

VINADEIS

REIMAGINES

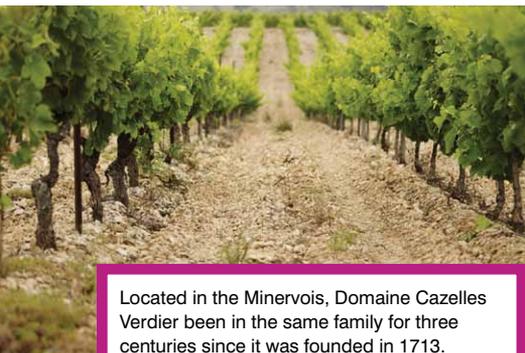
THE LANGUEDOC

THE EVOLUTION OF FRANCE'S LARGEST WINE PRODUCER

BY KRISTEN BIELER

For one of the largest wine companies on the planet, Vinadeis flies fairly under the radar. Founded 60 years ago by six family estates who wanted to strengthen their market presence, Languedoc-based Vinadeis—formerly known as Val d’Orbieu—has grown steadily: Today the company produces 150 million bottles of wine each year from over 42,000 acres of vineyard land.

The world is most familiar with their international mega-brands (Reserve St. Martin, Les Deux Rives, Cuvée Mythique) and scores of value-oriented chain-store brands (primarily for the European market). Yet Vinadeis today is focused on raising the visibility of their chateau and estate properties—a collection of 11 boutique growers crafting wines that showcase the potential of Languedoc terroir.



Located in the Minervois, Domaine Cazelles Verdier been in the same family for three centuries since it was founded in 1713. Chalky, mineral terroir keeps yields low.

“We are a very interesting organization: we consist of large wineries producing big brands and bulk wine, yet we also have a group of small, family-run estates practicing organic and biodynamic viticulture,” explains Benoit Roussillon, North American Export Director for Vinadeis, charged with growing the U.S. market (currently responsible for only 5% of the company’s exports—a number they are determined to increase).

Over the last five years, Vinadeis has been quietly working with their chateau partners to elevate quality. “One of the most significant changes we made was to integrate the grape-growing and winemaking,” says Roussillon. “Our winemakers and consultant, Olivier Dauga, [see sidebar] work with our growers to help them extract the best from their vineyards.”



Château Notre Dame du Quatourze, which belongs to Georges and Suzanne Ortola, is near Narbonne overlooking Bages Lake near the Mediterranean. Vines were first planted here by Romans more than 2,000 years ago.

OLIVIER DAUGA'S WINEMAKING MAGIC



Much of Vinadeis’ transformation is due to the deft hand of famed winemaking consultant, the Bordeaux-based Olivier Dauga, hired by

the company five years ago. “Olivier’s philosophy is to spend the first year getting to know each estate and the soil, implementing organic viticulture,” explains Roussillon. “He uses traditional ways to make modern wines.” Dauga has become an enthusiastic believer in the potential of Languedoc, and is particularly passionate about rosé: “While Provence rosé might be more expressive initially, Languedoc rosé has the potential to become more interesting with time,” he says. “The balance of acid and fruit is extremely good; this can be harder to achieve in Provence where it is hotter and drier.”

UNEXPECTED DISCOVERIES

"I am always impressed by the acidity in many Languedoc reds, which a lot of people wouldn't expect to be there," says wine writer Jeffery Lindenmuth. "To have both the ripeness and the acidity is an impressive hallmark for the region." Lindenmuth was joined by Caleb Ganzer, sommelier and wine director at NYC's La Compagnie des Vins Surnaturels, as well as writer and Languedoc expert Jamal Rayyis, to taste through a number of Vinadeis top cuvées.

For Ganzer, the whites and rosés from the region stand out: "I love Languedoc whites when they are truly expressive. Smoky, spicy, mineral-rich and salty, they can be white Bordeaux-like without the



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Jeffery Lindenmuth, Kristen Bieler, Tristan Lozach, Benoit Roussillon, Caleb Ganzer and Jamal Rayyis.

waxy character." And Languedoc rosés in many cases rival examples from far more famous rosé neighbor, Provence, the group concurred: "In more traditional fine-dining establishments you might see people having a prejudice against rosés not from Provence, but in the Millennial

world I live in, it makes no difference whatsoever," Ganzer reports. "A rosé's appellation is far less important as long as it's good in the glass." The two Vinadeis rosés we tasted more than delivered on that front. ■

VINADEIS WINES

ROSÉ

CHÂTEAU NOTRE DAME DU QUATOURZE ROSÉ 2015



This estate farms biodynamically, and their rosé, a Syrah/Grenache/Cinsault blend, showed a lovely elegance on the palate. Lindenmuth appreciated its "bristling acidity and minerality." **SRP: \$14.99**

CHÂTEAU DE JONQUIÈRES ROSÉ 2015



The group raved about this Grenache-dominant rosé. Rayyis noted "hints of peach and mango with a clean finish," and Lindenmuth gave high marks for aromas of "watermelon jolly rancher and juicy strawberry." "Grenache gives that wonderful, candied nose; this has all the markers of a great rosé," noted Ganzer. "It's a serious quaffer at a great price that would make an excellent house rosé." **\$14.99**

RED

CHÂTEAU NOTRE DAME DU QUATOURZE NAUTICA RED 2014



Ganzer's favorite red, this blend of Mourvedre, Syrah and Grenache showed "balance, good acidity and fresh fruit—it's a great meat-and-cheese wine, exactly what you want from the region for this price." **\$16.99**

CHÂTEAU NOTRE DAME DU QUATOURZE ROUGE, A FLEUR D'EAU 2014



Dark sweet fruit and cherry cassis aromas characterized this red blend, underscored by "a nice stony quality," remarked Rayyis. "There's a nice acidity which keeps it lively," said Lindenmuth. **\$24.99**

CHÂTEAU DE JONQUIÈRES ROUGE 2013



From Corbières, this red displayed a savory, roasted meat quality which

Lindenmuth liked: "I found the dark fruit had a grilled spicy character, yet it was surprisingly light and fresh on the palate." **\$12.99**

CHÂTEAU DE JONQUIÈRES ROUGE, CUVÉE EOLE 2013



Grenache leads in this blend, bolstered by Syrah. "The smoky, meaty character of Syrah really comes through on the nose, and in the dense cassis palate and dusty tannins," said Lindenmuth. Rayyis liked the notes of eucalyptus and fennel seed. **\$19.99**

DOMAINE CAZELLES VERDIER ROUGE, LE MARCHAND DE POIVRE 2014



This un-oaked Grenache/Syrah/Mourvedre blend is "fleshy yet still fresh," noted Rayyis: "The flavors here are what you look for: spicy tobacco, dark fruit and minerals." **\$18.99**

DOMAINE CAZELLES VERDIER ROUGE, LES PIERRES QUI CHANTENT 2014

In spite of intense black fruit and a fair



amount of oak, there is a freshness to this Minervois. "The combination of spice, fruit and earth work really nicely here, and it's got a great structure," Ganzer observed. **\$26.99**

WHITE

CHÂTEAU NOTRE DAME DU QUATOURZE NAUTICA WHITE 2014



Vermentino leads in the first vintage of this experimental white, filled out with Grenache Blanc and Viognier. Ganzer was a big fan of its expressive nose—"spice, ginger, cinnamon, nuts and lemon"—and creamy, earthy palate. **\$16.99**

DOMAINE CAZELLES VERDIER BLANC CHARDONNAY, LES PIERRES QUI CHANTENT 2015



Marked by roasted almonds, sweet tropical fruit and just a touch of oak, this well-made Chardonnay is "light, fresh and clean," described Lindenmuth. **\$21.99**