

Vineyard views



PURE SCHIST

The vineyards of Faugères perch majestically above the city of Béziers, in the Hérault *département*, in the foothills of the wild Cévennes mountains. Vines cling to gently undulating hills, interspersed with woodland and *garrigue* scrub. The sometimes fiercely hot Mediterranean summers are tempered by the influence of forests, and a vineyard altitude of up to 400 metres.

Trendy terroir

Faugères is best known in wine circles for its schist soils; some of France's most ancient earth. Schist is high fashion these days: even a little of it is enough to set wine journos' pulses racing, and Faugères is one of the few wine *appellations* in the world (along with Priorat in north-eastern Spain) that can boast an almost homogeneous schist *terroir*. Deep fissures in the soil allow vines to plunge their roots several metres deep, in search of vital water reserves; sucking up the beguiling mineral flavours for which Faugères is renowned.



In the hills of eastern Languedoc, **Dominic Rippon** explores one of southern France's most singular terroirs

Dominic's choice

DOMAINE OLLIER-TAILLEFER

Tel: (FR) 4 67 90 24 59

olliertaillefer.com

Choice wine 1:

Faugères Blanc "Allegro" 2020

An unoaked blend of roussanne and vermentino (rolle) grapes with a touch of white carignan. Fresh, ripe citrus aromas with floral hints. Wonderful presence on the palate; fat and mouth-filling. A great partner for smoked trout.

€13.50 / bottle

Choice wine 2:

Faugères Rouge "Castel Fossibus" 2017

Syrah, mourvèdre and grenache grapes are joined by a little carignan, "to retain freshness as the wine ages". Long maceration and oak ageing for this full-blooded red. Floral yet earthy aromas, mixed with cherry and liquorice. Balanced and suave on the palate.

€19.50 / bottle

DOMAINE DE

L'ANCIEN MERCERIE

Tel: (FR) 4 67 90 27 02

Choice wine:

Faugères Rouge "Les Petites Mains" 2019

One of the best value reds in Faugères, blended from old vine carignan, syrah, grenache and a touch of mourvèdre, for elegance. The wine is organically made and unoaked, showing pure ripe dark fruit aromas. The palate is powerful and grippy, with impressive concentration.

€12 / bottle

Faugères has only enjoyed *appellation d'origine* status for its red and rosé wines since 1982, partly because the area was historically better known for the production of Fine de Faugères – the local brandy, which is currently undergoing a renaissance of its own. Red grapes are syrah, grenache noir, lledoner pelut, carignan, mourvèdre and cinsault, 79% of which make robust, yet elegantly perfumed red wines. Meanwhile, 17% of Faugères is dry, food-friendly rosé.

On the up

Faugères had to wait until 2005 to make *appellation*-controlled white wines, from the roussanne, marsanne, grenache blanc, vermentino, viognier and clairette grapes. Although these whites represent a mere 4% of Faugères's total wine production, they are quickly gaining a reputation for their combination of exotic richness and cool finesse.

The impression of unspoiled sun-baked wilderness in the Faugères vineyards is reflected



Above: Domaine Florence Alquier's range

Left: Exploring the Faugères countryside

in their healthy credentials: 58% of land is farmed organically, and 40% is already certified organic – compared with a 9% average across France.

But Faugères's ambition in this regard is only in its infancy. The *appellation*'s president,

Nathalie Caumette, sees an eventual full conversion to organic viticulture (which she describes as “imperfect”) simply as an “intermediate objective” for Faugères's vineyards, on the way to an even braver future in harmony with nature. ❤️

PHOTOS: DIABOLO BOHEM, MATHIEU PRIER

CHÂTEAU LA LIQUIÈRE

Tel: (FR) 4 67 90 29 20
chateauliquiere.com

Choice wine:

Faugères Rouge “Nos Racines” 2019
 Unusually, this wine is made with (the once maligned) carignan grape, from 100-year-old vines, grown at an altitude of 350 metres; blended with 5% grenache. Deeply coloured, with sloe, flowers and Marmite aromas. Plump and silky on the palate, with all of carignan's trademark freshness.

€14.10 / bottle

*Buy in the UK from thewinesociety.com

DOMAINE FLORENCE ALQUIER

Tel: (FR) 6 01 78 43 29
domaine-florence-alquier.com

Choice wine:

Faugères Rouge “Rieutord” 2017
 Excellent, complex Faugères, softened by five years bottle age. A thoughtful blend of 50% syrah, 30% carignan, 15% grenache and 5% mourvèdre, with some oak ageing. Earthy and mineral on the nose, with floral cherry notes. Full and explosive in the mouth. Great with roast lamb or game stew.
 €16.80 / bottle



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