



DELECTABLE

From Lalaland to Languedoc – Ellen Clifford

What do my hometown and the south of France have in common, aside from a Mediterranean climate and an affection for wine? Surprisingly, I found myself drawing a lot of comparisons on a recent trip to the region.

Ever since moving to Los Angeles, I've posited that anyone that says they don't like Los Angeles hasn't found the part of it that's for them. You may hate the traffic. I'll allow that, but I pray you don't write off my adopted city as a superficial wasteland. Yes, we do have plenty of that. In fact, just today a friend (???) told me that if I weren't cute, I wouldn't be in his car. So good news! If a symmetrical face is your jam, we've got a jammery for that.

Go deeper, and we also have a vibrant and diverse variety of cultures, and with that comes myriad neighborhoods each with their own music, food, art, and vibes. And if you like easy parking and don't mind things closing early and less vibes, we've got the valley. Personally, I'm a city rat at heart. I'm discomfited by fitting in, so I live in between downtown (late night spots and cigarette smoke!) and Koreatown (more late nights, but with signs that I can't read and cooler grocery stores).

Oh right. The Languedoc. Much like Los Angeles, there is something, or should I say some WINE for everyone. Red, white, rosé, sparklers, dessert wine...and there's such a wild array of terroirs, all leading to ever so many iterations of what it means to be a Languedoc wine. NO ONE can straight up say they don't like Languedoc wines unless they don't like wine. In fact, when the group I was with was blind tasted on a set of 6 wines and asked to pick a favorite, nearly every wine had its fan.

Furthermore, much like Los Angeles, Languedoc is misunderstood—perhaps BECAUSE of its great diversity. So, like Los Angeles, it has double downed on neighborhood pride. We Angelenos have our favorite taco stands. They've got the schists of Faugères versus those of Saint-Chinian. Faugères' are older, but does age equal beauty? Taste wines from both and you make the call.

Both areas are not in the wine limelight and both are devoted to changing that fact. Both the Languedoc and Los Angeles feel (and are) justified in raising their wine profile. Not for fame and fortune, so much as for the love of the land, even if for Languedoc "the land" means cold gusting wind garrigue, and for Los Angeles it means warm Santa Anas and cannabis. For what can't they do when the synergy of peoplepower and viticulture collide.

Like Los Angeles, Languedoc is adapting, going with what feels right. And it's paying off. You know how Los Angeles is now home of the best bagels, according to the New York Times? A Languedoc winery owner (who originated from Belgium, so it's not hometown pride influencing his opinions)

said he no longer wants Bordeaux after drinking Languedoc. Then added, “Burgundy, yes.” True, none of us want to stop drinking Burgundy. But what I’m saying is Languedoc wines are here to compete.

Before getting into the wines, how about some quick facts: the Languedoc is in the south of France, just west of Roussillon, which as I wrote of earlier here . It’s Mediterranean. It’s sunny 300 days of the year. Windy 200 of them. The soils range from limestone to schist to sandstone to clay. Some sites are more influenced by proximity to the ocean and some, further inland, by elevation. The elevation is part of what accounts for the array of wines I encountered.

Here I present to you some of my favorite wines of the trip, and which Los Angeles neighborhood they correspond to. Maybe you’ll see yourself in some of them too.

LIMOUX X SILVER LAKE

If you got into hanging out in Silver Lake years ago, and are still into it, you may be a Limoux person. You are likely artsy and maybe you were there before it was ‘cool’, but you still secretly believe that brunch bubbles are desirable. So, may I suggest we pair Silver Lake with 2019 Domaine J. Laurens Clos des Demoiselles Tete de Cuvée Crémant de Limoux ? It is made with Mauzac, so keeping it original. Also, Limoux is where sparkling is said to have originated, made by the Benedictine monks. This tastes like a patio wine that has been upgraded. It has all the lightness and fruit fun of a basic betch you’d blend into a mimosa until WAIT! Then you get elements of toast and nuts—it’s its own thing.

SAINT CHINIAN GRENACHE BLANC X PASADENA

Pasadena is quiet, but pretty, but varied—as is Saint Chinian . The soils there vary from limestone to schist, and the wines all show up a bit different themselves, albeit I found all the whites to have a level of quiet confidence. Wines to sip when you go to chill out and have a peaceful life. I feel like Pasadena is a place I’d retire. So if you are in the mood to be chill, try Domaine Saint Cels Saint Chinian Mille Etoiles . This is a Grenache Blanc/Roussanne blend where you’ll find floral and citrus vibes along with a hint of anise. Also, I am not ready to retire to Pasadena, but if I did, I’d take a glass of this and enjoy some solitude.

PICPOUL DE PINET X VENICE

I can and will devote an entire column to Picpoul de Pinet at some point. This is, I believe, the only French wine region with a grape in the name. All of the Languedoc runs along the Mediterranean. Certainly, there is that influence elsewhere, but especially in this particular wine which lies close to

the Thau lagoon. This is where me and my cohorts would later board a boat for a taste of open waters and (for everyone but me, the vegetarian who has yet to buy that oysters don't feel anything and even a vegan can eat them) platters of oysters. How I love Picpoul. It is sea. It is sailing. It is salt. It is sexy. Its freshness should speak to a seaside town, so I paired Domaine Félines Jourdan Première Cuvée Picpoul de Pinet with Venice. It's ocean and sun and as eccentric as this wine's label. So citrusy but also herbs galore, maybe even dill. You get a little flower, a little stone fruit (white peach) on top of the citrus punch. I want to go surfing with this wine. Or at least drink it on a boat again. #goals

2016 CHATEAU CASTIGNO X HOLLYWOOD

There are two Hollywoods. There is the IDEA of it: the place where stars are made and stars shine in the sidewalk. The "Hollywood" that puts on a show. And then there is the actual vicinity of Hollywood, which is not my cup of tea. It feels full of dirt and desperation and tourists. Let's look past that. I am choosing to pair wine with the CONCEPT of Hollywood. Old school glamour. The 2016 Chateau Castigno looks fancy. The label for this Carignan/Grenache/Syrah blend screams RED CARPET! On the nose it hints at the dark side of the biz, with earthy notes saying...try and stay grounded, kid. You won't. On the palate you get "glamorous blueberries are achievable"! And they are, and it will keep you going even when your agent hasn't called in a month, which is represented by the slightly tart, balsamic vinegar notes. As I write this, I am realizing that Hollywood is bitter, and Hollywood is glitz, and even when you are down, you are gonna say yes to another glass of Hollywood.

PECHE MÉNEL X MALIBU

Maybe this shows that I don't know my Los Angeles beaches intimately, but some of the best I've enjoyed have been in Malibu. It's an interesting area in that there's much money living there, but then there are the surfers who are just there for the waves. And then the seafood lovers. All of which brings us to Peche Ménel, a winery from two sisters. Their wines scream at the freshness of the ocean, just....easy, breezy, fresh fresh fresh, especially the whites. But then the reds all have an aura of wealth, in particular the blend with 70% Syrah, the rest Grenache, of which I tasted a couple of vintages and the 2009 and 2013 were WORKING. There was blueberry fruit that had both pop and depth and...well also look for the Peche-Ménel whites, my note on the first one just said "silk and soigné".

CLOS BAGATELLE X GRIFFITH PARK

Okay so the park isn't a neighborhood except it sorta is. Just minutes out of the city (unless you are coming from Santa Monica, in which case could be longer) you can find some solace in nature. And you can have...l'aventures. Or 2017 Clos Bagatelle L'aventure. It's half Grenache and half Mourvèdre, and I tasted it in a vineyard where the garrigue was blowing my mind—the air can smell like this? Naturally? So you may have to climb pretty high in Griffith to get past city smells, but it is possible. In

the meantime, if you are a park person, try this wine and you'll inhale freshness and elegance, herbal tea leaf, bay leaf, mint, and damp earth. The tannins are as I like them, assertive not aggressive. It all finishes with slight tobacco and blackberry.

FAUGERES ROSÉ X DTLA ARTS DISTRICT

In the arts district you find...artists, but you also find a feeling of unity. Everyone there is arting hard, together. In Faugères, they are wine artists, and there is profound co-op cooperation. I chose a rosé to tie Faugères and Los Angeles together because we are a rosé all year town, and I wish people knew how good the rosé from the Languedoc is. I'm going for Mas Olivier Faugères Mourvèdre Syrah Rosé - a delightful Cinsault/Grenache ditty full of candied strawberry with a hint of spice and freshness.

VIN DOUX NATURELS X BEVERLY HILLS

I think of VDN wine as indulgence. It's too rich for day to day, but when you treat yourself to it, you don't want to admit it, but you enjoy yourself. When I've been Beverly Hills' Wally's, I realize I am marinating in money, but I kinda don't mind it. I feel like I'm supposed to sneer at it, and people still think they aren't supposed to love sweet wines, so I am pairing Beverly Hills with Domaine Ampelhus Muscat de Lunel Vin Doux Naturel . It is floral, it is sweet, it is...dessert. But it remains fresh enough that I'd take it into a bubble bath, which in my imaginary Beverly Hills life, I slip into before dinner at Spago. Sexy, indulgent rebellion against the Brut strength of dry wine proponents.

UNEXPECTEDLY TASTY PAYS D'OC AIRPLANE WINE X MY NEIGHBORHOOD

I like to call my neighborhood Silver Lake's cousin. We're like the other lake; we are officially Westlake. (Not to be confused with the valley's Westlake Village). The unfortunate and devastating crisis of unhoused individuals in the United States is no stranger to Westlake. Macarthur Park offers a beautiful space for the entire Westlake community. There is a beloved, walkable, dive-ish bar in one direction and a Starbucks and Target about a half mile from me in the other. I do so cherish my walkable bar. When people visit my neighborhood, they are usually more favorably impressed than they thought they'd be. Ergo I'm reviewing the plane wines that bookmarked my voyage. I expected nothing from and got...the totally quaffable Pays d'Oc IGP level wine Air France served. Pays d'Oc is an IGP, as opposed to an AOC, meaning there are less strictures on the winemaking. But there are some fun and affordable AF (like Westlake if gentrification would just slow the F down) options out there. Don't turn your nose up at my neighborhood, don't write off Pays d'Oc.

En route it was a 2018 Maison Castel Pay d'Oc Chardonnay . Even from a paper cup and at room temp it showed a lush freshness. I got butterscotch, golden apple tempered by fresh honeydew, and

an almost minty spark. It paired well with re-watching *The Bodyguard*. Hot tip, that movie holds up. RIP Whitney. I will always love you.

On the way home, I was surprised by a 2018 Madame de Sainte-Hélène Pays d'Oc Vermentino-Grenache . WHO THE F DRINKS VERMENTINO IN COACH? This happy writer, that's who. It was texture balancing acid with a smidge of seashell. Paired with re-watching *Inception*. Was I dreaming this wine? Fortunately not.

There are so many wines and neighborhoods I wish I had time to fit into this article. But I'm hoping the world gets on board with Languedoc. And maybe now that we have a hot bagel scene (what else could a city dream of), people will stop turning their nose up at Los Angeles.