

# Wine Spectator

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JULY 2003

## Tasting Report

## Languedoc and Roussillon

By Kim Marcus

For hearty, pure-tasting reds at affordable prices, few regions in the world are as exciting these days as the large swath of vineyards in southern France known collectively as Languedoc-Roussillon.

Until about 20 years ago, Languedoc and Roussillon chiefly made insipid wines that were geared for mass consumption in the French domestic market. Quantity, rather than quality, was the operating premise for too many of the region's vintners.

The emphasis on quantity was spurred partly by the ease with which grapes, especially Carignane, could be grown and ripened in the warm plains bordering the Mediterranean. While there have been improvements, to find the best wines you'll have to look to higher ground, which in most cases means the Coteaux du Languedoc.

The highest-scoring current release is the Château La Roque Coteaux du Languedoc Pic St.-Loup Cupa Numismae 2000, which scores 93 points and costs just \$18 a bottle, making it one of the best red wines bargains in the world today.

A complete tasting report begins on page 67. The following chart lists, alphabetically by producer, the 307 wines tasted for this report. For complete reviews, please refer to this and previous Buying Guides or our Web site, [www.winespectator.com](http://www.winespectator.com). "\$NA" means price not available.

### LES CAVES DU SIEUR D'ARQUES

Cabernet Sauvignon Vin de Pays d'Oc Vichon 2001	\$7	81
Chardonnay Vin de Pays d'Oc Vichon 2001	\$7	85
Limoux Domaine Prat Ségur 2000	\$16	86
Limoux Toques et Clochers Autan 2000	\$NA	90
Limoux Toques et Clochers Haute Vallée 2000	\$NA	89
Limoux Toques et Clochers Océanique 2000	\$NA	87
Merlot Vin de Pays d'Oc Vichon 2001	\$7	83
Sauvignon Blanc Vin de Pays d'Oc Vichon 2001	\$7	79

# Limoux: White Wines Take the Lead

While the Languedoc is known mostly as a red wine-producing region, there is a district where white wines excel. It's called Limoux, and it lies south of Carcassonne in high, rolling country within sight of the Pyrenees.

Traditionally, Limoux has been known for producing sparkling wines (local folklore recounts that Dom Pérignon first learned how to make a bubbly in an abbey there). Spurred by the forward-thinking *Sieur d'Arques* cooperative, Limoux growers are now harvesting good to high quality grapes for still-wine production, primarily Chardonnay.

White grapes do well in Limoux because it lies at the juncture of the warm, dry Mediterranean climate and the cooler, moister Atlantic climate. Limoux's upland topography also keeps the climate cooler than its southerly location would suggest, helping Chardonnay (and Mauzac, a local white, as well as Chenin Blanc) to ripen evenly.

*Sieur d'Arques* is focused on helping its 450 growers improve their viticultural techniques. The most widely available of its wines is the *Vichon Vin de Pays d'Oc Chardonnay* (2001: 85, \$7); it purchased the brand after Mondavi gave up on its Languedoc ventures that vintage. However, *Sieur d'Arques*' best Chardonnays, made under the *Tocques et Clochers* label, are not yet available in the United States. I rated the 2000 wine, from the *Autan terroir*, 90 points, or outstanding, in a blind tasting. It showed delicate fruit and honey flavors that rival those of *premier cru* Chablis and is quite an accomplishment for a co-op, which in France generally make low quality bulk wines.

*Sieur d'Arques* is also home to the best white currently imported from the

Languedoc, the *Trisser Chardonnay Limoux 2000* (89, \$35), which has ripe pear and tropical fruit flavors mixed with mineral and smoky notes. This is the first release of a partnership between Sue-Hua Newton of Napa's Newton winery, Bruno Lafon of the Languedoc's *Domaine Magellan* and Pierre Meurgey of Burgundy's *Domaine Champy*.

Their friendship led to the wine's creation. "It was something like a dream for Sue-Hua to make a wine in France," Lafon says. *Trisser* is made in a dedicated space in the co-op's cellar and is a blend of top lots drawn from Limoux's growers. Lafon chose the *Sieur d'Arques* cellar because the co-op offered the best equipment and knowledge of the local wines and *terroir*.

Limoux can make high quality reds as

well and was recently awarded AOC status for them beginning with the coming vintage, 2003. The best so far is named *Baron'arques*, a joint venture between the Baron Philippe de Rothschild wine group, of *Château Mouton-Rothschild* fame, and *Sieur d'Arques*.

The inspiration for the wine came from Baroness Philippine de Rothschild, who has a home in the region and became intrigued by Limoux's quality potential. The wine is a blend of what Rothschild calls Atlantic grapes (Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot) and Mediterranean varieties (Grenache, Syrah and Malbec). The 2000 *Baron'arques* (89, \$40) shows its Bordeaux pedigree via its refinement, while its Mediterranean heritage comes through in its spiciness. —K.M.



Surrounded by red wine country, Limoux holds fast to its white wine roots. Though once known mostly for its sparkling wines, the region is finding success with its quality still wines made from Chardonnay grapes.