

FRANCE: Provence

## Inland Provence

Côtes de Provence and Coteaux Varois Wines from the Hillside By Elizabeth Gabay MW



Vineyards blend in with Mediterranean pines in the Massif des Maures near Vidauban. © Mick Rock/Cephas.



The map above does not cover the complete extent of this micro-region. On the left its position is indicated within the main wine region.

To see the locations for recommendations in this Guide, use the on-line maps. These fully clickable Michelin maps allow you to plot routes and print locations. This service is accessible only to Gold subscribers.

### Visit an area of friendly, family-owned wine estates

An east-west corridor, running along the northern limit of the Maures hills, comprising the main N7 road (the Roman Via Aurelia), the A8 motorway and the railway line, makes the central belt of Provence markedly more urban than the surrounding region. Along this route lie the old towns of Saint Maximin, Brignoles, Le Luc and Vidauban. All can boast Roman and medieval ruins - indeed, Vidauban has only recently recovered from its main street being excavated by archaeologists.

The majority of wine estates lie to the north of this corridor, benefiting from the river Argens and its tributaries, and this is the main area for exploration in inland Provence, with Lorgues a good base from which to start. There is no historic wine centre although Les Arcs is home to the Comité des Vins. Vineyards and the remains of mulberry orchards (once an important part of the local silk industry) surround the villages, while further north towards the Alps the landscape is more heavily wooded and less densely populated. The family-owned estates are friendly to visit and most are well sign-posted with an open door policy of being able to drop in to taste and buy.

### Geography

The entire vineyard region of Provence extends from Les Baux in the west to Nice in the east and as far north as the Gorges du Verdon. In the north and east the soils are chalk based, to the south and west granite (crystalline based) with volcanic soils around Fréjus. The Mediterranean climate provides over 3000 hours of sunshine each year and little rain. The mistral wind and, sometimes violent, thunderstorms are the main threats to the vineyards. There are however, subtle differences in climate depending on proximity to the sea, mountain ranges, river valleys and altitude (with the highest vineyards reaching up to 500m). Harvest in the northerly, inland vineyards may be a good month later than along the coast.

The inland Provence region stretches roughly eastwards from the River Var valley north of Nice to just west of Saint Maximin la Sainte Baume – a region of dense Mediterranean forest – umbrella and Aleppo pines, holm oak and gorse on rolling hills and craggy escarpments while river valleys are instantly recognisable by the tall oaks, planes and poplars and greener pastures. There is still some evidence of the pre-second world war agriculture but the wheat fields and the pastures for migrating sheep on their way to and from the northern hills, are slowly being replaced by vines. The sheep and goats were an important part of the landscape, clearing the dry undergrowth and thus reducing the risk of fires.

## BASIC INFORMATION

### ● How to get there

The fastest route to Provence from Paris is the A6 to Lyon and the Rhône Valley. From here continue south along the A7 and either carry on to Marseille or, take the A8, which will take you straight to Cannes and onto Antibes and Nice. The coast roads are best avoided during the peak holiday periods as it becomes very congested. By train, the TGV runs from Paris to Nice stopping at Avignon, journey time 2 hours and 40 minutes, Marseille 3 hours, and (although the line between Marseille is at standard speed) Cannes 3½ hours. The region is also serviced by several international airports: Marseille, Toulon, and France's second largest airport, Nice.

### ● Useful information

Conseil Interprofessionnel des Vins de Provence  
Maison des Vins, RN 7, 83460 Les Arcs sur Argens

Tel: 04 94 99 50 10

Email: [www.vinsdeprovence.com](http://www.vinsdeprovence.com)

Website: [www.vinsdeprovence.com](http://www.vinsdeprovence.com)

Brignoles Tourist Office  
Carrefour de l'Europe, 83170 Brignoles

Tel: 04 94 69 27 51

Email: [info@officedetourisme-brignoles.com](mailto:info@officedetourisme-brignoles.com)

Website: [www.officedetourisme-brignoles.com](http://www.officedetourisme-brignoles.com)

Comité Départemental de Tourisme du Var  
1 Boulevard Foch, 83003 Draguignan

Tel: 04 94 50 55 50 Fax: 04 94 50 55 51

Email: [info@cdtvar.com](mailto:info@cdtvar.com)

Website: [www.tourismevar.com](http://www.tourismevar.com)

### ● Main appellations

#### Côtes de Provence

More than 13 different grape varieties are allowed for this AC, which is the largest in Provence and has a great variation in vineyard sites. There is a patch of vineyards between Cassis and Bandol and then the vineyards extend along the Mediterranean coast from Toulon to Saint Tropez, where it can be particularly windy, and continue to just east of Saint Raphael. Some of the vineyards are also found scattered southeast of Aix en Provence, whilst the main part of the AC stretches inland from the coast, into the valleys of the Massif des Maures and further north along the river plains, with only one AC vineyard in the Alpes Maritimes along the Var river. Rosés total around 80% of production, reds account for about 15% and there is a little white too.

#### Coteaux Varois

This large appellation, in the Var department, stretches from around Brignoles over a limestone area to the foothills of Montagne Sainte Baume. Mainly rosé wines are produced with some reds and whites. The reds and rosés are blends using mainly Grenache, Mourvèdre, Cinsault and Carignan with a very little Cabernet Sauvignon. The quality of the reds is variable partly because altitude causes ripening problems for certain grape varieties. The whites are blends of Rolle, Sémillon, Ugni Blanc, Clairette and Grenche Blanc although better quality producers are increasingly making almost 100% varietal whites.

#### Vin de Pays

There are a number of Vins de Pays designations that can be used by producers within this micro-region. The most commonly used are the departmental ones of Vin de Pays du Var and Vin de Pays des Alpes Maritimes (centred around Vence, Saint Jeannet and Tourettes sur Loup). Rules are more flexible than for AC wines, so many wines are from a single grape variety that would not be permitted under the AC rules. Quality and style varies tremendously.

## ● Main grape varieties

The grapes used in this micro-region are mainly local so it is possible to find wines made from blends with barely a trace of Cabernet, Chardonnay or Sauvignon Blanc.

### Red

#### Mourvèdre

This late ripener thrives well in the warm, sunny climate of Bandol, south of this micro-region, but elsewhere it can add a hint of greenness to the blends. The older the vines, the more successful this wine is. In good years it provides extra structure and fruit concentration in blends with Grenache and Cinsault.

#### Grenache

Widely planted variety used in red wine blends and also rosés. Adds depth and richness.

#### Syrah

Adds longevity to typical Grenache, Cinsault, Mourvèdre blends, and is occasionally also partnered with Cabernet Sauvignon.

#### Cinsault

A high yielding variety that is resistant to drought. Results in light soft reds and is particularly suitable in rosé blends since it adds freshness, alcohol and fruity aromas.

#### Carignan

Ancient Mediterranean variety that is robust and productive resulting in wines with high acidity, tannins and colour that are best blended with Grenache and Cinsault. Considerable amounts of Carignan have been ripped up as a solution to the general wine surplus problem.

#### Cabernet Sauvignon

Sometimes used in blends, providing colour, structure and aroma.

#### Tibouren

Indigenous, dark-berried variety that adds elegance and herby aromas to rosés in particular. However, this variety is an early ripener and prone to problems if there are early spring frosts. As a result it is more successful along the coast and in warmer sites.

### White

#### Rolle

This variety, identical to the Vermentino of Corsica, is used particularly for aromatic whites. It is increasingly being used as the dominant component in quality wines with sometimes a small percentage of Sémillon, Chardonnay or Ugni Blanc. Its structure, which often comes from a second less developed grape bunch grown next to the main fully ripened bunch, provides extra acidity.

#### Ugni Blanc

An Italian variety (Trebiano) originally imported and planted by the papal court in Avignon. Used in white wine blends to provide an acidic edge.

#### Clairette

Traditional variety that thrives on dry soils. Tends to result in flabby wines, and therefore often blended often with Ugni Blanc to provide a perfumed fruit character.

#### Bourboulenc

Ancient white variety, cultivated throughout southern France, thought to have originated from Greece. Blends well with Grenache Blanc. Used rarely in Central Provence.

#### Marsanne

More commonly associated with Roussanne in the Rhône. Its good productivity has increased its popularity. Modern wine making techniques have ironed out its tendency to produce flabby wines. Useful blending ingredient especially with Rolle. Used rarely in Central Provence.

#### Sémillon

Adds texture, body and richness to blends.

#### Viognier

Growing in popularity as part of a blend or as a Vin de Pays varietal wines.

#### Chardonnay

Frequently blended with Rolle, especially in the white wines of Bellet (in the Coastal Provence micro-region).

#### Muscat

Used in small amounts in a blend to give perfume and increasingly in sweet wines.

## ● Main wine styles

### Reds

These range from serious Rhône style Syrahs to opulent New World style wines. During the autumn and winter these wines come into their own with regional hearty meat stews. The reds are, on the whole, robust – the fresher styles for drinking young but with an increasing number of good wines for ageing.

### Dry whites

Generally with round herby fruit for drinking young, apart from the growing number of well-balanced, more acidic wines from the northern part of the region many of which benefit from careful barrique fermentation and ageing.

### Sweet whites

Whilst not officially recognised by the appellation regulations, there are an increasing number of producers making a range of sweet wines (Thuerry, Roubine, St Jeannet, St Joseph among others) which are well worth looking out for.

### Rosés

Generally dry and delicate with a pale pink/onion skin hue. The traditional rosés can be beautiful, but to my mind are usually better in the glass than in the mouth – apart from the odd exception or on seriously hot, leisurely days.

## ● Food specialities

Truffles: in late autumn and winter, truffles are a particular speciality of Provence, and are used in a wide range of dishes. Match with a spicy, herbal Provence red unless serving truffles with *brouillade* (see below).

Brouillade: a delicious starter or snack of creamy scrambled eggs. The deluxe version has truffles included - a particularly successful accompaniment is a rich, creamy white wine.

Pistou soup: a tasty bean and vegetable soup flavoured with pistou. Rosés go particularly well with this soup.

Ratatouille: the classic dish of aubergines, courgettes, tomatoes and peppers cooked in olive oil, with the addition of garlic and aromatic herbs, such as rosemary.

Lamb: roasted or stewed.

Civet de Lapereau: rabbit stew.

Daube: rich beef stew

Morue: salt cod either served as Brandade de Morue – a purée of salt cod - with potatoes or as the fish in Le Grand Aioli.

Le Grand Aioli: a large platter of poached salt cod and boiled vegetables served with the garlic mayonnaise (aioli). The best versions do not over boil the vegetables and have a good selection (not just potatoes!).

Tourte de Blettes: a filling pie made either *salée* (savoury) made with *blatte* (swiss chard), cheese, pine nuts and raisins, or *sucré* (sweet) with *blatte*, pine nuts, raisins, orange peel and sugar

Goats' cheese: either mild and fresh, or mature and pungent.

Tapenade: a paste of olives, capers and anchovies – served with bread or raw vegetables – often as an aperitif with a glass of chilled rosé.

Anchoiade: Warm anchovy paste with olive oil and garlic into which you can dip raw vegetables.

Desserts: not a big dessert area, but dried and candied fruits, honey and nuts feature in nougat, ice cream and tarts as well as more imaginative innovations such as lavender ice cream.

## ● Main towns and villages

### Brignoles

A medieval town with the local museum housed in the former palace of the Counts of Provence, it has benefited from the recent construction of a by-pass. A turbulent history of wars and plagues during the 16th century destroyed some of its medieval heritage, but prosperity since Louis XIV (who visited with his musketeers) has allowed the town to retain its commercial position. As well as trade in leather, silk, soap and bauxite, Brignoles was famed for its plums.

### Saint Maximin-La Sainte Baume

Despite the traffic congestion from the N7, the atmosphere of this town is quite different from many other Provençal towns largely due to the very large medieval basilica in the centre of town. It is rare to find gothic architecture on this scale in the region, which gives a feeling of northern France, transferred to the south! Prosperous from centuries of pilgrimage and with a big church centre, there are plenty of interesting buildings and roads to explore.

### Lorgues

Only a few years ago this was a sleepy medieval market town, but recent urban policies have encouraged rapid expansion. The Tuesday market is big and often very crowded. Luckily the old narrow streets are too small for much traffic, so once inside the town it is still a pleasant place to explore. Pick up a leaflet for the guided walk around the fountains and *lavoirs* (washing-places) including a rare, old well used for market garden irrigation. For a more strenuous walk climb the hill marked by the Stations of the Cross to the chapel and circle back following the line of the now forgotten local railway.

### Vence and Saint Paul de Vence

Vence is a traditional hilltop town, preserved by tourism. A big emphasis on Matisse who came to live there and other artists who followed suit – the town makes an interesting and artistic break from visiting the vineyards. However, to my mind, both towns suffer overly from tourism, especially in the summer season. The Matisse Museum is in Cimiez, Nice.

### Grasse

THE town to go to for perfume. Tours of the factories and vast perfume shops for the main houses of Galimard, Fragonard and Molinard. Sniffing perfume is a completely different art to sniffing wine! All three big perfume houses are very well sign-posted in town and the shops can be very crowded with coach loads of tourists – tours are available in most languages including Russian and Japanese. To be quite honest, each factory visit and perfume shop is very similar and the first place you find usually receives the visit – hence the competitive sign-posting. Fragonard also has a perfume museum in Boulevard Fragonard and a separate clothes and jewelry museum in Rue Jean Ossola.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Wine producers to visit

#### Domaine des Alysses

Address: Le Bas Deffens, 83670 Pontevès

Tel: 04 94 77 10 36 Fax: 04 95 77 11 64

Email: [domaine-des-alysses@wanadoo.fr](mailto:domaine-des-alysses@wanadoo.fr)

Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:33:12N (43.55334) Longitude: 6:4:4E (6.06772)

Jean Marc Etienne and his wife, both teachers, set up their small vineyard (at 380m altitude) in the mid 1970s. Amongst the first in the region and early advocates of organic viticulture, they have continued to remain outside the commercial circuit. Sheltered from the hotter Mediterranean weather by the Massif du Bessillon to the south, their white wine (largely Chardonnay with some Grenache Blanc and Ugni Blanc) is a perfect illustration of how their cooler climate (with harvests a month behind the coast) and chalkier soils favour greater acidity; their rosés combine full dry fruit and fresh acidity and their red wines are aged in old barriques (no new wood here) and are just opening out ready for drinking at around five years old. Lower yields and great concentration of fruit mark these wines out. Note that wine tasting is in the cellar and during the winter months it can be cold. Mr Etienne is also mayor of neighbouring Pontevès and is a mine of information on the area.

#### Château La Calisse

Address: D560, 83670 Pontevès

Tel: 04 93 99 11 01 or 04 94 77 24 71 Fax: 04 93 99 06 10

Email: [contact@chateau-la-calisse.fr](mailto:contact@chateau-la-calisse.fr)

Web: [www.chateau-la-calisse.fr](http://www.chateau-la-calisse.fr)

Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:33:38N (43.56054) Longitude: 6:1:49E (6.03014)

Situated just to the north of Domaine des Alysses, Patricia Ortelli bought the domaine in 1991, and since 1998 it has been certified organic. Madame Ortelli is an exuberant vigneron – her passion for her wines bubbles over as she talks of her likes and dislikes. Her premium range, Etoile, aged in barrique, is definitely of interest, and her white wines yet again illustrate the region's suitability to this colour.

Useful information: Tasting and visits by appointment only.

#### Château Margüi

Address: Quartier Margüi, 83670 Chateaufort

Tel: 06 10 26 56 25 Fax: 04 94 77 30 34

Email: [philguillanton@yahoo.fr](mailto:philguillanton@yahoo.fr)

Web: [www.chateaumargui.com](http://www.chateaumargui.com)

Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:30:35N (43.50968) Longitude: 6:2:22E (6.03943)

Situated in the valley of the river Argens, just to the south of the Massif du Bessillon, this terroir is fractionally warmer than that at the above two estates and is also proving to be good for wines. This old estate was abandoned until it was bought by Marie-Christine and Philippe Guillanton in 2000. They set about replanting the vineyard and had their first vintage in 2004 – so it is still early days. But the wines from the 2005 vintage were certainly good (especially their red with 70% Syrah, 30% Cabernet with its opulent, almost New World character) and their modest enthusiasm is encouraging. Definitely an estate to keep an eye on.

## Château Miraval

Address: 83570 Correns

Tel: 04 94 86 39 33 Fax: 04 94 86 46 79

Email: [fanny@miraval.com](mailto:fanny@miraval.com)

Web: [www.miraval.com](http://www.miraval.com)

Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:28:41N (43.47800) Longitude: 6:1:52E (6.03108)

Another organic vineyard from this very 'bio' region. An historic site in its own right – with pre-Roman and Roman connections, a medieval monastery and one time home to the Prince of Naples. At the end of the 19th century, Joseph Lambot, the inventor of reinforced concrete, lived here and unsurprisingly the wine tanks are made of concrete lined with epoxy resin. Today the estate also houses a famous recording studio where many big name bands come to record in idyllic surroundings. Fountains, an aqueduct and a moat provide a lush oasis. The vineyards are located at 350-400m altitude. The Rolle-based whites again reflect the benefits of a cooler climate and chalk based soil while the reds have an almost New World richness and intensity. Not a small family concern and so lacks the more intimate welcome, but the wine quality plus the historic interest makes it worth the visit.

Useful information: Tasting and sales from Monday to Friday 10.30-16.00 and until 18.00 by appointment.

## La Mascaronne

Address: Flassans-sur-Issole, 83340 Le Luc en Provence

Tel: 04 94 86 39 33 Fax: 04 94 86 46 79

Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:23:3N (43.38415) Longitude: 6:15:23E (6.25633)

Currently a difficult vineyard to find. At Le Luc follow signs for Flassans sur Issole. At the sign for Domaine Saint Bernard turn left, drive up the track past Domaine Saint Bernard and continue until you reach Domaine La Mascaronne. With the same owners as Château Miraval and the same *oenologue*, this vineyard only makes rosé and red – leaving the production of white wine to Miraval. Recently Mascaronne has seen major building works – renovating the cellar, winemaking facilities and tasting room – but all is due to be ready soon. The rosé is standard Provencal fare, but the red and reserve red Guy Da Nine are both excellent. The latter is 100% Syrah and only made in top years. The 2000 is currently available at €24.

Useful information: Telephone to make an appointment.

## Commanderie de Peyrassol

Address: N7, 83340 Flassans sur Issole

Tel: 04 94 69 71 02 Email: [contact@peyrassol.com](mailto:contact@peyrassol.com)

Web: [www.peyrassol.com](http://www.peyrassol.com)

Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:22:12N (43.36999) Longitude: 6:13:25E (6.22356)

This vineyard is worth visiting for its history alone – once a Templar stronghold, the cluster of medieval buildings at the heart of the estate is a long way from the hustle and bustle of the modern world and the nearby N7. From the summer of 2008 a guided tour of the art work scattered around the vineyards will enable visitors to walk around the vineyards and get a feel of the domaine. In the cellar look out for the stunning chandelier made of broken wine-bottles!

## Domaine Gavoty

Address: Le Grand Campdumy, 83340 Cabasse

Tel: 04 94 69 72 39 Email: [domaine.gavoty@wanadoo.fr](mailto:domaine.gavoty@wanadoo.fr)

Web: [www.gavoty.com](http://www.gavoty.com)

Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:24:26N (43.40722) Longitude: 6:12:51E (6.21404)

Owned by the Gavoty family since the revolution, this estate has remained true to its traditions and produces good quality Provencal wines. The rosés have more fruit and character than many from the region while the reds reflect the fashion of the 1980s to replant with Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon – these vines are now established and yielding rich intense fruit. The Gavoty family have strong musical traditions- the main label shows a harpist and the top *cuvée* is called Hautbois (oboe). Along these lines the family host numerous concerts during the summer months.

Useful information: Tasting cellar open Monday-Saturday 08.00-12.00 and 14.00-18.00. Walks, horse-riding and mountain biking possible in the vineyards.

## Domaine de Sarrins

Address: Saint Antonin du Var, 83510 Lorgues

Tel: 04 94 72 90 23 Email: [lessarrins@aol.com](mailto:lessarrins@aol.com)

Web: [www.chateaudessarrins.com](http://www.chateaudessarrins.com)

Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:29:36N (43.49320) Longitude: 6:21:45E (6.36256)

Owned by the Paillard family (Champagne Bruno Paillard), the vineyard and winemaking is now run by the son Aymeric Paillard – a keen young winemaker who is happy to admit that learning to make wine in Champagne has meant his approach to Provencal wine is probably a little different. This is very much to the estate's advantage as each variety, site and blend is viewed with curiosity and excitement, and the same old traditional blends are not slavishly followed. M. Paillard is busy this winter doing up part of the cellar to create a wine tasting room to be ready for spring 2008. The rosés are traditional, while the predominantly Rolle-based whites and the reds, both aged in barrique, have a serious quality about them making them stand out from the crowd. The estate's name comes from the legend that somewhere on the domaine is buried a Saracen captain with all his loot! Numerous holes exist amongst the trees bearing testimony to the locals' search for the treasure.

Useful information: Advance appointments are essential.

## Domaine Valette

Address: Route de Draguignan, 83460 Les Arcs sur Argens

Tel: 04 94 73 30 55 Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:28:23N (43.47318) Longitude: 6:29:2E (6.48376)

Pierre Vivet changed his lifestyle in the early 1980s when he gave up being an engineer and decided to make a go of the family vineyards. Like many other Provencal growers, the grapes had been sent to the local cooperative, but for the past 20 years Pierre and his wife Marie Jo have been making a traditional range of well-structured Provencal wines. Their premium range, Haute Restanque is consistently enjoyable. Since 2006 the second generation, Michel has been making the wine; the third generation is now learning to appreciate the vineyards on walks with his grandmother!

## Château de Rasque

Address: Route de Draguignan, 83460 Taradeau

Tel: 04 94 99 52 20 Fax: 04 94 99 52 21

Email: [mail@chateau-rasque.com](mailto:mail@chateau-rasque.com)

Web: [www.chateau-rasque.com](http://www.chateau-rasque.com)

Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:27:17N (43.45480) Longitude: 6:25:41E (6.42798)

The very interesting *maitre de chai* (cellar master) Yann Cherise, originally from Condrieu in the Rhône Valley, runs the estate along organic principles and makes an interesting range of wine. His favourite is the rosé because it is a difficult wine to make; his white is 100% Rolle, harvested late to get greater complexity and character than most standard Provencal white wines and his two reds appear to be designed to create debate. The Pièce Noble red is apparently generally preferred by male drinkers and is more austere in style whereas the Clos de Madame red, as the name suggests, is generally preferred by women and is more intense and concentrated. Needless to say not all women or men agree with this, but it is impossible not to discuss further!

## Clos Saint Joseph

Address: Le Savel, 06710 Villars sur Var

Tel: 04 93 05 73 29 Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:56:5N (43.93467) Longitude: 7:5:20E (7.08899)

The only Côtes de Provence vineyard in the Alpes Maritimes, this vineyard sells 90% of its production to restaurants around Nice and a mere 10% to those who beat a track to the cellar door. Situated in the Var valley a long way from the main vineyard trail, this domaine is not well known, and does require some exploratory spirit. Add to that the lack of signposts - follow the signs for the local HLM (social housing estate) and *gendarmerie* (police station) and you will soon see that this vineyard is a well hidden secret. However, Mr Sassi, and now his son, have been making excellent wines for a number of years, taking advantage of the considerably cooler climate of the area to produce clean fresh wines, even in 2003. The 2007 vintage saw the first rosé production due to demand from restaurateurs – an elegant wine, quite different from the more herby offerings of central Provence. Both his red and white wines age well and he also makes a late harvest sweet wine and a Madeira style wine.



## Domaine des Hautes Collines de la Côte d'Azur

Address: 800 Chemin des Sausses, 06640 Saint Jeannet  
 Tel: 04 93 24 96 01 Email: [vignoble.stjeannet@club-internet.fr](mailto:vignoble.stjeannet@club-internet.fr)  
 Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:45:4N (43.75098) Longitude: 7:9:31E (7.15852)

The oldest established vineyard of the Vin de Pays des Alpes Maritimes designation, this vineyard is a lesson in winemaking history and worth visiting even if just to marvel at how M. Rasse and his family have safeguarded the regional tradition of ageing both the rosé and red wines in large glass demijohns out on the road come sun or snow. The rosé has real character and is elevated to more than just a summer quencher; the white wines are fermented and aged in barrique; and the red wines are full bodied and fresh despite their unusual maturation. A sweet wine made from grapes allowed to dry on the vine is made and in years when the autumns are damp (unfortunately increasingly rare) a second sweet wine is made with botrytis. A third sweet wine is made similar in style to Madeira. M. Rasse is encouraging several other winemakers in the area to preserve the unique traditions of this area – until the 1950s the hills around here were covered in vines and flowers (for the neighbouring perfume industry) but are now given over to villas. The method of making the wine here is one of the region's best kept secrets.

## Places to stay

Although there are some excellent grand hotels in the area, Provence is not, on the whole, traditional hotel territory. The vast majority of visitors own second homes, stay in rented villas or in one of the numerous bed and breakfasts (*chambres d'hôtes*) available. Apart from the chains of hotels, few have air conditioning.

### Hotel Le Couvent Royal

Address: Place Jean Salusse, 83470 Sainte Maximin la Sainte Baume  
 Tel: 04 94 86 55 66 Email: [contact@hotelfp-saintmaximin.com](mailto:contact@hotelfp-saintmaximin.com)  
 Web: [www.hotelfp-saintmaximin.com](http://www.hotelfp-saintmaximin.com)  
 Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:27:12N (43.45329) Longitude: 5:51:49E (5.86352)

Amongst the more grand and formal hotels is this one with a difference. Created within the old convent attached to the basilica (and thus centrally located to visit the town), the hotel has retained the old stone walls, tiled floors and big vaulted ceilings as part of its decor. The 67 rooms are in the former monks' cells – beautifully decorated and full of style. The restaurant has not been tried but looks formal with a modern, ornate twist on local classics.

Useful information: Rooms: €85-€153; breakfast €12; parking €9.

### La Petite Auberge de Tourtour

Address: Route Draguignan, 83690 Tourtour  
 Tel: 04 94 70 57 16 Fax: 04 94 70 54 52  
 Email: [mail@petiteauberge.net](mailto:mail@petiteauberge.net)  
 Web: [www.petiteauberge.net](http://www.petiteauberge.net)  
 Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:35:8N (43.58551) Longitude: 6:18:20E (6.30566)

A pretty Provencal villa with swimming pool and an excellent restaurant (around the fire in autumn, on the terrace in summer). Very much a family affair, the Jugy family give a personal touch to the hotel.

Useful information: Rooms: €55-€130; breakfast: €10. Closed end October to mid March.

### Bruno

Address: Campagne Mariette, 83510 Lorgues  
 Tel: 04 94 85 93 93 Web: [www.restaurantbruno.com](http://www.restaurantbruno.com)  
 Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:28:25N (43.47360) Longitude: 6:22:20E (6.37229)

Six large, beautiful rooms are available in the house next door to the restaurant (see 'Places to Eat'). The range of prices is from the smallest and 'simplest' room to the largest and grandest suite.

Useful information: Rooms: €100-€360; Standard breakfast €15, *petit déjeuner à la truffe* €30 – in which Bruno's wonderful egg dish, *brouillade au truffes* is included.

## La Sarrazine

Address: Chemin du Pendedi, 83510 Lorgues  
 Tel: 04 94 73 20 27 Web: [www.lasarrazine.com](http://www.lasarrazine.com)  
 Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:29:17N (43.48804) Longitude: 6:21:19E (6.35534)

This luxury *chambres d'hôtes* is within walking distance of the medieval town of Lorgues with its fabulous Tuesday market, and also, just within walking distance of restaurant Bruno. Three comfortable rooms, with en suite facilities, large garden, swimming pool and tennis court.

Useful information: Rooms: €85–€115 including breakfast.

## L'Enclos

Address: 13 Rue de la Résistance, 83510 Lorgues  
 Tel: 04 98 10 13 31 Email: [info@enclos.net](mailto:info@enclos.net)  
 Web: [www.enclos.net](http://www.enclos.net)  
 Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:29:37N (43.49348) Longitude: 6:21:48E (6.36346)

An imposing *maison de maitre* (mansion) in the centre of Lorgues, renovated by architect Michel Blanchard and his wife Colette, with an eclectic mix of 18th century architectural detail and modern art. A grand atmosphere with plenty of style – the four bedrooms and bathrooms are big, spacious and full of light. This is an elegant *chambres d'hôtes* for those who are more poetic and happy to forget the modern world – there are limited mod cons in the bathroom, no lift to the third floor and no TV.

Useful information: Rooms: €95-€110; breakfast: €7.50.

## The Frogs' House

Address: 35 Rue du Saumalier, 06640 Saint Jeannet  
 Tel: 04 93 58 98 05 or 06 28 06 80 28 (mobiles) Web: [www.aubergedesbaous.com](http://www.aubergedesbaous.com)  
 Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:44:53N (43.74800) Longitude: 7:8:38E (7.14376)

Owned by a young and enthusiastic couple, Corinne and Benoit, this hotel-cum-*chambres d'hôtes* is very much part of the local community. Benoit is from the village and takes pride in taking clients walking on the Baou de St-Jeannet – the big cliff face which towers over the village sheltering it from northerly winds, and to the vineyard of the Haut Colline (see 'Wine Producers'). Corinne cooks all the meals – influenced by her time spent in the French island of La Réunion in the Indian Ocean, and offers cookery lessons. Activity holidays or just one night stays are possible in fresh, simple rooms – the welcome is friendly and charming. Wi-fi available in the rooms.

Useful information: Rooms: €69-€86 including breakfast. Three-night packages available including meals, see website for details.

## Places to eat

### Bruno

Address: Campagne Mariette, 83510 Lorgues  
 Tel: 04 94 85 93 93 Web: [www.restaurantbruno.com](http://www.restaurantbruno.com)  
 Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:28:51N (43.48081) Longitude: 6:22:26E (6.37380)

For an extravagant treat and plenty of truffles served with panache, this one star Michelin restaurant is the place to go. Quantities are large – by the time the truffles on toast, eggs with truffles and baked potato with truffles have been downed, many feel little interest in the main course – be prepared, starve in advance, this is only for those with stamina! Unfortunately the wine list does not live up to expectations. Glamour is high. During the summer the tables are outside on the terrace, in the cooler months tables are inside the old *mas* (farmhouse) with roaring fires.

Useful information: Menus: €60-€130. Booking essential. Closed Sunday evening and Monday out of season.

## Le Clos de Vignes

Address: 4539 Chemin Clos de Vachoun, D22, 83570 Cotignac  
Tel: 04 94 04 72 19 Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:30:6N (43.50168) Longitude: 6:8:34E (6.14270)

Not such an impressive long distance view but set in the midst of the vineyards of Domaine Nestuby – half way between Cotignac and Montfort-sur-Argens. Food is very regional – with plenty of game in the right season. (Last time I ate here it was good – but have heard from some people that it is not consistent.)

## Auberge du Parc

Address: Place du Général de Gaulle, 83570 Correns  
Tel: 04 94 59 53 52 Web: [www.aubergeduparc.fr](http://www.aubergeduparc.fr)  
Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:29:17N (43.48799) Longitude: 6:4:45E (6.07930)

Set in an old *maison de maitre* (mansion) with a pretty courtyard entered through large wrought iron gates, the interior of this restaurant is a surprising jewel. The restaurant and foyer are decorated with wall paintings of cherubs on pink fluffy clouds; chairs are delicate white and gold – the scene restful and unworldly. The food however is not ephemeral – a hearty fish soup followed by a rack of lamb with a rich sauce and vegetables followed by white chocolate mousse left me ready for a siesta in the courtyard rather than visiting more vineyards! There are also a few luxurious rooms, but usually only available in summer months.

Useful information: Menus: €25(lunch)-€35. Rooms: €100; breakfast €10. July/August closed Tuesdays; April-June and September/October closed Sunday evenings, Mondays and Tuesdays; November/December and March open only Fridays and Saturdays. In 2008 closed 31 October - 12 November and 21 December - 4 March.

## Fleur de Thyme

Address: 83780 Flayosc  
Tel: 04 94 50 31 53 Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:32:2N (43.53394) Longitude: 6:23:46E (6.39602)

Small restaurant with no more than 20 covers run by a husband and wife team. She is front of house, he works in the kitchen. Do not be deceived by the village bistro appearance, nor the relatively modest prices, the husband is an artist at work turning out very tasty meals with an imaginative use of flavours and all presented as a work of art. If squiggles of purée and dots of relish irritate, give this place a miss – but if you are interested in an imaginative evening and have had your fill of traditional Provençal fare this is certainly somewhere to head for.

Useful information: Menu: €29. Closed all day Tuesdays and Wednesday lunchtime. Booking essential.

## Le Cigalon

Address: 5 Boulevard du Grand Chemin, 83780 Flayosc  
Tel: 04 94 70 45 85 Email: [info@le-cigalon.com](mailto:info@le-cigalon.com)  
Web: [www.le-cigalon.com](http://www.le-cigalon.com)  
Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:31:58N (43.53289) Longitude: 6:23:55E (6.39854)

A traditional style restaurant run by a French couple, Jeannine (front of house) and chef Roberto, who have for many years run a restaurant in England. The restaurant is very prettily decorated in pale yellow; the welcome is friendly (look out for Bessy the golden retriever up the stairs); and there is an interesting and seasonal menu. A recent autumn dinner had millefeuille with wild mushrooms and plenty of salad, followed by a rich and spicy Provençal *daube* with pasta and finished with a delicious crème brûlée with chestnuts all from the lower-priced menu. There are also two pretty bedrooms.

Useful information: Menus: €28-€38. Rooms: €35; breakfast: €5.

## Auberge du Moulin

Address: Rue Lou Coulet, 06420 Bairols

Tel: 04 93 02 92 93 Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:58:56N (43.98215) Longitude: 7:7:37E (7.12683)

This restaurant situated on the cliff's edge in the old restored medieval village of Bairols along the Tinée valley, is not for the faint hearted. The view is impressive overlooking the valley below and the mountains further afield; the route up has numerous tight hairpin bends and the parking is on the edge, but the food is definitely worth the trip. Typical Piemontese cuisine – eight plates served – each one more tempting than the last – even my 8-year old, who eats like a mouse, demolished everything put before her. Rooms in local *gîtes* are available for those who wish to indulge and then relax. There is one set menu with a special truffle menu in season when the additional dishes are liberally served with truffles and *cèpes*. No wine list but a bottle of Dolcetto from the chef's family vineyards completed the idyll. This restaurant clearly highlights the fact that this corner of France is very strongly connected with Piedmont in Italy and a long way from the traditional image of Provence.

Useful information: Menu: €35 or Truffle menu (in season) €60. Closed Mondays. No Credit Cards. There are two rooms at the auberge and six local *gîtes* with possibility of overnight accommodation booked through the Gites de France on 04 92 15 21 30.

## Wine shops & Bars

### Maisons des Vins Côtes de Provence

Address: N7, 83460 Les Arcs sur Argens

Tel: 04 94 47 48 47 Web: [www.vinsdeprovence.net](http://www.vinsdeprovence.net)

Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:27:51N (43.46405) Longitude: 6:28:45E (6.47913)

A wide selection of wines for tasting and buying (see 'Wine Related Attractions').

## Other interesting shops

### The pottery and tiles of Salernes

Address: 83690 Salernes

Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:33:49N (43.56366) Longitude: 6:13:56E (6.23231)

This small town and its surroundings are a centre for pottery and tile making. The main road leading from Lorgues/Draguignan and around Villecroze is lined with shops and kilns. Sunday morning is market day.

## Wine related attractions

### Maisons des Vins Côtes de Provence

Address: N7, 83460 Les Arcs sur Argens

Tel: 04 94 47 48 47 Web: [www.vinsdeprovence.net](http://www.vinsdeprovence.net)

Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:27:51N (43.46405) Longitude: 6:28:45E (6.47913)

Information on the region's wines is offered along with a wide selection of wines for tasting and buying (five whites, five reds and five rosés are offered each week). The attached restaurant La Vigne à Table (formerly Le Bacchus Gourmand) serves excellent, if somewhat pricey regional cuisine (around €20-€55) to match the wines. The atmosphere is a touch formal.

Useful information: Closed Wednesday in summer.

### Maison des Vins Coteaux Varois

Address: Abbaye de La Celle, 83170 La Celle

Tel: 04 94 69 33 18 Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:23:38N (43.39394) Longitude: 6:2:23E (6.03985)

Situated in a picturesque restored abbey, you can taste a large range of local wines here. It is also the home of Alain Ducasse's Michelin-starred restaurant and hotel.

## Château d'Astros

Address: Domaine d'Astros, 83550 Vidauban

Tel: 04 94 73 00 25 Fax: 04 94 73 00 18

Web: [perso.orange.fr/chateau.astros/accueil.htm](http://perso.orange.fr/chateau.astros/accueil.htm)

Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:26:16N (43.43783) Longitude: 6:24:30E (6.40825)

Not only the beautiful château used in the filming of Marcel Pagnol's 'Château de Ma Mère', but also a good place to stop for some exercise in September/October picking apples in their pick-your-own orchards, trying some wine and then walking along the river Argens with a picnic.

## Other interesting attractions

### Abbaye du Thoronet

Address: 83340 Thoronet

Tel: 04 94 60 43 90 Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:27:0N (43.45011) Longitude: 6:18:29E (6.30809)

This was a Cistercian monastery founded in 1120 from Mazan Abbey, and was one of the Cistercian abbeys known as the 'three sisters' of Provence (the others were Sénanque Abbey and Silvacane Abbey). It was suppressed in the French Revolution, but the impressive buildings were bought back by the state in 1854 and have since been preserved. Many of the big wine estates in the region were originally affiliated to monasteries. You may well hear blasts from the surrounding bauxite quarries when in the region.

Useful information: Open from 09.00–19.00 1 April – 30 September (closed Sundays 12.00–14.00) and 10.00–13.00 and 14.00–17.00, 1 October – 30 March.

### Caves at Villecroze

Address: 83690 Villecroze

Tel: 04 94 67 50 00

Many Provencal villages have caves carved out of the cliffs around them, but these caves were turned into grand dwellings during the wars of religion and are well worth an adventurous visit.

Useful information: Contact the local tourist office (number above) for opening times.

### Caves at Cotignac

Address: 83570 Cotignac

Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:31:36 (43.52663) Longitude: 6:8:58E (6.14956)

The cliffs (formed of tufa) dominate the village and have been used as shelter and a refuge since early times from invasions and epidemics, political wars and religious wars. Houses are built into the cliffs, and a few lower ones are still in use today. Walk behind the *mairie* (town hall) and past the old large oil presses up the narrow paths carved into the cliff face. The paths are badly signposted and the higher paths are a little rugged, but you can pass close to the caves and from the top of the cliffs there are two old towers and a good view of the village. (Restaurant La Fontaine has been recommended but yet to be tried).

### Fondation Maeght

Address: 623 Chemin Gardettes, 06570 Saint Paul

Tel: 04 93 32 81 63 Email: [contact@fondation-maeght.com](mailto:contact@fondation-maeght.com)

Web: [www.fondation-maeght.com](http://www.fondation-maeght.com)

Geo-coordinates: Latitude: 43:42:15N (43.70410) Longitude: 7:7:1E (7.11705)

This is one of the definitive museums for private art in Provence with a wide ranging selection of works from both famous artists and new, less well known artists. Special exhibitions, a library and research facilities, as well as a programme of lectures contribute to the vibrant atmosphere. For wine travellers there is the added interest that Adrian Maeght started to make wine some 15 years ago under the appellation of Vin de Pays des Alpes Maritimes – the wines are available to try in the cafeteria.

Useful information: Open all year 10.00-18.00 (19.00 in summer). Admission charge €11.

## Events

### Fête de la truffe, Aups

A big truffle fair held during the last weekend in January. During winter there are also regular truffle markets at Aups on Thursday mornings and there are numerous smaller truffle fairs throughout the region.

Useful information: Tourist Office in Aups Tel: 04 94 70 00 80.

## Drives

### Gorges du Verdon and other gorges

Further north and out of the wine region of Côtes de Provence lies the spectacular Gorges du Verdon, the large Lac du Sainte Croix (good for boating and swimming in the summer) and the town of Moustiers with its traditional pottery. Further dramatic gorges can be found north of the Var river. The Gorges du Cians and the pink Gorges du Daluis provide dramatic drives with stunning scenery.

### La Provence Verte

The heart of Provence. The route around Pontevès - Barjols - Chateauvert - Correns is beautiful and green, following the river valley. Cycle routes and walking paths are all clearly labelled. The route between Flassans – Cabasse – Carces is also very scenic. Web: [www.la-provence-verte.net](http://www.la-provence-verte.net)

## Walks

La Provence Verte has a number of walk and cycle paths clearly signposted leading along the river Argens and between the medieval villages. See [www.la-provence-verte.net](http://www.la-provence-verte.net).

The book *Les Chemins Médiévaux du Var* by Alain Raynaud, Editions de la Renaudie has some very interesting and historical walks listed. Web: [www.editionsdelarenaudie.fr](http://www.editionsdelarenaudie.fr)

### Sillans la Cascade

Just north of Salernes on the way to the Gorges du Verdon. The path is not maintained perfectly so good shoes and the ability to do a little bit of scrambling may be necessary. The *cascade* (waterfall) drops 42m.

### Baou de Saint Jeannet

Although this is a centre for rock climbing, it is possible to follow a more relaxed walk following the clearly sign-posted paths. Wonderful views from the top (nearly 800m altitude) are afforded of the region to the south towards the sea.

Approximate time: 45 minutes - 2 hours

## Itineraries

### Ideal One-Day Itinerary

Overnight at L'Enclos

#### MORNING

Follow the ring road anti-clockwise around Lorgues and take the westerly exit to Entrecasteaux and St Antonin du Var

Visit 1: Domaine de Sarrins

Drive through Entrecasteaux to Cotignac. Explore the caves and a light lunch in one of the cafés on the square.

#### AFTERNOON

Drive on towards Barjols.

Visit 2: Domaines des Alysses and look around the old hill top village of Pontèves

Drive south towards Châteauvert and turn off to Margüi

Visit 3: Domaine de Margüi

Drive on to Correns for dinner and overnight at Auberge du Parc.

### Ideal Two Day Itinerary

Overnight in Lorgues at L'Enclos or La Sarrazine.

#### Day One

##### MORNING

Drive towards Taradeau

Visit 1: Château de Rasque

At Taradeau drive up to see the views from the tower which was used as a look out post and defence against marauding Saracen pirates

Drive on to Les Arcs

Visit 2: Domaine Valette

Lunch at Maisons des Vins at Les Arcs and go to the tasting room to see if there are any other undiscovered wines!

##### AFTERNOON

Back to Lorgues and explore the old town

Drive up to Tourtour for dinner at La Table de Tourtour (04 94 70 55 95 or [www.latable.fr](http://www.latable.fr)) and see the sunset over Provence

Overnight La Petite Auberge de Tourtour or back to Lorgues.

#### Day Two

##### MORNING

Drive to Vidauban and turn onto the N7 towards Le Luc and then Flassans

Visit La Mascaronne

Drive onto Brignoles to the Maison des Vins Coteaux Varois at La Celle

Lunch either at a restaurant in Brignoles or at the expensive l'Abbaye de la Celle (04 98 05 14 14)

##### AFTERNOON

Drive on to Le Val and stop to look around

Visit 1: Domaine Miraval

Visit 2: Château La Calisse

Drive onto Correns for dinner and overnight at Auberge du Parc.

## About the contributor

Elizabeth Gabay MW

After a couple of years in publishing, the theatre and backpacking, Elizabeth early on discovered the joys of working in wine. Since the mid 1980s she has focused on the wines of South Eastern France and has been on hand to see the great strides made in the developing quality of the wines as well as the not so great strides in the urbanisation of many areas. Until having children, Elizabeth was an independent wine merchant and an active educator and consultant to a number of companies. She graduated as a Master of Wine in 1998 and has since then been involved in the Masters' education programme and is an active member of the IMW Council. Since moving to South East France in 2002 she has concentrated on her children and on working on her first book on the history of the drink Punch, as well as writing articles on France and nearby northern Italy.