

UNDERSTANDING AND TASTING THE GREAT WINES OF FRANCE

A 4-part series of Geology & Wine tours in France on the theme :
From the rocks & soil of the terroir – to the wine in your glass

The first tour 2010 : BURGUNDY and the RHONE VALLEY

Wednesday 18th August – Thursday 2 September 2010

Presentation

The magic of French wines is matched only by the diverse and uniquely magical landscape – a direct result of all the global, regional and local processes which have produced it. Reflecting a history of deep seas, tropical archipelagoes, coral reefs, mountain building, the collision and rifting of continents and the climatic changes of the Ice Ages – such processes have collectively produced the most diverse environs – brilliantly suitable for the growth of *Vitis vinifera*. For 2000 years, vigneronns have teased the secrets from this “Land of a Thousand Wines”.

The overall programme

“Understanding and tasting the great wines of France” has been conceived in four parts :

- 2010 : Burgundy & the Rhone Valley
- 2011 : Champagne & Alsace
- 2012 : the Loire Valley from Nantes to Pouilly-sur-Loire
- 2013 : From Bordeaux to Cahors

Our first tour, after a “meet & greet” in Paris, will start in Chablis and finish in Avignon, traversing Chablis, the Côte d’Or, the Maconnais, the Beaujolais, and the northern & southern Rhone, following the history of a geology which has carved the landscape to produce environs which have become famous for many of the world’s greatest wines.

Tour Leader

Professor Peter Davies

Recently retired Edgeworth David Professor of Geology at the University of Sydney, Peter is one of Australia’s leading scientists and a world expert on the formation of limestone – rocks of critical importance in the art of wine-making. A gifted teacher and presenter, Peter makes every subject “sing”!

Peter Davies has worked throughout the world, but has always kept returning to France, where he now spends a good deal of time each summer. He completed his Ph.D in the late 1960s in France – and this was where he first began the journey of relating the geology of the regions in France to the country’s great wines. Peter is perhaps best known internationally for his work on the Great Barrier Reef, and is a former Chief Government Marine Scientist. But throughout his professional life he has continued to develop his interest in France, geology and wine as a priority, but has become in the process a first class amateur French historian!

Itinerary & Programme

Day 1 (Wednesday 18 August)

Participants to arrive in Paris at the latest by early afternoon.

Late afternoon : Meet and greet at the Hotel : Presentation of the tour by Tour Leader and short briefing by Tour Manager.

Evening : welcome dinner

Day 2 (Thursday 19 August)

Morning drive to **Auxerre** : lunch & settle in hotel.

Mid-afternoon : guided visit of Auxerre and contribution made by the Cistercian monks to the development of the **CHABLIS** wine.

Day 3 (Friday 20 August)

All day exploration of the close links between Chablis “grands crus” and the geology. Visit to cellars and wine-tasting. Only seven communes have the right to produce “grand cru” Chablis.

Chablis – for many arguably the finest of white wines, especially for oyster lovers! It is also the white wine which has been most imitated (a form of praise!), including in Burgundy itself!. Until relatively recent times, many Chablis were “mixed”: one has to look very carefully to ensure you have a genuine great Chablis in your glass! Impossible to confuse a real Chablis with, for example, a white Meursault, or more particularly a Pouilly Fuissé.

Late afternoon return via **Epoisses**, home of the greatest of the Burgundy cheeses, visit the chateau (famous names from Madame de Sévigné to Queen Elizabeth II have been guests here!), followed by cheese-tasting in the chateau’s great salon.

Dinner and night in Auxerre

Day 4 (Saturday 21 August)

The greater part of the day will be an exploration of the geology of the “**Chablis 1er crus**” and “**Petits Chablis**”.

Late afternoon before returning to Auxerre we visit to the great Abbey of Pontigny.

Dinner and night in Auxerre.

Day 5 (Sunday 22 August)

Morning drive to the World Heritage site of **Vézelay** : guided visit of the Basilica and time to explore the village. From Easter to November the village is inhabited by artists of all kinds – painters (including Burgundy’s best-known contemporary painter, Hosotte), potters, wood-workers, artisans of all kinds – plus plenty of Chablis outlets!

Lunch at Marc Meneau’s celebrated restaurant *L’Espérance*.

Mid afternoon : a guided walk through the “**vignoble de Vezelay**” – the history of which goes back to gallo-roman times, but it’s great period started in the 9th century and culminated in the 18th.

Disappeared entirely in 1884 with the phylloxera outbreak. Meneau has played an important role in the re-creation of the vignoble – which in 1997 was granted its own *appellation* “**Bourgogne Vezelay**” (“the terroir is highly distinctive, neither the Loire nor Burgundy”...Marc Meneau)

Night in Beaune (4 nights)

Day 6 (Monday 23 August)

Presentation and exploration of the *Côtes de Nuit*. We drive direct by motorway to **Gevrey-Chambertin** and return by the route through the vignobles, going first to the **Clos Vougeot** (home of the *Chevaliers du Tastevin*) for a guided visit and tasting. Lunch will be taken in **Nuits St Georges** with time to explore the small town afterwards.

Mid-afternoon – the geology of the most celebrated grand cru of them all, **Vosne-Romanée** and the legendary **Romanée-Conti**. Wine-tasting at the conclusion of the excursion.

The return to Beaune will involve a short detour to see what remains of one of the most important monasteries, Citeaux.

Day 7 (Tuesday 24 August)

Presentation and exploration of the *Côtes de Beaune*. A very full day!

Morning starts with a short drive to the hill of **Corton** – home of truly great wines, both white and red. Then back to the other side of Beaune, the exploration will take us through **Meursault, Puligny-Montrachet, Chassagne-Montrachet**. We will pass the Chateau of Rochepot (one of the most photographed rooftops in Burgundy!) and make a short detour to Nolay to see the 14th century “halles” (covered market place).

The return will take us first across the scenic road high above the great region into which we descend at **St Romain** before reaching **Auxey-Duresses – Monthélie – Volnay** – and finishing in **Pommard** for a wine-tasting.

Dinner and night in Beaune.

Day 8 (Wednesday 25 August) : All day in Beaune

Morning organised with the BIVB for a seminar reviewing the Burgundy part of the tour, the theme for analysis and discussion based on the geology and great wines of Burgundy as related to the experiences and explorations of the last few days.

Afternoon : guided visit of the celebrated *Hospices* in Beaune, followed by a visit to the Wine Museum.

Day 9 (Thursday 26 August)

Morning : by coach to the villages of **Pouilly** and **Fuissé**.

Climb to the top of the famous landmark above Pouilly : the *Roche de Solutré* (magnificent views over the Maconnais), followed by a visit to the *Musée de la Préhistoire*, one of the most important prehistoric sites in Europe. Wine tasting in Pouilly.

Afternoon devoted to a totally different terrain : **St Verand** and **Chasselas**.

Dinner and night in Mâcon

Day 10 (Friday 27 August)

A unique story! The geology and wines of the Beaujolais

A wine known throughout the world – a very “new” wine historically, unknown before the French Revolution. A wine with a very special history, a superb blending of local skills & and understanding of the terroir. An object lesson in how to create, if not a great wine, a universally appreciated wine! After all, most of the world airlines are active for the exercise of the 3rd Thursday in November for the *Beaujolais Nouveau*!

During the day’s excursion we will visit or pass through all ten of the Beaujolais village appellations – **Brouilly – Côte de Brouilly - Chiroubles - Saint-Amour – Chénas – Moulin à Vent – Morgon – Fleurie – Juliéna – Régnié**. Several guided walks through the vignobles are programmed

Wine-tastings and lunch will be arranged !

Dinner and night in Mâcon.

Day 11 (Saturday 28 August) : A day off from vineyards, marking the passage from Burgundy to the Rhone Valley

Morning : excursion in and around Cluny (guided visit) Time for lunch

After lunch, short drive visit to the *Chateau of Cormatin* for guided visit.

Then by motorway, past Lyon, and down into the Rhone Valley to Tain l'Hermitage.

Dinner and night in **Tain l'Hermitage** (One night stand, but one can relax in pool and dining room!).

Day 12 (Sunday 29 August)

The Northern Rhône –Syrah and Viognier. A region of great beauty and exceptional wine history. The wines from here were prized in Rome at the time of Caesar, while you need to be virtually a mountain-goat to visit some of the vignobles.

After breakfast we return north for a while, crossing the Rhone to travel back down along the edge of the Massif Central and the famous wines : **Côte Rôtie**, **Condrieu** (which produces arguably the finest Rhone white wine), **Château Grillet** (one of the smallest AOCs in France, and **Saint Joseph** (directly opposite Hermitage, the wines are perhaps not as good overall as in the past, but a few are excellent).

After lunch we explore first in **Cornas**, before taking the superbly scenic road back north from Saint Romain de Lerps, to terminate the day in the **Hermitage**, historically one of France's greatest wines. In 1856 at the concours de Paris, the three "greats" were : Chateau Lafite, Clos Vougeot, - and Hermitage! Boileau, Walter Scott, Dumas are among those over the centuries who have praised the qualities of Hermitage.

Wine-tastings will be arranged exclusively with traditional wine-makers, the only ones to produce wine today which has some of the greatness of the past

Back to Tain for the evening.

Day 13 (Monday 30 August)

The only really early start of the tour : leave by coach at the latest by 8.15am!

Straight to **Suze-la-Rousse**, for a presentation by the *Université du Vin* (situated in a superb chateau!) in collaboration with Peter Davies on the theme *The geology and wines of the Southern Rhone*.

Late lunch will be taken in Suze.

After lunch, an exploration of the villages around the **Dentelles de Montmirail** – including **Sablet**, **Rasteau**, **Vacqueyras**, **Cairanne**, **Beaumes de Venise** and culminating with a wine-tasting of one of the most internationally recognised names, that of **Gigondas**.

Hotel in Orange : a small town with a very big World Heritage Roman Theatre site! Since the Second World War, Orange is also the centre of the most important annual "wine-competition" ("Concours") for wines of the region.

Day 14 (Tuesday 31 August)

After breakfast, short drive to Avignon, to visit the World Heritage *Palais des Papes*, after which there will be time to wander down to (and even dance on!) the famous bridge which every child learning French will have sung at some stage "*Sur le pont d'Avignon, on y danse..!*").

A short late-morning drive into the **Tavel** region for lunch (**Tavel**, **Lirac** or **Roquemaure**).

Afternoon devoted to an exploration of Tavel and surrounds.

Tavel is the only AOC in France (with the possible exception of Riceys in Champagne) with just rosé wine. Famous from Francois 1er, Ronsard (for whom Tavel was “Sun in a bottle”), Louis XIV, to Balzac, Tavel is claimed as the only authentic rosé wine in France, being neither a false red nor a false white! Visits will be made also to Roquemaure and Lirac – including the “most accursed vignoble in France”, the *Château de Clary* in Lirac, where the great phylloxera outbreak was first located.

Day 15 (Wednesday 1 September)

Morning : Guided visit of the World Heritage Roman Theatre in Orange.

Then a short drive to **Chateauneuf du Pape** – where better place to finish the tour than in this most legendary of the Rhône Valley vignobles!

On arrival, we climb up to the top of the village for a very comprehensive presentation of the CduP wines. After which the Farewell Lunch will be taken on the terrace of a restaurant in the shadow of the remains of the Chateau overlooking the Rhone River, the vignobles stretching as far as you can see, the Mont Ventoux in the distance, and the vignobles of Chateauneuf du Pape just beneath which Daudet, the famous Provençal writer, immortalised when he declared it was “The wine of kings, and the king of wines”!

To help digest lunch, there will be a guided walking tour in the vignobles of Chateauneuf, while the return to Orange will be via either the *Pont du Gard* (World Heritage) or the village of Gordes in the Luberon (one of the loveliest villages in France).

Free for the rest of the evening.

Day 16 (Thursday 2 September)

Return to Paris by TGV.

Accommodation can be arranged in Paris for the night for those who require it.

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