

I tried at least 100 ways to describe how beautiful the Riviera is. The keyboard stops my every attempt and I end up typing the same words – the Riviera is beautiful. I know that I will not get anyone to disagree. However, I am only allowed to go to the Riviera proper to rest and to have a glass of wine. No fun for me. This week I am in search of the fabulous Red Wines from two or three of the several appellations of Provence. Off I go armed with Michelin Map (If you ever go to Europe, these maps are the best if no GPS is available) and my slightly used Citroen.

The first area I wanted to see is Bandol. The wines of Bandol are especially fine. The Mouvedre grape provides the tannin and body and is most often blended with the Grenache grape to provide well structured, powerful wines best enjoyed after four or five years from release. Production in Bandol is about 70% red and 30% rosé. There are a many multi-star Michelin Restaurants in France. The red wines of Bandol are found on the wine lists of these restaurants. Why? Because the producers of these wines adhere to very strict production controls. The red wines must be made from a minimum of 50% Mouvedre. Then the wine must be stored in wooden foudres (a large wooden barrel that holds anywhere from 2000 to 100,000 liters) for at least 18 months to soften the fierce tannin of the Mouvedre grape. The best Producer of red wines from Provence is Domaine Tempier. This Domaine is recognized world-wide and their products do get to Lowcountry.

The next appellation is Les-Beaux-de-Provence. Production here is limited to red and rosé wines. I mention it because it is another area where strict AOC rules strictly adhered to ensure quality output. It may be difficult to find any wine from Les-Beaux-de-Provence in the Lowcountry. However, should you stumble upon one, pay the price and bring it home. If it is a red, open after 4-5 years from the release date.

Now for a small treat. I move on to Cassis (ka-sea) This is a small fishing village located 30 km from Marseilles. Cassis is also noted for excellent white wines. There are 12 estates, each producing and bottling their own wine. In 1936, cassis was awarded its own AOC. This recognition of quality work still holds true today. The estates produce over 100,000 cases per year combined, and not a drop is left unsold. Most notable is Clos Sainte- Magdelaine. The wines produced are made from Clairette and Marsanne grapes The end product is dry and goes very well with seafood. Once again, if you find a bottle, pay the price and bring it home. It is well worth it.

One little clue. If you go to these areas, do *not* miss market day. I personally guarantee a wonderful experience. To say anything more would spoil it for you. Make the adventure. Bring

the kids and your mother-in-law. Enjoy!

Winespeak:

Appellation – Literally, place name. The word used to indicate where a particular grape is grown and subsequently made into wine.

Appellation Controlee (AOC) — French wine laws that dictate which varietal can be planted in specific regions. The AOC laws also stipulate, for any given wine, the precise area where the grapes can be planted, the grape varieties that the wine can be made from, the permissible yield, aspects of viticulture such as pruning and irrigation, and the alcoholic strength of the wine. The French Appellation Controlee wine laws are a world model for laws that define and protect geographically named wines and spirits.

Varietal – Wine made from a particular type of grape.

Next stop – Italy.