

FRANCE

FRENCH *lessons*

THE GAILLAC APPELLATION
IMPRESSES WASHINGTONIANS WITH
ITS UNDER-THE-RADAR GRAPES AND
DIVERSE WINEMAKING

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Gaillac producers pride themselves on their use of indigenous varieties.



Wines of Southwest France Ambassador André Compeyre, Clément Serres from Domaine la Croix des Marchants, Chloe chef/owner Haidar Karoum, and Alain and Brigitte Cazottes at the Gaillac wines luncheon in Washington, D.C.

what

Gaillac might lack in prolificity it more than compensates for in stylistic diversity and a wealth of indigenous varieties: That was the takeaway shared by André Compeyre during a trade lunch at Chloe in Washington, D.C., early last November.

Compeyre, a Wines of Southwest France Ambassador as well as Sommelier and Manager at Aldo Sohm Wine Bar in New York, is also a native of Toulouse, which lies 60 kilometers west of this region to watch. “Gaillac is one of the oldest appellations and one of the most diverse,” he told the audience of industry professionals. “It can produce any style of wine: white, red, rosé, and sparkling.”

The region’s 100 growers and two major co-ops are collectively responsible for producing 20 million bottles per year. (By comparison, Burgundy makes 200 million bottles and Bordeaux a staggering half-billion annually.) Gaillac wines are emerging as a great source of value, which, as Compeyre pointed out, isn’t automatically synonymous with wallet friendliness. “Value doesn’t necessarily mean cheap; it could be a \$60 bottle that’s comparable to a \$250 one in a more well-known appellation,” he explained.

What makes Gaillac a sommelier’s and wine geek’s dream region is its unapologetic preference for unfamiliar, little-grown local grapes over more prominent international varieties. The white wines—which have been classified as an AOC, labeled Gaillac Dry White or Gaillac Premières Côtes, since 1938—rely mainly on crisp and vibrant, if not overly expressive, Mauzac. Also important are Loin de l’Oeil, which lends full body, low acidity, and stone-fruit notes, and Sauvignon Blanc and Muscadelle, which are used to boost aromatics.



Attendees saw the diversity of Gaillac’s wines—including bubbly made in the *méthode ancestrale* from the indigenous white grape Mauzac—during lunch at Chloe in Washington, D.C.



Various cheeses have an affinity for the whites and reds of Gaillac.

For AOC Gaillac red wines, Brauacol is the most important grape, touting concentrated flavors of red currants and soft tannins. Duras has a grippier structure, while Prunelart allows Brauacol to be a bit showier. And just as in other French regions, Syrah bottled solo or in blends offers signature dark-fruit and black-pepper notes.

Then there are Gaillac's sparkling wines made from Mauzac, which kicked off the afternoon. In Gaillac (as in neighboring Limoux), winemakers employ the *méthode ancestrale*, halting fermentation by chilling the juice down to the point where the yeast becomes inactive. After the wine is bottled and warms up again, the yeast continues its process of feeding on the

sugars, resulting in trapped bubbles. Compeyre pointed out that these wines can be a little challenging, as their sweetness and effervescence vary. It's that inconsistency, however, that makes them an exciting gamble.

As Chloe chef/owner Haidar Karoum served smoked-salmon rillettes, guests sipped the dry and fresh NV *Domaine du Moulin Mauzac Méthode Ancestrale* and the semi-sweet, white flower-tinged 2017 *Domaine la Croix des Marchands Méthode Ancestrale*. Three whites were then poured with the first course, a salad of autumn greens, cucumbers, and radishes in Sherry vinaigrette.

The 2017 *Domaine des Terrisses Terrisses* demonstrated how *Loin de*



l'Œil can express dusty, dry apricot notes and Mauzac can lend structure as Sauvignon Blanc adds aroma and freshness. The 2017 *Domaine Croix des Marchands Fraîcheur Perlée* incorporated the region's three main white varieties in relatively even amounts,



Chloe chef/owner Haidar Karoum set the table for a multicourse luncheon paired with the sparkling and still wines of Gaillac.

along with a touch of carbon dioxide for energy and slight fizz. The 2016 Domaine Plageoles Ondenc, meanwhile, featured Ondenc, a little-known grape that accounts for just 1 percent of Gaillac's wines. Funky with some oxidation, it warranted comparison to orange or amber expressions.

Four reds were served with a choice of main course: hanger steak with creamed winter greens, blistered red shishito peppers, and crispy onions or potato gnocchi with roasted wild mushrooms, butternut squash, Brussels sprouts, and black-truffle butter. Dark fruits and spice were the hallmarks of the 2015 Domaine des Terrisses Terre Originelle; made with Brauacol, Prunelart, and Syrah, it was fermented

for four weeks and aged in 25 percent new oak. Similar notes showed in the 2014 Domaine la Croix des Marchands Vieilles Vignes, produced from equal parts Syrah and Brauacol grown on old vines, hand-harvested, and aged nine months in oak to maintain the fruit. The 2015 Château Palvié Les Secrets du Château Palvié was a round and soft Syrah blended with a touch of Brauacol and aged 14 months in oak. We also tried the 2015 Château Lastours Rouge Tradition, which got some of its austerity and tannic structure from the inclusion of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot (Brauacol kept it focused).

The luncheon finished with a pairing of three wines and cheeses. The tangy 2016 L'Enclos des Braves Gourmand

Sec, a half-and-half split of Sauvignon Blanc and Loin de l'Oeil, was a no-brainer for the Pipe Dreams goat cheese. Grayson Meadow Creek and Cambozola Blue vied for the attention of the 2016 Domaine des Terrisses l'Orée des Terrisses, in which Duras (80 percent) amped up the tannins yet kept things balanced. The nose was dominated by violets and dried tea leaves.

Finally, the 2014 Domaine du Moulin Cuvée Florentin—produced entirely from Brauacol—mirrored the style of a dry, dusty, tannic Cabernet, with creamy cheese complementing it as well as a marbled piece of meat would have. Commit the aforementioned grapes to memory, as Gaillac clearly makes wines to watch. ■■