGNAC

in the longer keeping **Couture** cuvée. In May 2004 we tasted the 2001 vintage of this latter cuvée which has 36% Syrah and equal proportions of the other varieties. Half was matured in barrique and half in the cuve. It was excellent.

tel/fax: 04 67 90 27 02

email: ancienne.mercerie@free.fr

[17] Jacques and Jeanine Pons of **Domaine du Fraïsse**, are long established producers and their wines always show up well in our tastings. They are another popular venue on the annual Leeds Club wine circle pilgrimage. Their cave is on a corner of Chemin de Ronde, on the southern edge of the village.

The Pons' produce a very different style of Faugères at Autignac. The traditional reds seem to age more gently and, when at their peak, they develop a very slight and attractive smoky background taste. Occasionally there is also a slight piquancy. Since 1999 they have developed a top of the range wine, **Fleur de Cuvée**. When tasted in January 2003 it was much appreciated and was well rounded. It had great promise but was still slightly tannic. It was thought that it would be even better in two years time. At the tasting in January 2004 the same views were expressed whilst the Tradition 2000 was enjoyed and ready to drink.

They also produce a very pleasant and unusual Vin de Pays Merlot, and a pleasant fruity rosé, made from Syrah and Grenache. Technical notes are available with the tasting at the winery. They also make a Chardonnay of great character. Even someone who is a member of the ABC fraternity - "anything but Chardonnay" - should try it.

tel: 04 67 90 23 40

fax: 04 67 90 10 20

email: domfraisie@aol.com

[18] Véronique and André Balliccioni of **Domaine Balliccioni** have their cave at 1 chemin de Ronde, next to the Pons' Domaine du Fraïsse. They are recent arrivals on the scene, with their first vintage being 1998. In addition to their Faugères red they also make Coteaux de Languedoc and Vin de Pays (Coteaux de Murviel) reds. They all tasted excellently in May 2005.

ROUTE 4 - AUTIGNAC

tel/fax: 04 67 90 20 31
mobile 06 11 12 02 41
email: ballivin@aol.com

[19] **Domaine des Prés Lasses**, is difficult to find! Its official address is 5 rue de l'Amour but the entrance to the tasting cave is on the other side of the building. Look out for the standard advertising panel on the wall - and then go round to the other side and look for the door bell with the names M. Feigel and M. Ribeton. Their first vintage was 2000 and the Tradition 2000 was pleasantly fruity when tasted in May 2003. Their oaked red, **Les Tabernolles** is mainly Grenache. They also produce a special cuvée, **Le Castel Viel** which spends eighteen months in oak barrels. 2001 was a prize winning vintage, but it was not made in 2002.

tel/fax: 04 67 90 21 19
email: denis.feigel@pres-lasses.com
web: www.pres-lasses.com

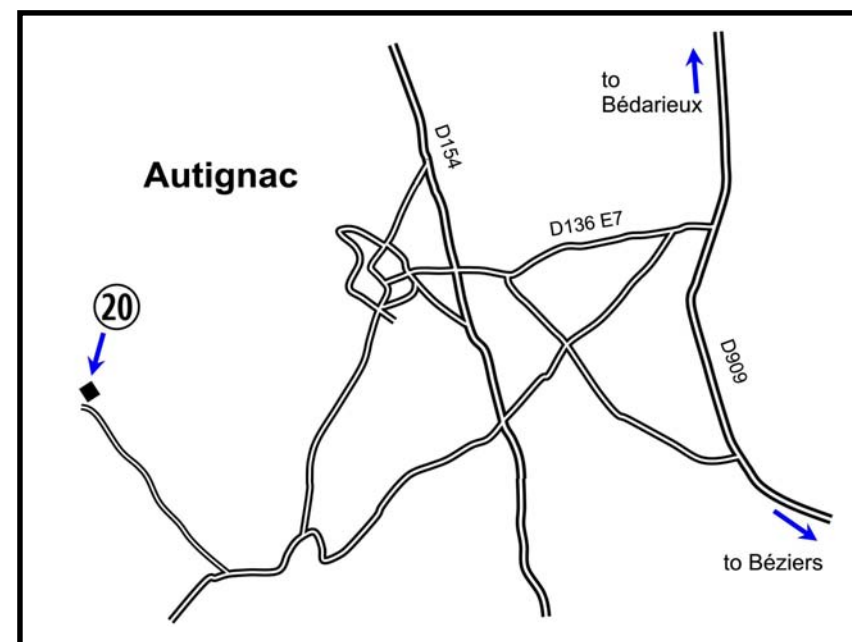
[20] **Château Moulin de Ciffre** is down a signposted track off a minor road 1.5 kilometres west of Autignac village. A large room at the end of the winery, overlooking a stream, has been made into a delightful tasting room. Unusually, three different appellations are produced at Moulin de Ciffre. In addition to Faugères, it has St Chinian and Coteaux de Languedoc. Moulin de Ciffre is a testimony both to the skill of individual winemakers and to the consequences of French inheritance laws. Jacques and Bernadette Lesineau are Bordelais by background. On the death of M. Lesineau's father their Bordeaux estate would have had to be divided between the children. M. Lesineau preferred to be bought out by his brother, whereupon, in 1998 he bought Moulin de Ciffre and began making exceptional wines, transforming its previous reputation for a nondescript product. The Lesineaux are splendid hosts for a tasting at their very attractive location. Incidentally the leaflet produced by them is a model of its type: well laid out, informative and attractive.

They produce six wines, all to a very high standard. A great apéritif Viognier, a St Chinian rosé, St Chinian and Vins de Pays reds, and two terrific Faugères. The basic one "in which the wood goes well with the fruit" needs three to four years to reach maturity, and the **Eole** cuvée, made from Syrah, Grenache and

ROUTE 4 - AUTIGNAC

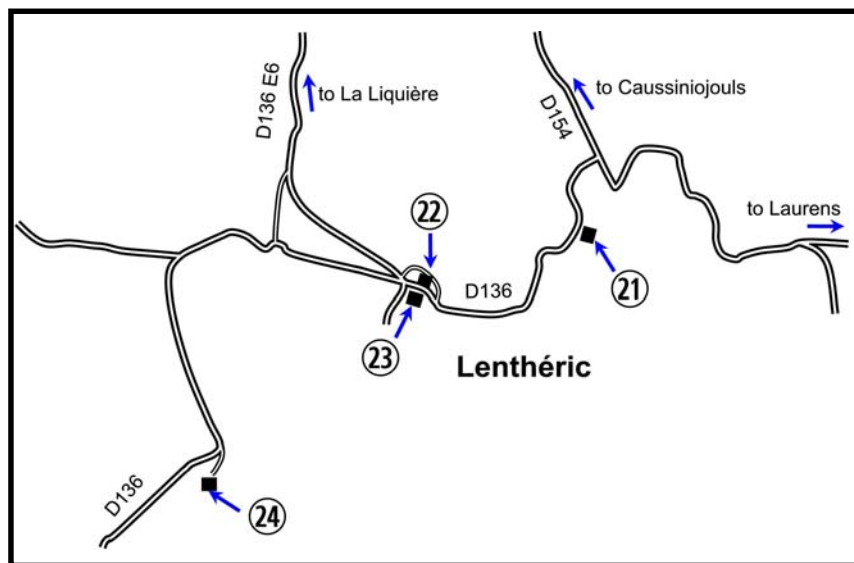
Mourvèdre, matured in barrique, is one of the finest Faugères reds. Our notes talk about it being "excellent, very classy, complex, and well balanced". It needs some four years to develop fully.

tel: 04 67 90 11 45
fax: 04 67 90 12 05
email: info@moulindeciffre.com
web: www.moulindeciffre.com.



Route 5 - Lenthéric and La Liquière

Lenthéric



[21] Frédéric Albaret of **Domaine St Antonin** is another young and relatively new producer - 1995 being his first vintage. He has built a striking new house, with a large and well appointed cellar attached, on the road to Lenthéric from Laurens or Caussiniojols. In May 2004 we tasted his 2001 and 2002 Tradition vintages. They were certainly promising but were still somewhat tannic and need keeping a little longer. His 2001 **Magnoux** cuvée, made with 50% Syrah, was drinking well.

tel: 04 67 90 13 24
fax: 04 67 90 06 43
email: stantonin@wanadoo.fr

[22] **Domaine Léon Barral**, is in the centre of Lenthéric, opposite Château des Estanilles. Didier Barral went to the Côtes du Rhône for training before returning to his native Languedoc. He is an enthusiast who was always deter-

ROUTE 5 - LENTHÉRIC & LA LIQUIÈRE

mined to make fine wine and only to release it to the restaurants when ready to drink. His first vintage was 1993. On one visit, after a tour of the winery, we had a fascinating tasting direct from the barrels. One of the problems of his popularity and of his rapidly growing reputation, is that he has no wine to sell on the spot.

In addition to his standard red he produces a special cuvée, **Jadis**, which, in our experience has invariably been a distinguished and enjoyable wine.

tel: 04 67 90 29 13
fax: 04 67 90 13 37

[23] Michel, Monique and Sophie Louison at **Château des Estanilles** are reckoned by some of the wine writers to be producing the best Faugères red. Originally from Touraine - Madame Louison is from Faugères - ~~Madame Louison was working in Switzerland as an electrician in 1975 when they decided to go back to France and make wine!~~ The late 1970s marked the beginning of the shift from quantity to quality in the Languedoc and, though the future was far from assured, it was a good time to aim at producing high quality wines. A visit to the cellar, in the centre of Lenthéric, to judge for oneself is a very pleasant experience. The Louisons have built a Greek style tasting suite on to their winery! They produce the usual Tradition and Prestige reds, both of which are excellent, but the star is the cuvée Syrah, sold as **Château des Estanilles**, which somehow squeezes into the appellation's rules. When it was first produced sales were limited to three bottles per visitor on subscription! This is, fortunately, no longer the case. This cuvée needs keeping rather longer than the other reds - ideally perhaps five years in all. Mme Monique or Mlle Sophie Louison provide a very generous and informative tasting. One visit was on a viciously hot day and we began with a wonderfully reviving Coteaux de Languedoc white. This is a superbly complex and perfumed blend of Marsanne, Roussanne, Viognier and Muscat, and is strongly recommended. The Estanilles special Mourvèdre rosé is very unusual - and powerful! Also recommended. In January 2004 we tasted a Prestige 1998, which was pleasant, and the **Château des Estanilles** which was superb.

tel: 04 67 90 29 25
fax: 04 67 90 10 99
email: earl.louison@worldonline.fr

[24] Jean-Luc Saur et Fils, **Château Haut-Fabrègues**, is well signposted off the east side of the D136, by a sharp bend in this road, two kilometres south west of Lenthéric. It is sometimes signed as Fabrègues, sometimes as Haut-Fabrègues. Watch out for the home made direction signs! Tastings with M. Saur take place in a beautiful sixteenth century cellar. Jean-Luc's father André, now retired, was a well known character with a dry and laconic humour. Jean-Luc and his son, Cédric, continue the tradition of producing some of the best non-oaked reds and are now also producing some wine in oak. Their straightforward high quality deep and well balanced, dry red needs at least five years in bottle. The cuvée **Gaëlle** - named after Cédric's daughter - is a distinctive red which is well worth waiting some four or five years to drink! It has 80% Syrah and 10% each of Mourvèdre and Grenache.

When tasted in January 2003 the **Gaëlle** 1998 had very good fruit and was much appreciated. We felt that it would probably benefit from being kept for a further two years, but by January 2004 it had developed faster than expected. In May 2004 we tasted three separate years of the Prestige, made with 40% Mourvèdre, 40% Syrah and 20% Grenache. The oakiness of the 2002 was very delicate and attractive; the 2001 had a huge taste, and the 2000 was marked as "superb". They also produce a splendid rosé.

tel: 04 67 90 28 67

fax: 04 67 90 11 17

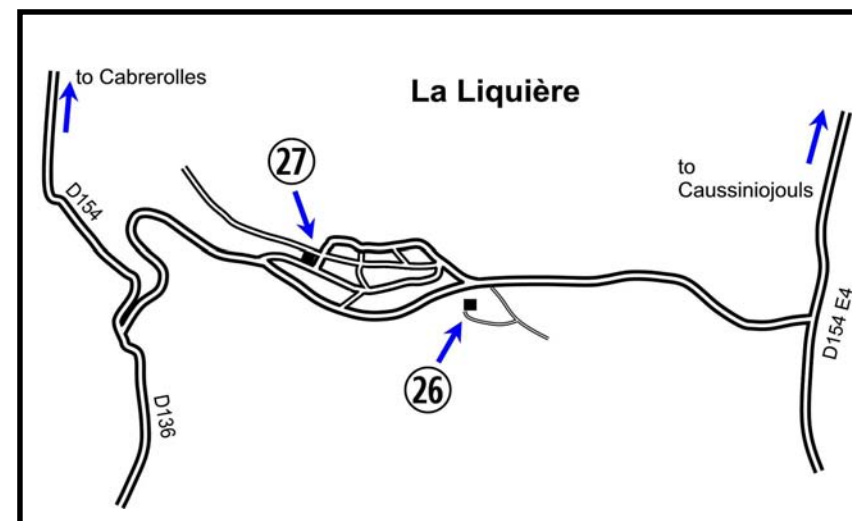
email: jean-luc.saur@wanadoo.fr

web: www.chateauhautfabregues.com

[25] Cédric Saur is also producing wine under his own marque, **La Grange d'Aïn**, at Fontenilles, Cabrerolles. His first vintage was 2003 and his wine is available at Le Cellier de la Vigneronne (see page 54).

tel: 04 67 09 35 84

email: cedricsaur@hotmail.com



La Liquière

[26] **Clos Fantine** is situated in La Liquière - but off the beaten track. At the entrance to the hamlet watch out for the small sign on the left. Follow the track and at the T-junction turn right. The house that comes into sight is Clos Fantine. Olivier, Carole and Corinne Andrieu are more young enthusiasts, they initially only produced reds but have now added a Terret white to their list - reviving a traditional local white grape. Olivier is the practical partner and his sister Carole the oenologue, having done her studies at the Montpellier college. Corinne is the manager.

Their first vintage was 1996. They welcome visitors and will willingly show you around the adjoining winery. The Andrieux are passionate about the intimate nature of wine making. They do everything themselves in order to maintain a close contact with their vines. Their intention has been to make straightforward, honest-to-goodness wines, no frills and no concessions to marketing ploys. Their success is seen in the number of merchants who now make the trek to their door.

ROUTE 5 - LENTHÉRIC & LA LIQUIÈRE

Their reds, both the Tradition and the special cuvée **Courtiol**, are characterised by their huge taste and their length on the palate. These are reds of real Faugères character. In January 2004 the 1998 Tradition was thought to need another year in bottle, but the 1997 **Courtiol** was at its peak.

tel: 04 67 90 20 89

fax: 04 67 90 28 48

[27] Bernard and Claudie Vidal and Sophie Dumoulin-Vidal of **Château de la Liquière**, are in La Liquière, off the D154 at the top of the village. They have recently converted an old cellar just along the top street, on the left hand side, opposite the village hall, into a pleasant and intimate tasting venue. The family has been producing wines in La Liquière since the seventeenth century. Bernard Vidal served with distinction as the chairman of the Faugères Syndicat from 1997 to 2004. On his retirement he commented that Faugères wine “ran in his veins”.

Their best reds are deep and complex in the Faugères style, with yet another variation in the blend of the grape varieties. Matured in oak, they also need some five years in bottle, unlike their **Amandiers** label, which is made to be drunk young. They also make a **Vieilles Vignes**, pressed gently to give it a deep nose and a wonderful strong, fruity and lingering flavour on the palate. This wine is one of the few Faugères wines to be available retail in half bottles. The Vidal Trois Tours marque, cuvée **Cistus** (made from Mourvèdre and Syrah) was one of the first of this quasi-organic special cuvée. In January 2003 the 2001 vintage had a pleasant nose, was very well constructed, and had an enjoyable vanilla tang. Although already drinking well, it will develop still further over one or possibly two years. In May 2004 the 2002 was excellent and was further advanced than earlier vintages. It may only need laying down for a couple of years. The 2003 **Vieilles Vignes**, made with grapes from fifty year old Carignan and Grenache vines, was splendidly tannic but will be excellent in around three years time. The Vidals now have an additional top of the range cuvée. Called **Tucade** this is predominantly Mourvèdre. We tasted it in May 2004 and it was extremely promising. We felt that it would need two years to develop fully.

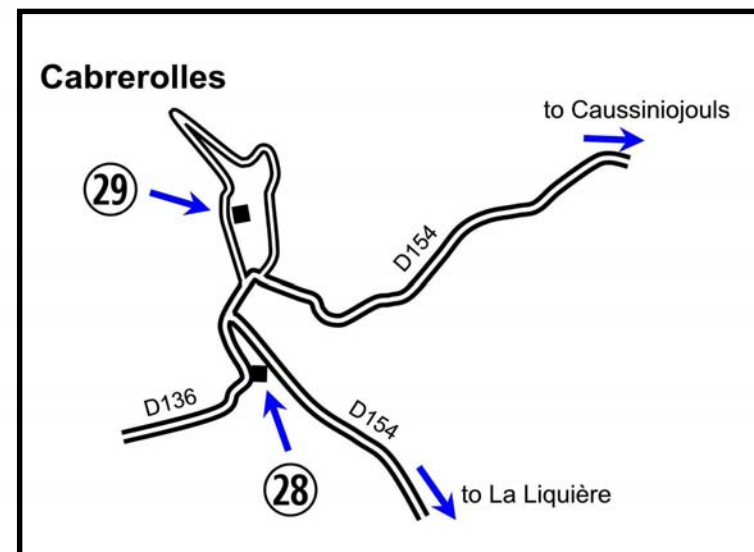
tel: 04 67 90 29 20

fax: 04 67 90 10 00



Route 6 - Cabrerolles and Caussiniojols

Cabrerolles



[28] **Domaine du Météore** is off the D154 from Cabrerolles to La Liquière. Mme Geneviève Coste-Libes' domaine is so named because it includes a meteor crater which is also worth a visit. She produces a deep full red which benefits from up to five years bottle age but which latterly has been very drinkable within two years. In January 2003 the 1999 Tradition was excellent and very much ready to drink. The **Grande Réserve** is tremendous and its oak is very delicate. This is a great wine for keeping for five years, but will last much longer. We had a bottle of the 1996 in January 2004 which was splendid and, happily, needed drinking forthwith. In May 2003 the 2000 was superb and much more forward than expected and in January 2004 the 1998 was very drinkable but would possibly still benefit from a further year.

Mme Coste produces a very pleasant white, which will now carry the AOC label, and makes a high quality, perfumed and delicate Viognier. Also produced

ROUTE 6 - CABREROLLES & CAUSSINIOJOULS

is a very unusual late harvest Viognier, **Ballade d'Automne**, in 50cl bottles which makes a splendid pudding wine. Mme Coste is another of the favourites for the annual Leeds Club visitation. If visiting do not be concerned about the noisy dog; it has not proved dangerous - yet.

tel: 04 67 90 21 12

fax: 04 67 90 11 92

email domainedumeteore@wanadoo.fr

[29] The main cellar of Raymond and Marc Roque, of **Domaine Raymond Roque**, is on the lower road into Cabrerolles, off the D154 road between Caussiniojous and La Liquière. If no-one is visible there is a notice indicating a telephone with which to ring up to the house and the other cellar at the top of the village. Five generations of the family have been producing wine in Cabrerolles for over two centuries and it regularly wins prizes at the Macon Concours. Marc Roque is now very much in charge and, according to Marc, his father now only does the easy jobs! Raymond has produced his own little cuvée, **Palais de Pape**, which, as he enjoys pointing out, is a play on words between 'daddy's palate' and 'Pope's palace'. Raymond Roque was just about our first close contact in the appellation and he sponsored Michael when he was made a Chevalier of the Commanderie du Faugères in 1998.

Domaine Roque is consistently among the very best producers and is one of the big favourites with the Leeds Club visitors. It is surprising that the high quality of its wines is rarely recognised by the big wine guides, though in terms of maintaining its availability, the secret is valuable to those of us who are aware of it.

Raymond Roque's **Grande Réserve** is one of the great Faugères wines. It is slightly oaked and requires at least five years bottle age but stays at its peak for many years beyond that. 1995 is a long lasting vintage with great tannins, 1996 was rather lighter than usual, and there was no 1997. The 1998 vintage was tasted in January 2004 and its potential noted - it needed another two years or so.

They also produce a cuvée **Marc François**, made "in the ancestral fashion" from old vines. It matures earlier than the **Grande Réserve** and is usually at its peak within four years. It is yet another absolutely typical and enjoyable Faugères

ROUTE 6 - CABREROLLES & CAUSSINIOJOULS

red. Recently Marc Roque has become enthusiastic about producing wines organically and his first such vintage, **Cuvée Nature**, using Syrah, Grenache and Mourvèdre, was made in 2002. A recent addition to their range, first produced in late 1997, is a late harvest dessert wine - **Vendage Passerillé**. In the first year the grapes were picked starting on 11th November! Available in very limited quantities it is a sweet, but not sickly, light, and very alcoholic pudding wine. There are other wines to taste at the Roques' and all are excellent value for money. Indeed, if you are one of those connoisseurs who likes to have wine 'on tap', they produce five and ten litres boxes of red, rosé and white. The red costs 27 euros for ten litres! Work it out - it's about £1.50 for the equivalent of a bottle.

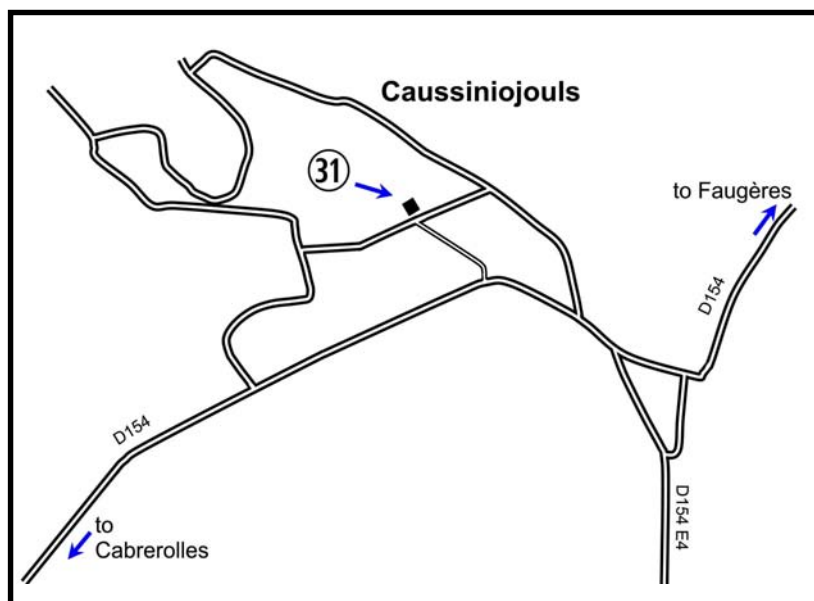
tel: 04 67- 90 21 88 or 04 67 90 24 74

fax: 04 67 90 14 56

email: roqueraymond@wanadoo.fr

[30] Mas d'Arlans is a new producer, based in Cabrerolles, which we tasted for the first time at the 2004 Fête du Grand St Jean. M. Dubriot and M. Bronnet do not yet have a sales outlet in the area, but their wines can be tasted at Le Cellier de la Vigneronne in Faugères. Their first vintage, 2003, was pleasant enough but judgement is reserved.

Caussiniojous



[31] Eric Chabbert at **Château Chênaie**, is a relatively new producer. 1994 was his first vintage produced with his father, André. The sign for the château is on a building at the entrance to Caussiniojous but this merely indicates a bell to ring. This is usually responded to by Mme Chabbert who comes down from her house and conducts one up to the cave. They produce a range of excellent whites and reds and often have earlier vintages on sale at the cave.

M. Chabbert produces whites of character, made to drink with, say, appropriate fish dishes as well as serving as excellent apéritifs. His reds need to be kept for varying lengths of time. In January 2003 we enjoyed the 1997 **Les Douves** which seemed absolutely ready to drink. It is made mainly from Syrah. In May 2003 we tasted the 2000 and 2002 vintages of the same cuvée and found the quality and style very consistent. His top wine cuvée **Oblivia**, made mainly from Mourvèdre, was excellent.

tel: 04 67 23 17 73
fax: 04 67 95 44 98

[32] **Mme Marie-Thérèse Rigaud, Château Anglade**, produces some lighter and pleasant wines. Although the château is in Mme Rigaud's name we have only ever met M. Rigaud. He does not sell from a cellar in Caussiniojous, but a tasting at a cave at the far end of the avenue de la Gare in Laurens can be arranged by telephone call. One year we ended up with an 8am tasting there - the only time we could all manage! It felt rather odd to be tasting a range of excellent red wines at breakfast time. For some years Château Anglade was somewhat of a mystery to us. It appeared to vary between being individually produced and being labelled as from the co-operative. Certainly we didn't manage to meet the producer until M. Rigaud attended the 2003 Fête du Vin. He has produced a number of interesting special cuvées, one of which, **Comète**, was, at 24 euros per bottle, the most expensive Faugères wine direct from the producer.

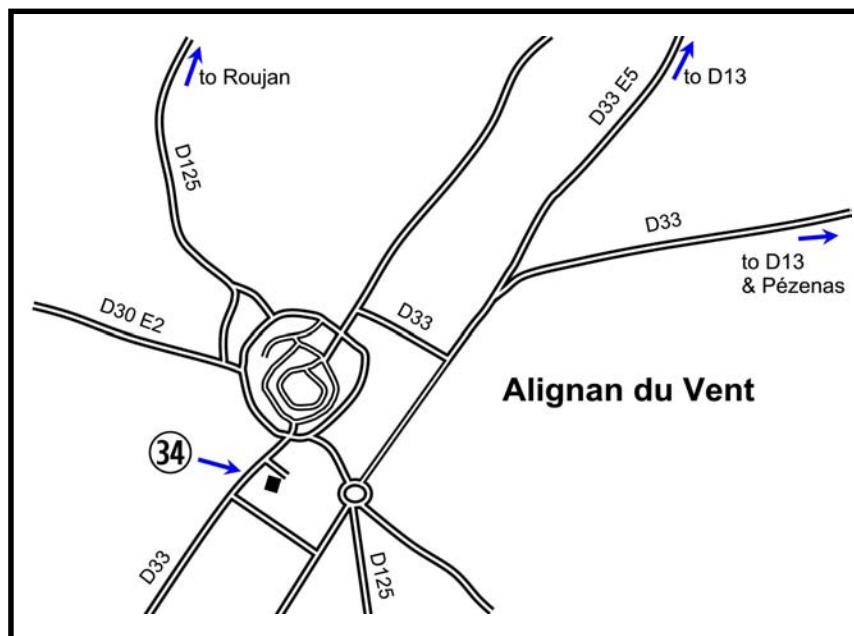
tel: 04 67 90 28 31 or 05 59 84 16 23
fax: 04 67 90 06 28
email: chateau.anglade@wanadoo.fr

[33] **Domaine de Cauvy** is a new producer whose first vintage was in 2001. We found it on sale at the big Languedoc wine warehouse at Saporta, Lattes, and, of course, bought a couple of bottles to taste. It was excellent, but we were unable to find any reference to it in the list of producers, and nor did anyone appear at the various fêtes. However, M. Godefroid at Le Cellier de la Vigneronne stocks their wines and was able to resolve some of the mystery in that the producers were apparently previously part of the Faugères co-operative. He was keen on the two cuvées, **Le Malpas** and **Le Malpas Bois**, and, after tasting them there, so were we. Really big reds, full of flavour. They are hoping to open up a tasting room in Caussiniojous later in 2005.

tel: 04 67 23 80 32
fax: 04 67 23 74 22

Route 7 - The “Offshoots”

Alignan



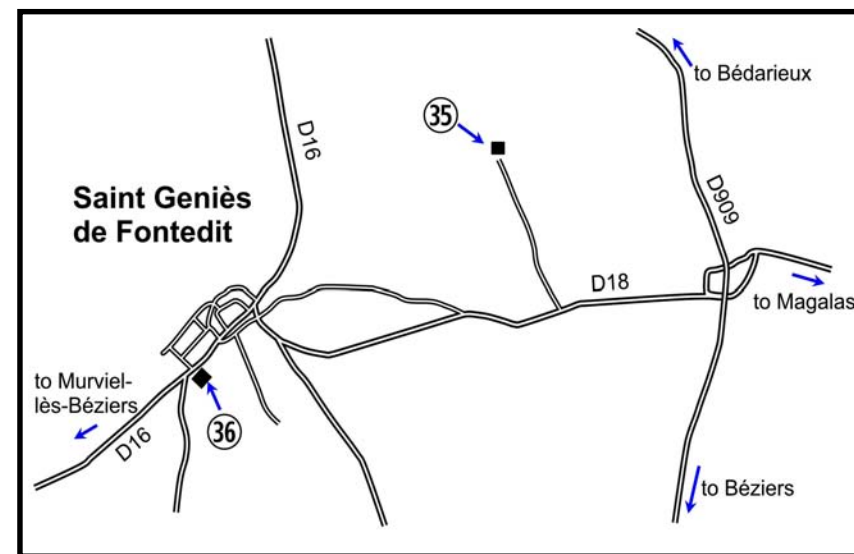
[34] **Abbaye Sylva Plana**, made by Henri and Nicolas Bouchard and Cédric Guy, is part of Vignobles Bouchard, a much larger operation, which has its main base at Alignan du Vent, eight miles south of Faugères on the Pézenas road. The Abbaye Sylva Plana has a winery in Laurens and it may be possible to taste the wines there (see map on page 26). However, the main centre in Alignan du Vent is open for tastings without having to make an appointment. Watch for the sign to Domaine Deshenrys on the D33 road to Béziers at the roundabout in the centre of Alignan. It is in the same direction as is signposted “Déchetterie.” They also produce a number of non-Faugères wines. If the old adage about the plainer the label the better the wine is true, then Sylva Plana is in the front rank. When tasted in January 2003 the **La Closerie 2000** was thought to be well structured and would benefit from a couple of years more to allow it to open up, but the **Songe de l’Abbé 1999** was still very tannic.

ROUTE 7 - THE OFFSHOOTS

However, by January 2004 the latter had already lost much of its tannin and was much more appreciated, with the suggestion that one more year in bottle could well bring it to its peak.

A tasting at Alignan is a pleasant occasion and can include other wines from the same producer. The 2003 vintage, tasted in May 2004, had considerable promise. The basic red, made from the standard varieties apart from Cinsault, was particularly long on the palate. They produce half bottles of this wine.

tel: 04 67 24 91 67
 fax: 04 67 24 94 21
 email: info@vignoblesbouchard.com
 web: www.vignoblesbouchard.com



St Genies

[35] Another “offshoot” is Alain Borda, **Domaine du Rouge Gorge**. As with M. Mégé his wine is produced in Autignac, but his cellar is actually situated within the Magalas commune, though on the west side of the D909 *not* on the Magalas village side! He is on a narrow road off the D18 from St. Genies to

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Magalas. It is well signposted from the D909, Bédarieux to Béziers road, 5.5 kilometres south of Laurens. At the winery there is also a museum of artefacts connected with wine production. His wines are often to be found in local restaurants and he is a faithful attender at the festivals. He produces some lighter reds which tended to be rather tannic. At the May 2004 tasting, his 2002 red had only been in bottle for one week. It was certainly worth tasting again at a later opportunity.

tel: 04 67 36 22 86
fax: 04 67 36 61 24
email: borda@terre-net.fr
web: www.borda-vins.com

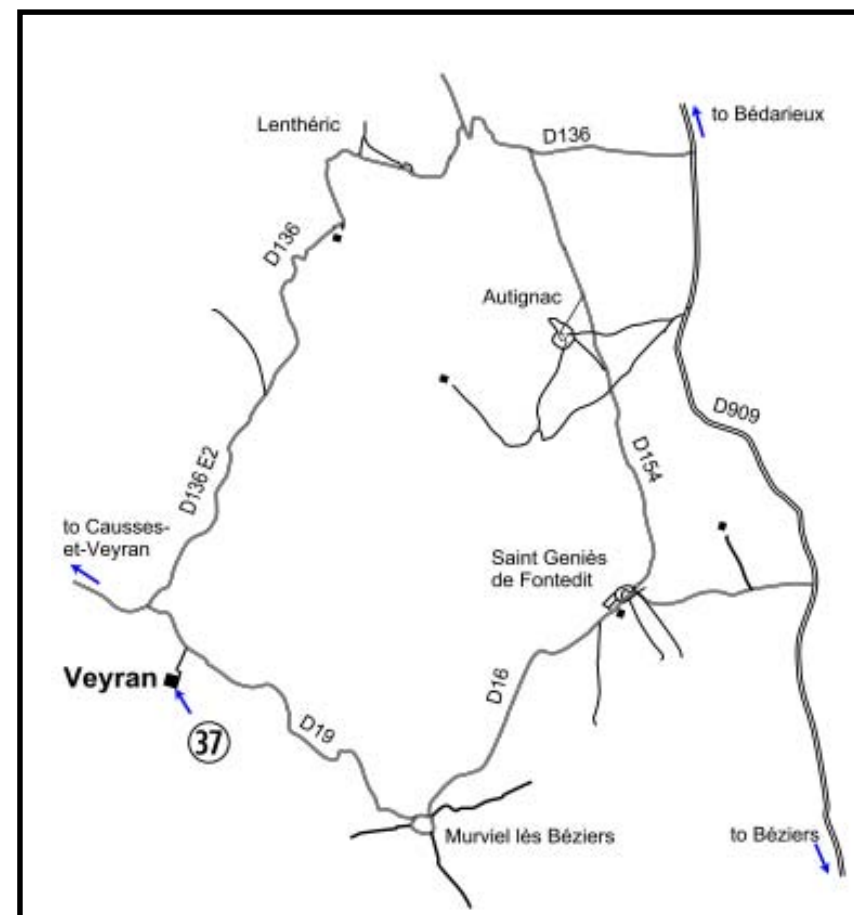
[36] The cellar of **Domaine de la Reynardière**, is actually just outside of the appellation at St Geniès de Fontedit (sometimes signposted as St Geniès le Bas, or just St Geniès). However, the wine is made within the appellation boundaries at Autignac (as it must be to in order to be classed as Faugères). Pierre Mégé has presided at the domaine for many years but is now taking more of a back seat as his son and his nephew are increasingly involved. However, he has recently taken over as Grand Maitre of the Commanderie du Faugères. With his white beard and his trademark broad-brimmed straw hat he is a popular and avuncular figure at the wine festivals.

The domaine produces a wide variety of reds and whites, including a number of non-Faugères wines. All are tremendous value for money. A tasting at the domaine is invariably a long job, not least because of the generosity of the producers. Our impression is that the general quality of Reynardière wines has steadily improved over the years. He is one of the few producers who regularly has older vintages for sale. His Tradition is a typical solid Faugères red and his Prestige is produced both with and without oak, and uses older Syrah vines; nowadays Carignan is not included amongst the varieties used in the blend. In July 2004 we tasted the 1999 oaked and the 2000 non-oaked Prestige, both were excellent and ready to drink. The domaine also makes an excellent, lightly oaked, very dry, Chardonnay, a good Sauvignon Blanc, a prize winning rosé and a fabulous lightish Muscat .

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tel: 04 67 36 25 75
fax: 04 67 36 15 80
email: domaine.reynardiere@wanadoo.fr
web: www.wineweb.com/scripts/wineryfram.cfm?wc13296

Veyran



[37] **Mas Gabinèle** is a bit of a drive but is well worth it. Thierry Rodriguez is often travelling to promote his wines and it is important to telephone before visiting. Follow the signs to Causses et Veyran, either from Lenthéric or from

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Murviel lès Béziers and watch for the sign to the hamlet of Veyran. The cave itself is worth seeing, being the beautifully converted Priory of Saint Sever de Veyran. M. Rodriguez' wines are expensive but magnificent. A relative newcomer - his first vintage was 2000 - he has rapidly made a name as one of the top producers. Meticulous with his methods, and prepared to take a chance on a special cuvée based on a special selection of grapes, and therefore a very small production, he has an attractive range of reds and rosés, including a wonderful rosé dessert wine. He is in partnership with André Balliccioni (see page 35) and much of Mas Gabinèle's vinification is carried out at his premises in Autignac.

We tasted most of the range of wines in May 2003 and were very impressed. Their structure and balance were excellent, with very concentrated fruit. In May 2004 the Tradition 2000 was just about ready to drink. The 2002 had a huge nose and length on the palate and very little tannin. The 2003 had a particularly well focussed structure and will need at least a year to develop. The 2001 vintage of the top of the range cuvée **Rarissime**, with a tiny yield per hectare, made with 40% Syrah, 40% Grenache, and 20% Mourvèdre, was exceptional. Just about ready to be fully appreciated it will also keep for another five years at least.

tel: 04 67 89 71 72

fax: 04 67 89 70 69

email: and throdriquez@wanadoo.fr

web: www.prieuresaintsever.com/en

Further reading

A glance at the wine section of a good local bookshop should quickly demonstrate the burgeoning interest in Languedoc Roussillon wines. After a gap of a decade three new books on the region have appeared. One, *Languedoc Roussillon - the wines and winemakers*, by Paul Strang, published by Mitchell Beazley in 2002 at £25, is an informed and informative work that can almost double as a coffee table book. Another, *The Wines of Languedoc-Roussillon*, by Peter Gorley, published by Hamilton John Publishing, also in 2002, at £17.99 is a more direct and practical guide to key vineyards. *The Wines of the South of France – from Banyuls to Bellet*, by Rosemary George, published by Faber and Faber in 2001 and re-published as *The Wines of the South of France – from Banyuls to St Raphael* by Mitchell Beazley in 2003 at £25, has an excellent section on the Languedoc.

Previously the best book in English on the region's wines was certainly *The Wines of Languedoc-Roussillon*, by Liz Berry MW, published by the Ebury Press in 1992. It is now remaindered and can be found at around £8. Jancis Robinson's superb tome *The Oxford Companion to Wine* has a short but informative article on Faugères but Hugh Johnson's and Hubrecht Duijker's *The Wine Atlas of France* is almost dismissive of the appellation. Most of the annual publications that recommend good buys, including Robert Parker, Oz Clarke, *Which?*, and the French writers, tend either to stick with the same few producers or to go for one of the latest newcomers, the latter perhaps on the basis that should one of them turn out to be a genius they could then claim to have spotted him or her first!

There is also a splendid local history in French, including a great deal on local wine, *Le Faugerois - Terroir du Languedoc*, by the late Mme Jeanne Colignon-Sabatier, published in 1994, and available in Faugères at the local Syndicat and at Faugères village shops.

Useful addresses

Locations are marked on *Faugères* map on page 23.

(A) Syndicat de l'Appellation

Faugères
4 rue de la Poste
Faugères
www.faugeres.com

(B) Syndicat d'Initiative du Faugères

Route de Bédarieux
Faugères

Buying wine in the area

FAUGÈRES

(C) Bel-Air garage

Bel Air
Faugères

(D) Tabac

Route de Pézenas
Faugères

(E) Le Cellier de la Vigneronne

18 route de Pézenas
Faugères (see also below)

FURTHER AFIELD

SICA du Caroux

Route de Saint Pons
Villemagne l'Argentière

Maison de Pays Bédarieux

1 rue République
Bédarieux

Au Chai du Languedoc

14 ave Albert 1^{er}
Béziers

Maison des Vins du Languedoc

Mas de Saporta
Lattes

Maison Régionale des Vins et des Produits du Terroir

34 rue St Guilhem
Montpellier

Restaurants in the appellation

Château de Grézan

Laurens
tel: 04 67 90 22 65

Le Bel Air

Faugères
tel: 04 67 23 19 80

l'Echalotte

Soumartre
tel: 04 67 23 18 05

La Vigneronne (wine-tasting & lunch)

18 route de Pézenas
Faugères
tel: 04 67 95 78 49
www.lavigneronne.com

UK sellers of Faugères

These are sites which, at the time of research, sold Faugères wine from at least two producers:

www.everywine.co.uk
www.picwines.co.uk/
www.devignewines.co.uk
www.amphorawines.co.uk
www.jeroboams.co.uk/
www.abvintners.co.uk
www.terroirlanguedoc.co.uk

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Laborie Fouisseau, Domaine	Véronique Bergan-Vaquer	28
Liquière, Château de la	Bernard Vidal & Sophie Dumoulin	42
Météore, Domaine de	Geneviève Coste-Libes	43
Moulin de Ciffre, Château	Jacques & Bernadette Lesineau	36
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Ollier-Taillefer, Domaine	Alain, Luc & François Ollier	32
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St Antonin, Domaine	Frédéric Albaret	38
Sauvanes, Château de	Vincent Vallat	27
Sylva Plana, Abbaye	Henri Bouchard & Cédric Guy	48
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