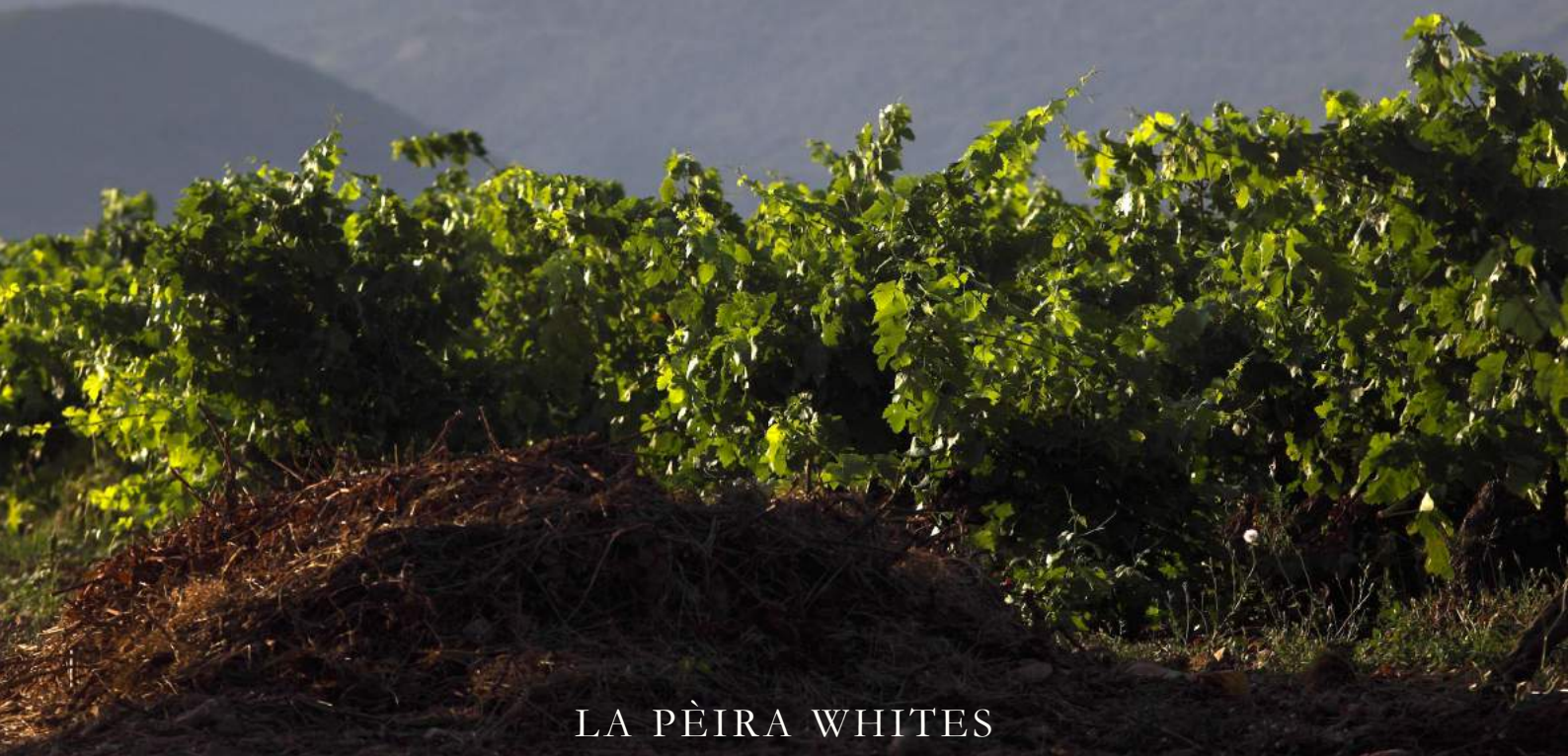




LA PÈIRA



LA PÈIRA WHITES

“These are the first extensive vineyards in France we can be certain about”

HUGH JOHNSON THE STORY OF WINE





LA PÈIRA WHITES

La Pèira can be found nestled in the southern region of France, in the vicinity of the city of Beziers, and along the Herault river. This is an area with a rich history of white wine production that has endured for over two millennia, making it the oldest known white wine-producing region of France. It is within the pages of Pliny's *Natural History* (AD 77-79) that we encounter the earliest historical reference to a French wine whose merit warranted documentation.

FIRST WHITES

Pliny speaks of two wines: the white wines from Baeterrae (Beziers) and the resinous wines from Vienne (near present-day Northern Rhone).

The first English translation of this work in 1601 by Philemon Holland reads,

"When ye are passed once into Fraunce or Gaule, the wine of Beterræ is in chiefe request."

William Smith, in *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (1875), writes, "Of the wines in Southern Gaul, that of Baeterrae alone bore a high character."

In 1879, two amphorae bearing inscriptions from the region of Béziers were discovered at Castro Pretorio in Rome by Heinrich Dressel.

One inscription, dated to the first half of the 1st century AD, declared, "I am a white wine of Beziers and I am 5 years old."

Earliest-known French wines imported to Rome

These represent the earliest-known French wines imported to Rome.

In 2007, another significant discovery was made: France's earliest-known winery, dating back to 10 AD, was uncovered near La Pèira.

As *Le Figaro* newspaper reported, "Everything leads us to believe that an excellent wine was produced here two thousand years ago."

Decanter magazine wrote: "Roman ruins found in southern France have been declared remnants of the country's earliest known winery."

The one-hectare excavation site was situated between two vineyards within the Clairette white wine AOC

- one of the region's and France's first white wine appellations, granted in 1948.

La Pèira's village and parish also sit within the Clairette AOC.

Archaeological seeds from this Roman site were analysed and compared with the Clairette variety cultivated today in the region revealing a near-certain probability the strands are identical.

In his book, *The Story of Wine* (1966), Hugh Johnson comments about this area, "These are the first extensive vineyards in France we can be certain about."

First Steps

Of this, we knew absolutely nothing when we first stumbled upon several rows of white grape varieties on the Belle Fiolle parcel which we had previously thought to be a plot of young Syrah vines.

La Pèira's first white wine fermentation was made using these initial rows of Viognier and Roussanne grapes. The resulting white wine was fermented in oak barrels and, after 18 months, a second white wine from the estate, Deusyls de la Pèira, was released.

It was well received.

Initial Release

The wine critic David Schildknecht praised La Pèira's initial white in 2011 saying:

"The rare white from La Pèira is surprising even its creators with its excellence and stamina ...and as such is broadcasting the message that this region's soils and old vines harbor abundant latent grandeur whose awakening awaits only the right combination of inspiration, labour, and luck."

“Everything leads us to believe that an excellent wine was produced here two thousand years ago”

LE FIGARO



MAPPING OUT A GREAT WHITE

Jancis Robinson wrote of this initial vintage in 2010:

“Dense and racy and honeyed and like a lovely Northern Rhône white. Really exciting and good. Honeysuckle. Low acid though.”

Cépages

On looking at the remarkable response to this first white vintage, we thought to set out on a mission to plant further white grape varieties.

The first question was, of course, which varieties should we plant?

Our first thought was clear: Clairette blanche.

Clairette blanche

Clairette is one of the oldest varieties of France’s Midi and possibly even originates here in the Hérault. Furthermore, it is the only white grape variety allowed in the region’s historic 1948 Clairette AOC, in which La Pèira is located.

Clairette wines these days are often made in a fresh, dry, and acidic style. However, there is also another more traditional style - the oxidative *Rancio* method.

In fact, one wonders if the Roman wines were not somewhat similar to this Rancio style or perhaps even distant cousins to the vermouths of Noilly Prat (made of Picpoul de Pinet and Clairette with the addition of herbs and spices) as grown in the Hérault today near the seaside town of Marseillan.

A good modern-day Clairette should be crisp and invigorating, with tangy and zesty characteristics.

We couldn’t, however, just plant Clairette.

Having already made wonderful white wines with grape varieties outside of the Clairette AOC, we wished to work with other excellent Rhône varieties known for producing long-lived and complex white wines as well. To start with: Viognier.

Viognier

If Clairette’s historical roots in France, along the Hérault and around the town of Béziers, hark back to the era of Rome and Pliny, then the origins of the second variety we thought to plant lie close to Pliny’s other notable mention, Vienne.

Here overlooking the Rhône river within the appellations of Condrieu and Château-Grillet is planted Viognier.

It is difficult not to be captivated by the charm of Viognier.

From our early days, with the first rows of vines and the initial barrel-fermented vintages, its allure was evident. With the first glass raised to the nose, delicate aromas of apricot, peach, and floral scents unfurled, capturing something of a spring day.

The whites of La Pèira are grown on gravelly Quaternary alluvial terraces, differing notably from the granite soils of Condrieu. The Terrasses du Larzac appellation, while it is situated in the northern and central portions of the Hérault department and experiences a more continental climate and higher rainfall than other southern regions, retains a Mediterranean essence. At night during the summer months, cool air is said to flood down to the vineyards from the Larzac plateau, lending lift and freshness to both reds and whites. We were curious to find out more about how this climate and soil expressed Viognier and the other white varieties. Yet, we decided not plant further Viognier, relying instead on the vineyards planted in 1994.

As we journey southward from Condrieu, two additional white cépages merited serious consideration at the time.

Roussanne & Marsanne

For centuries, a certain Rhône white wine has been distinguished for its complexity and capacity to age gracefully.

Thomas Jefferson esteemed it as “the first wine in the world, without a single exception.”

The wine in question is none other than Hermitage Blanc, and the two white grape varieties that have secured its place in history are Roussanne and Marsanne. At La Pèira, we had already taken some delight in blending Roussanne with Viognier with the early vintages of our second white wine.

Indeed, in 2020, Jancis Robinson tasted the 2008 Deusyls de la Pèira, observing, “Lovely to taste an old white wine that has not lost its fruit. This promises rather well for Terrasses du Larzac whites...”.

Even at this embryonic stage, the aging potential of the first white wines cultivated at La Pèira had far surpassed our expectations. Roussanne and Marsanne, at their finest, may be best approached early or after a decade in bottle and superior vintages can age for three decades or more.



▲ The history of Clairette in this region spans over 2000 years



▲ In 2009, the planting program of further white cepages began at La Pèira



▲ From a door at the chai of La Pèira, a plot of old vineyards before replanting

Roussanne & Marsanne (cont.)

What secrets do Roussanne and Marsanne hold to be viewed in such high regard?

Perhaps the combination could be seen as akin to a keystone and arch in architecture.

Marsanne serves as the keystone, offering essential structural support and stability through its richness, body, and weight. Roussanne, meanwhile, embodies the graceful curve of the arch, contributing elegance and a sense of movement with its heightened acidity and floral aromas. Together, they form a well-balanced whole.

In the northern reaches of Hermitage, Marsanne often forms the majority of the blend, while further south in Châteauneuf du Pape (with a wine such as the Beaucastel white for instance) Roussanne takes the lead, sometimes accompanied by Grenache Blanc.

Which leads us to the final white variety we considered: Grenache Blanc.

Grenache Blanc

For continuing further south towards Châteauneuf-du-Pape we encounter it for the first time.

Whether it be rich and supple whites nurtured on Galets roulés and harried by the violent Mistral near Avignon, or the lively and floral wines cultivated on the hillsides overlooking the Côte Vermeille and Mediterranean sea, Grenache Blanc conveys something truly unique. We knew we had to include it in our plans.

From the vineyards of Collioure, where the grape is planted on vertiginous slopes that spill onto the beautiful coast and the town's harbour - a site that inspired artists such as Matisse and Derain to begin the Fauvist movement, and Picasso and Braque to explore the Cubist style - to our own cooler and more northerly inland region, Grenache Blanc is emblematic of the light and colours of this area.

PLANTING

In the end we planted a little of each.

- In 2009, we planted Roussanne and Marsanne on the estate's existing lieu-dit of Belle Fiolle (Bellefeuille).
- In 2011, we planted Roussanne, Clairette, and Grenache Blanc on a new plot called *Les Pointes*.

This parcel is located just a thousand yards from the winery towards the mountains, where cultivation of the vine and olive give way to sheep grazing for Roquefort cheese production.

Thus, in 2013, the estate released its first La Pèira Blanc, a blend of Roussanne and Marsanne, with some Viognier, to acclaim:

Wine Advocate on the La Pèira whites

"...the 2013 Terrasses du Larzac La Peira Blanc is a sensational effort...a full-bodied, lengthy, elegant white."

"...silky, pure, layered, yet with some solid oomph, this beauty is up with the top whites of the appellation."

"...full-bodied, rich and concentrated, with first-rate purity and freshness, it's probably the white wine of the vintage."

Jancis Robinson on the La Pèira whites

"...distinctly Condrieu-ish. Any oak is exceptionally discreet in these three whites (2016, 2017 and this 2018). Very well done!"

"...satin texture and excellent cut of acidity. Very youthful for a three-year-old wine. Carries its alcohol well. Just a tiny bit of texture on the end. Sophisticated wine."

"...lovely to taste an old white wine that has not lost its fruit. This promises rather well for Terrasses du Larzac whites."

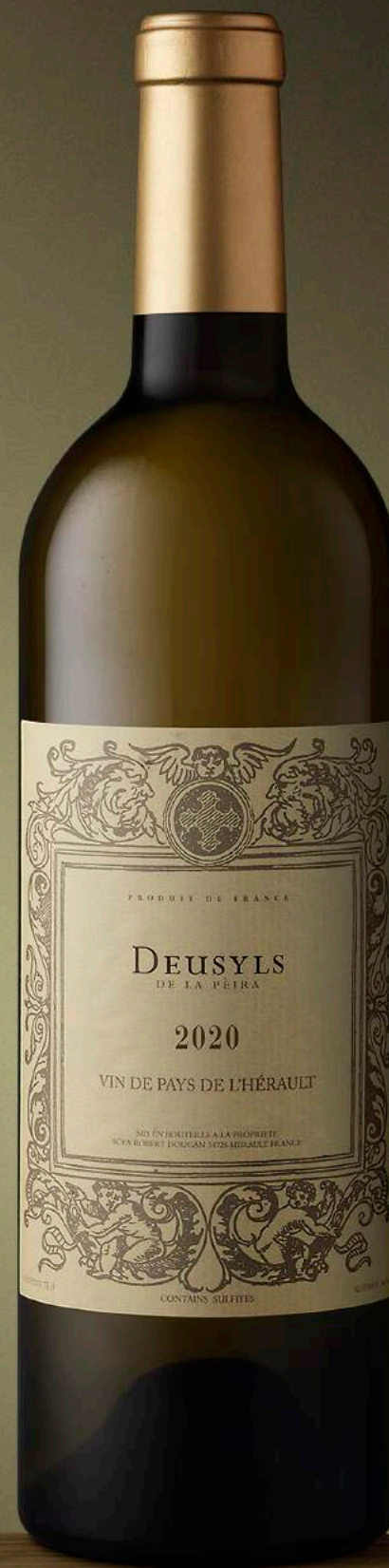
Jeb Dunnuck on the La Pèira whites

"...good freshness, a richer, broad mouthfeel, and a great finish. It could easily be mistaken for a top Northern Rhône white and will shine on the dinner table."

"...with good acidity, plenty of density, and a great, great finish, this prodigious white will drink well."

"...white peach, honeyed toast, chalky minerality and white flowers all lead on the nose and it's medium-bodied, has a balanced, elegant mouthfeel, and a great finish"

The La Pèira Blanc (around 1000 bottles produced) is generally built around a core of Roussanne, Marsanne. The second white, Deusyls (3000 bottles) includes Clairette, Grenache Blanc, and Viognier.



GASTRONOMIC WHITES

The character of the La Pèira whites is decidedly full-bodied, generous, fresh and opulent – whites that serve as a distinguished alternative when red wine is the first thought. They match well with sumptuous classic French cuisine or any hearty dish. Should one's conception of whites be high-acid wines that pair with seafood, then these whites belong to a different category, suited for other occasions and settings.

SERVING: DEUSYLS DE LA PÈIRA

The whites of La Pèira are characterised by relatively low acidity. They are well-balanced, rounded and graceful, with even a hint of tannin resulting from extended barrel aging. They are, indeed, gastronomic whites.

Pairing

When opening a bottle of the La Pèira whites and matching it with food it helps to note that the wine's profile is not dissimilar in style to white Hermitage (generous, rich, medium to full-bodied with a signature low acidity) or the whites of Châteauneuf-du-Pape (full-bodied, intense, and rich).

For the most part, these are not whites to be served at low temperatures with fish or seafood - unless perhaps it is a more robust dish like prawns with garlic, or fish that is grilled or accompanied by a creamy sauce.

While not wishing to make the point quite as emphatically, as Jancis Robinson remarked in 2020 of a 100% Marsanne from Hermitage after several decades in bottle, "This is the sort of white you could serve with a steak".

Serving temperature While whites with Rhone varieties are often served initially at 50-55°F/ 10-13°C the ideal might be around cellar temperature (59°F / 15°C.). Cool, not cold. If need be, place in fridge for 20 minutes.

Suggestions

Marsanne and Rousanne go well with butter, garlic, or white sauces. Likewise, there's an affinity for truffles (esp. white truffles), mushrooms, roasted or grilled white meats, white fish dishes with sauces, pasta dishes with cream-based sauces, and robust vegetarian dishes.

Deusyls de la Pèira - Panisse with Aioli

In her book "Sud de France: - The Food & Cooking" where Caroline Conran focuses on the region of Occitania, there's the following simple inclusion: Panisse with Aioli.

Aioli is Occitan specialty (the original word comes from the Occitan *aiòli* or *alhòli* and Panisse (*Panisso* in Occitan) has an age-old history in the region.

Panisse: 85g chickpea flour / 80g butter / fleur de sel, to taste / pepper, to taste

Aioli: -4 garlic cloves, chopped / 2 egg yolks / 300 ml olive oil / 1 tbsp lemon juice / 1 tbsp hot water / 1 tsp Dijon mustard, Sea salt, pepper

1. In a saucepan, heat 230 ml water with salt and butter and bring to boil
2. Gradually whisk in chickpea flour with 100 ml water until smooth.
3. Cook over medium-high heat, stirring constantly, for about 8-10 minutes until very thick.
4. Pour the mixture into a greased baking dish and smooth the surface.
5. Allow to cool and set, then refrigerate for at least 2 hours.
6. Once set, cut the panisse into desired shapes.
7. Heat vegetable oil in a deep fryer or large pan and fry the panisse pieces until golden brown.
8. Drain on paper towels and season with salt before serving.
9. For the aioli, whisk together the minced garlic and egg yolk in a bowl. Slowly drizzle in the olive oil while continuously whisking until the mixture thickens and forms an emulsion.
10. Stir in the lemon juice and season with salt and pepper to taste. Add warm water if needed.
11. Serve the Panisse warm with the aioli on the side for dipping.



▲ Panisse with Aioli, a variation of the traditional Occitan dish to compliment La Pèira's second white: Deusyls de la Pèira.



“There has been more ballyhoo about this domaine than any other since Daumas Gassac”

PAUL STRANG - THE WINES AND THE WINEMAKERS



▲ *Mushroom Risotto with Parmesan and Truffle Oil - a suggestion for the La Pèira Blanc.*

LA PÈIRA BLANC: SERVING & MATCHING

In the suggested pairing for Deusyls de la Pèira (Panisse with Aioli), the recipe above opts for butter instead of the traditional olive oil characteristic of the Occitan region and as detailed in Caroline Conran's book. Naturally, olive oil is the quintessential ingredient of Southern France, while butter is a classic staple in the cuisine of Northern France.

The rationale behind this substitution lies in Marsanne and Roussanne's affinity for the richness of butter which complements the full-bodied nature of the wine.

Likewise, white fish baked in a lemon butter sauce or baked chicken in a cream sauce are complimentary dishes to pair with these wines.

As with aioli, where the depth and savory notes from the garlic and creamy sauce are rich and flavourful, both are an excellent match. The creamy, luxurious texture of white sauces pair beautifully with the Marsanne and Roussanne grapes that comprise the core of La Pèira's white wines.

Truffles are a famous match for these white cépages. The earthy and umami flavors of the truffles highlighting the wine's nutty and spicy notes. Likewise, mushrooms with their earthy and savory qualities compliment the full-bodied complexity of the whites.

Our suggested accompaniment for the La Pèira Blanc cuvée below.

Mushroom Risotto with Parmesan and Truffle Oil

Ingredients:

- 250g of Arborio rice
- 750 ml of vegetable stock (or a little more)
- 100g of unsalted butter
- 1 shallot, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, chopped
- 100ml of white wine
- 500g of mixed mushrooms, roughly chopped
- 50g of Parmesan, grated
- Olive oil
- Truffle oil
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

Method:

Prepare vegetable stock in a saucepan and keep it at a gentle simmer.

1. To begin the risotto, use 50g of the butter to fry the mushrooms in a saucepan until light brown in colour. Add the shallot and garlic and cook until soft for a further 30 seconds

(50g of unsalted butter / 500g of assorted fresh mushrooms / 1 shallot / 1 garlic clove)

2. Stir in the rice and cook until transparent. Pour in the wine and stir in well

(250g of Arborio risotto rice / 100ml of white wine)

3. Add stock a little at a time, stirring constantly until all is absorbed and creamy and the rice is cooked. Add more stock the rice is still slightly undercooked

(750ml of vegetable stock)

4. Season with sea salt and freshly milled pepper and a little olive oil and the remaining 50g butter. Stir in the Parmesan cheese and truffle oil and serve

(50g of unsalted butter / truffle oil / salt / black pepper / 50g of Parmesan / Olive oil)

Other suggestions:

- Cauliflower gratin with Gruyère cheese: The creamy, rich flavors of the gratin balance the full-bodied character of the wine.
- Pan-seared halibut with beurre blanc sauce: The buttery, rich sauce enhances the wine's creamy texture.
- Brandade de morue (salt cod with potatoes and olive oil): The creamy texture and rich flavors of this dish work well with the wine's complexity. (Occitan)
- Hearty vegetarian dishes, such as a vegetable gratin or a savory tart
- Roasted chicken with tarragon and white wine sauce: The herbal notes in the dish pair well with the wine's complexity.
- Poached salmon with dill and hollandaise sauce: The rich sauce and the herbaceous dill complement the wine's complex flavors.

WHITE VINEYARDS AT LA PÈIRA

Cépage	Année	Lieu-dit	Hectares
Roussanne	1994	Belle Fiolle	0.172
Viognier	1994	Belle Fiolle	0.3
Marsanne	2009	Belle Fiolle	0.0847
Roussanne	2009	Belle Fiolle	0.2573
Clairette	2011	Les Pointes	0.286
Roussanne	2011	Les Pointes	0.57
Grenache Blanc	2011	Les Pointes	0.285

The original white grape vineyards at La Pèira were established in 1994. Additional Marsanne and Roussanne grapes were planted in 2009, followed by Clairette Blanche, Roussanne, and Grenache Blanc in 2011. The Belle Fiolle parcel, an Occitan name, is sometimes referred to as Bellefeuille in French.

CUVÉES

La Pèira Blanc

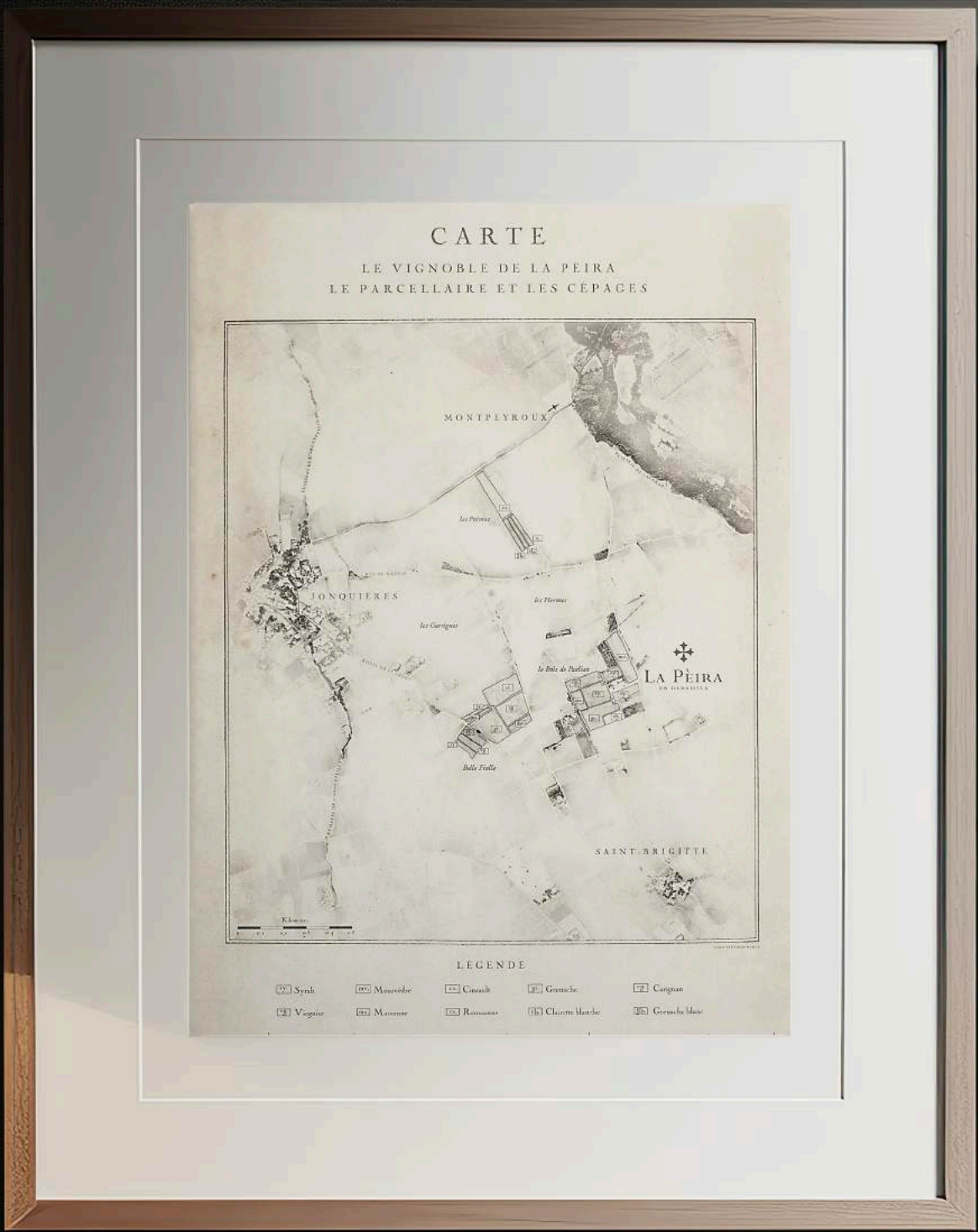
Cepages: Marsanne and Roussanne with some Viognier

Production: 500-1000 bottles

Deusyls de la Pèira (second white)

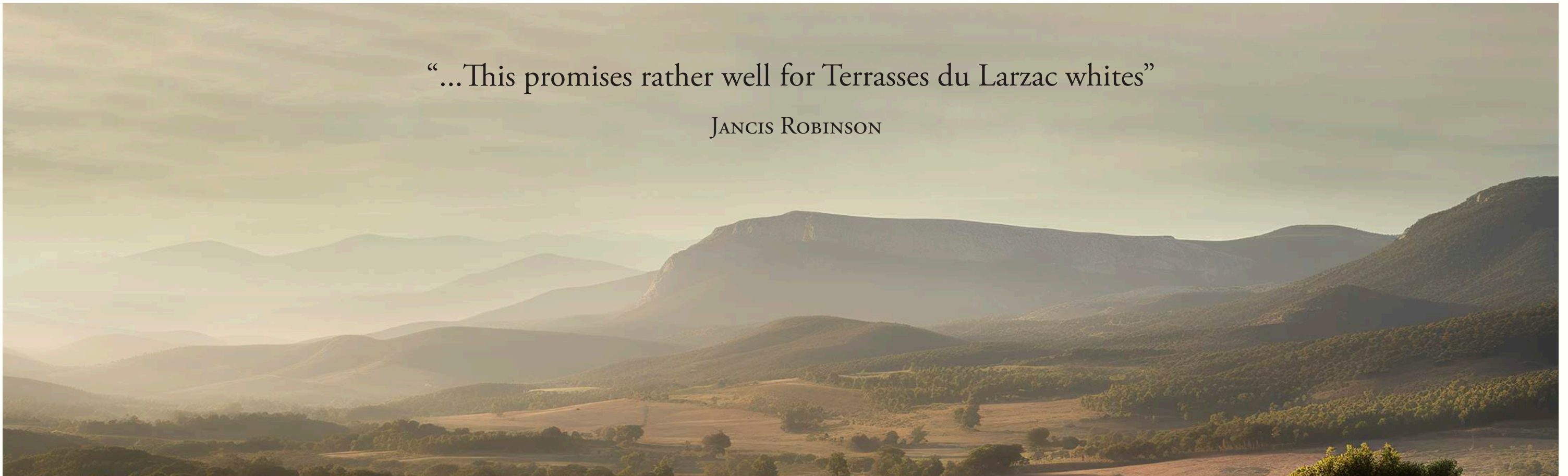
Cepages: Marsanne, Roussanne, Viognier, Clairette, Genache Blanc

Production: 3000-4000 bottles



“...This promises rather well for Terrasses du Larzac whites”

JANCIS ROBINSON



LA PÈIRA

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

The Terrasses du Larzac are located in the north of the Hérault department and include the old villages of Montpeyroux and St Saturnin. Here, summers are warmer and longer, winters are harsher than average in the region, with rapid warming in the spring and an extension of good weather into early autumn. While the hills forming a natural border to the Terrasses du Larzac rise to over 800 meters, the AOC-classified vineyards vary from heights of 50-300 meters on the Causse hills and on the old terraces. The Romans were the first to plant vines on the Terrasses du Larzac. The lands around Lodève were very attractive, extending along the busy Roman Road at the time, connecting Cessero (St. Thibéry) to Segodunum (Rodez).

The Terrasses du Larzac AOC partially overlaps with that of Roquefort, France’s oldest and the world’s first appellation (established in 1925) in the villages of Pégairolles-de-l’Escalette and Octon. Here, the grazing of Lacaune, Manech, and Basco-Béarnaise sheep for the production of Roquefort cheese occurs alongside the cultivation of Grenache, Syrah, and Mourvedre grapes for Terrasses du Larzac wine.

TERROIR

Quaternary alluvium: The vineyard soil is mainly clayey with pebble deposits and a subsoil of alluvium dating back to the Pliocene age. The deposits come from the north, from the Jurassic limestone mountains that are about 150 million years old. The gravel (a mixture of sand, silt, and clay) is deposited in streambeds and in what are known as alluvial cones.

IN BRIEF

- Owners: Karine Ahton and Robert Dougan • Appellation: AOC Terrasses du Larzac • Sector: Sainte-Brigitte (Jonquieres/Saint-André de Sangonis) • Vineyard Area: 14 hectares • Plots/Locations: Bois de Pauliau, Belle Fiolle (Bellefeuille), Les Pointes • Soil: Quaternary alluvium: The vineyard soil is mainly clayey with pebble deposits and a subsoil of alluvium dating back to the Pliocene age. • Average Annual Production: 300 cases of the grand vin, La Pèira - 50 case of La Pèira Blanc - 700 cases of the second vin, Las Flors de la Pèira - 300 cases of the second white, Deusyls de la Pèira • Grape varieties: Syrah, Grenache, Mourvedre, Cinsault, Carignan, Viognier, Roussanne, Marsanne, Grenache Blanc and Clairette Blanche •



▲ While far inland away from the Mediterranean, La Pèira shares with Collioure the intriguing connection of Grenache Blanc.

“...wine that, although busy with fruit, still succeeds in gathering scents of the hills into itself, like shadows into night—”

Andrew Jefford
THE WORLD OF FINE WINE MAGAZINE

“...there is clearly real sensibility for the local terrain and varietal traditions”

Jancis Robinson
JANCISROBINSON.COM

LA PEIRA
EN
DAMAISELA

