



LA PÈIRA

BEGINNINGS



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In 2024, La Pèira is regarded by many as one of France's finest wine estates:

'Easily one of the top estates in all of France.' - *Wine Advocate*

'The texture and the depth of flavour are amazing. It reminded me at different moments of 1989 La Mission Haut-Brion, Fattoria Galardi 2004 Terre di Lavoro and 1990 Henri Bonneau Reserve des Célestins.' - Jay McInerney, *Wall Street Journal*

'The next great global cult wine. Think Clos Erasmus or Masseto.' - Gary Vaynerchuk

'Southern France's First Growth.' - Andrew McMurray, Vice-President of Zachys

'Can rival the best from Bordeaux, and the Rhône. Maybe, given time, they might even right a historical wrong.' - Andrew Jefford *Decanter Magazine*

'There Has Been More Ballyhoo About This Domaine Than Any Other Since Daumas Gassac.' - *Languedoc-Roussillon - The Wines and the Wine Makers*, Paul Strang

All this in the last two decades.

What transpired after the turn of the century to effect such a transformation?

The oldest known wine growing region of France

One answer could be that La Pèira lies in an ancient wine growing area: the oldest known wine region of France.

Hugh Johnson states in his *The Story of Wine*: 'These are the first extensive vineyards in France we can be certain about.'

France's earliest known winery (A.D. 10) was discovered nearby La Pèira in 2007 (Source: *Decanter Magazine - France's earliest winery found* 2 Jul 2007).

La Pèira's appellation in the inland hills of the northern Hérault, overlaps in two villages with that of Roquefort – France's oldest and the world's first appellation (1925).

Here, in the villages of Pégairolles-de-l'Escalette and Octon, the grazing of Lacaune, Manech and Basco-Béarnaise ewes for the production of Roquefort cheese occurs alongside the growing of Syrah, Grenache and Mourvèdre for Terrasses du Larzac wine.

After this point, cultivation of olive trees and vines peter out.

The first mention of French wine in literature

Indeed, the first mention of French wine in literature as being of significant merit is found in Pliny's *Natural History* (A.D. 77–79) in which the white wines of Baeterræ [Beziers] nearby are cited as worthy of note alongside the resinous reds of Vienne:

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

[Trans. Philemon Holland 1601]

La Pèira also sits in the Clairette Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC) decreed in 1948 just after the end of the Second World War - one of France's earliest AOCs.

Clairette is a grape variety of some antiquity (the location of France's earliest known winery also lies in the Clairette AOC) and is still grown today at La Pèira. However the domaine is now known as much for its reds.

'Some of the greatest vineyard land in the south of France'

Writing for the *Financial Times* in 2009, Andrew Jefford detailed the epic battle at the turn of a millennium between Aimé Gilbert and Robert Mondavi who wished to make a 'grand cru' in the nearby scrubland. One of the biggest wine battles of the century.

On reviewing La Pèira for the first time there, he describes how:

'Some of the greatest vineyard land in the south of France did indeed lie close to hand – but not exactly where the Mondavis thought it did.'

He continues:

‘Head for the least geologically showy part of the appellation: the central benchlands of flat but well-drained limestone gravels.’

Here, he writes, can be found: ‘Balance, harmony and substance... and, especially, the astonishing wines of La Pèira.’

His conclusion?

‘La Pèira itself is a Syrah-Grenache of microscopic yields that contrives to summarise its entire region: it smells of evening on the hills and tastes like a liqueur of garrigue.’

Michel Bettane and Thierry Desseauve spoke of the area with the words:

‘This sector very much deserves a status apart. A terroir. A real one.’

A Medoc of the South

“...it feels almost Médoc-like”
Decanter Magazine

The wines of La Pèira are grown of quaternary alluvial deposits from the Pleistocene Era that sit along the path of the Hérault river.

The very same quaternary alluvial that forms the soils of the Medoc region along the Gironde river deposited over the same era.

While the Quaternary Alluvium deposited in the Medoc there sometimes forms terrace mounds or gravel *croupes*, here it is expressed as alluvial fans or *cônes* (another notable example of this in the world of wine is the Rutherford bench). As David Schildknecht relates:

“The deep alluvial fan that is the basis for this site is only barely tilted, as it might be in St. Helena or Rutherford, St.-Estephe or Pomerol ... and these comparisons will not seem inapt once you experience the quality of La Pèira’s wines.” - *Wine Advocate*

‘Southern France’s First Growth’

‘There has been more ballyhoo about this domaine than any other since Daumas Gassac.’

So wrote author Paul Strang of La Pèira in his book, *The Wines and Wine Makers* (2017) on this southern region.

In fact, La Pèira began its journey in a small stone barn halfway between Daumas Gassac (dubbed the ‘Grand Cru of the Midi’ by Hugh Johnson in the late 1970’s) and nearby estate Grange des Peres.

‘Southern France’s First Growth’, Andrew McMurray (vice-president of Zachys – New York’s and one of the world’s leading fine wine auction houses) wrote of La Pèira.

In 2022, La Pèira was one of a select group of wine estates in France to receive a ★★★★★-rating (the highest) in *Hugh Johnson’s Pocket Wine Book*. One of a handful in all Southern France.

Bought for a Song

In 2004, Robert Dougan and his wife Karine (who was born in neighbouring Montpellier) took over La Pèira.

Mr Dougan had some 10-years earlier immigrated to London and had started working as a dishwasher before beginning to work in music. Sometime later he had been nominated for a Grammy, signed to a record label as an artist with his orchestral music heard in films and on record.

You could say La Pèira was bought for a song.

Ethos

Starting together with a small team, there was a simple ethos:

- vineyard work equal to any of France’s greatest estates
- harvesting at sensible time to allow complexity
- a relatively hands-off careful vinification

The result would be what it would be.

The idea: a commitment to the above might allow the true character of place to convey something expressive and unique.





Making History Now

La Pèira owner Rob Dougan spoke of the excitement of being an explorer in the modern world when interviewed in 2013:

The idea that we can make history now, and we can be a part of that is exciting...the South of France region in general, is the region that's unfolding before our eyes, in our lifetime. In the way that we'd love to go back to Burgundy and see the nascence of Burgundy when the discoveries were made.

What would we not pay to go back to that time? and be part of that? and see that all happening? And see those famous, wonderful expressions in their first moment of lighting that flame?

Or to go back to Bordeaux, when the Dutch engineers were draining the swamps, and they were going to plant the first of these famous vines? When they had no certainty about what was going to be achieved, and they were just discovering that... we have that process unfolding before our eyes, in our lifetime.

A land where the Modern world began

Around the time that Gaspard de Stérimberg, weary of slaughtering Cathars in Southern France, went off to retire and redecorate his small (now famous) abode on the Hermitage hill, the area where we work was still known as the Occitania.

The name simply meant the region (composed of a group of changing fiefdoms covering Southern France, Monaco, parts of Italy and Spain) where the language Occitan (or Òc) was spoken. Richard the Lionheart's first language was Occitan, as was his mother's, Eleanor of Aquitaine. Most significantly, it was his Great Grandfather's, William (Guilhem) IX, one of the first of the Occitan poets (Troubadours).

The poetry of the Troubadours, the dominant literary force in Europe from 1100–1350, in effect invented the idea of romantic love – then courtly love (as seen nowadays in countless Hollywood romantic comedies), of chivalry and, more fundamentally, instigated the move from writing in classical latin, to literature

being written in the European romance languages that were actuality spoken on a day to day basis. This movement spurred the Italians into action, the French, and the English (Chaucer).

In 1210, Raimon Vidal de Bezaudun wrote *Razos de trobar* in which he asserted the superiority of Occitan over all other European vernaculars. This, in part, prompted Dante Alighieri's *De Vulgari Eloquentia* ('Of Literature in the Vernacular') essay on the historic evolution of language and the author's search for an (indigenous) illustrious vernacular among the fourteen varieties he claimed to have found in the Italian region.

Dante differentiates between the three main romance languages of the time, the 'Lingua d'Òc' (Occitan), 'Lingua di Si' (Italian), and 'Lingua d'Oil' (Old French), noting that the language of Occitan (Òc) was particularly suited for poetry, while Old French (Oil) was more suited to, 'works of history and knowledge', and citing the troubadour poet Peire d'Alvernhe.

Dante thought to write *The Divine Comedy* in Occitan before opting for his native Florentine dialect.

A wish to champion one of Europe's greatest treasures and regional cultures

Nearby La Peira, there are several UNESCO World Heritage Sites. On the ancient pilgrim Route of Santiago de Compostela there is the the abbey of Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert founded in 804 AD. It is reached by another such site, the 11th century, Pont du Diable - the old stone bridge that linked the Benedictine abbeys of Aniane and Saint-Guilhem. We have always viewed our entire region, its vineyards, its history, its cuisines, its people, customs and traditions as one great world heritage site.

A regional and 'illustrious vernacular'

Our search at La Pèira in Southern France was - and is - for a regional and 'illustrious vernacular' in the language of wine that might take its place among the many and varied expressions of France.

'In just a few years, La Pèira has established itself as one of the most groundbreaking properties of the Languedoc-Roussillon. Created in 2004, the property now ranks alongside – and in some eyes even above – the best of the best in Bordeaux and Burgundy.'

Classement des Meilleurs Vins de France 2014 Lafont Presse

ABOUT

- Owners: Karine Ahton and Robert Dougan
- Winemaker: Benoit Dreyer
- Appellation: AOC Terrasses du Larzac
- Area: Sainte-Brigitte/Jonquieres
- Vineyard area: 15.3 hectares
- Parcelles/Lieux-dits: Bois de Pauliau, Belle Fiolle (Bellefeuille), Les Pointes
- Soil: Quaternary alluvium: The soil of the vineyard is mainly clay with stony deposits and an alluvial subsoil dating from the Pliocene age. The deposits originate from the north, from the Jurassic-era limestone mountains some 150 million years old. Gravel (a mixture of sand, silt and clay) is deposited in the bed of streams and in what are known as alluvial cones.
- Production yearly: 300 cases of the 'grand vin' La Pèira. 500 cases of the 2nd wine, Las Flors de la Pèira.
- 85-100 cases of the La Pèira Blanc. 300-400 cases of the 2nd white, Deusyls de la Pèira.
- Cépages : Syrah, Grenache, Mourvedre, Cinsault, Carignan, Viogner, Roussanne, Marsanne, Grenache Blanc and Clairette blanche
- Other wines: Obriers de la Pèira, Matissat.

TERRASSES DU LARZAC

'Many observers consider this to be the most exciting estate in the Languedoc.'

Robert Parker Wine Advocate on La Pèira





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GEOGRAPHICAL SITUATION

The Terrasses du Larzac AOC (Southern France) is located north of Hérault and include the old villages of Montpeyroux and St Saturnin. There, the summers are hotter and longer, the winters harsher than on average in the region, the rapid warming in spring with prolonged good weather in early autumn, while Terrasses du Larzac rise to more than 800 meters, the AOC classified vineyards vary from a height of 50-300 meters on the hills of Causse and on the old terraces. The Romans were the first

TERROIR

Quaternary alluvium: the soil of the vineyard is mainly clay with stony deposits and an alluvial subsoil dating from the Pliocene age. The deposits originate from the north, from the Jurassic-era

VITICULTURE

Organic. mechanical soil maintenance, full disbud-
ding on all plots. The Syrah and the white grape

HARVEST

100% manual harvest. 100% destemmed, Grapes then pass through a vibrating sorting table, followed by a manual sorting table with 6 people.

to plant vines on the Terrasses du Larzac . The land around Lodève was very attractive, stretching along the Roman Way, very busy at the time and connecting Cessero (St. Thibéry) to Segodunum (Rodez). Hugh Johnson states of this general area in his *The Story of Wine*:

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

limestone mountains some 150 million years old. Gravel (a mixture of sand, silt and clay) is deposited in the bed of streams and in what are known as alluvial cones.

varieties are trellised on three wires, the rest of the vines are in goblet.



THE CRITICS ON LA PÈIRA

‘Easily one of the top estates in all of France’ - *Wine Advocate*

‘Make no mistake about it, this is a very special wine made on a very special estate’ - Jancis Robinson MW, *Financial Times*

‘There has been more ballyhoo about this domaine than any other since Daumas Gassac’ - *The Wines and the Wine Makers*, Paul Strang

‘The texture and the depth of flavor are amazing. It reminded me at different moments of 1989 La Mission Haut-Brion, Fattoria Galardi 2004 Terre di Lavoro and 1990 Henri Bonneau Reserve des Célestins’ - Jay McInerney, *Wall Street Journal*

‘Wines that need not fear comparison with any of the world’s wine icons’ David Schildknecht, *Wine Advocate*

‘The flagship wine from this new venture is easily going to be the next great global cult wine. Think Clos Erasmus or Masseto’ - Gary Vaynerchuk

‘Rearranged my inner pantheon in the way that truly great wine can’ - Andrew Jefford, *Decanter Magazine*

‘Many observers consider this to be the most exciting estate in the Languedoc’ - Robert Parker, *Wine Advocate*

‘The leading estate in all of the Languedoc and Roussillon’ - Jeb Dunnuck

‘Have helped completely change the landscape and the horizon of their appellation, with the wines being placed on qualitative level or above, of the 1er crus classés of Bordeaux and the Grands Crus of Burgundy’ - Bertrand Rougier *Le Classement des Meilleurs Vins de France 2014* (Lafont Presse).

‘La Pèira: one of a select list of estates in France to receive a ★★★★★ (super 5 stars, restricted to the true classics, out-and-out world class) rating. One of three in all South of France.’ - *Wine Behind the Label Guide*

‘Can rival the best from Bordeaux, and the Rhône’ - Andrew Jefford, *Gourmet Traveller*

‘Southern France’s First Growth’ - Andrew McMurray (vice-président of Zachys, one of the world’s leading fine wine auction houses)

La Pèira one of a handful of ★★★★★ domaines (highest-rating) in Southern France, and a select number from France itself - *Hugh Johnson’s Pocket Wine Book 2022*

www.la-peira.com



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