



I am blessed to have traveled the world to visit wineries, and experience the culture of the people who make them. The place that I love the most is the southern part of France, the wine regions of the Languedoc and Provence. Both regions are steeped in history, have dramatic landscapes and the people share a relaxed approach to life that I greatly envy. The features this month are both from the Provence side, running east of the Rhone River to the Italian border, sandwiched between the Alps and the Mediterranean Sea.

My earliest knowledge of the region came from reading Richard Olney's installment of the Time-Life series *Foods of the World - The Cooking of Provincial France* which showed me the beauty of the region through spectacular photography and food. In honor of that the recipes for this month are from his later work, *Provence: The Beautiful Cookbook*.

2016 Fabre Cotes de Provence Rosé (\$16)

It is impossible to discuss the wines of Provence without starting with Rosé. As a category, Rosé is on fire and the examples from Provence are the market leader. While there is no evidence that Rosé production started in the south of France, the region is practically synonymous with the category. While it is a hot category right now, the producers of this region have depended on Rosé sales for decades. The primary consumers used to be the millions of northern European tourists who flock to the Mediterranean coast each summer. For them Rosé is the Florida equivalent of the margarita. As has been my habit for several years now, the Explorer Club "summer white" selection is Rosé and one that I believe you will really enjoy.

You may remember the name Fabre, as they also produced my Rosé pick for last summer, the extremely popular Serpolet bottling. This year the importer has secured a stronger position with this family, who dominates the Provence Rosé category, and brought us a better wine for the same price.

Maison Fabre was founded in 1920 by Henri Fabre, Sr. who's family was already well established in the wine business. Within a few years he grew the firm to the largest in France, selling not only the wines of Provence but also Bordeaux and the Rhone as well. Then during the depression he purchased two Provence estates and turned his attention to winemaking. It was Henri who introduced many modern winemaking innovations in Provence, including the instillation of the first bottling line. After World War II, the family's merchant business faded away as Henri's heirs acquired more acreage of vines in Provence. Today they are the largest owner of the region's Premier Cru vineyards, controlling over 40% of the entire category.

What impresses me most about the Fabre family is their dedication to quality, even when producing a massive amount of wine. All of their vineyards are farmed organically, and the vast majority of their grapes are hand harvested, which is not very common in Provence. To make this Rosé the grapes were harvested from three different vineyards, and 20% of them are from Cru Classé sites. The grape makeup is 40% Grenache, 40% Syrah, and 20% Cinsault. All are red varieties that are picked and pressed directly to the stainless steel fermentors, then fermented at very low temperature, and bottled young without lees contact. Winemaker Didier Mauduet intention is to bottle the freshest example of Cotes de Provence Rosé possible, to capture the delicacy and aromatics of the wine.

When you are ready to serve this wine, if in the refrigerator I would encourage you to open the bottle and let it sit on the kitchen counter for a few minutes before serving. If the wine is too cold the bouquet will be muted and acidity will be too sharp. When you pour the first glass you will immediately recognize the aromas of ripe cantaloupe, sweet plantain, raspberry jam, lavender, rosemary and sea foam. In the mouth this wine is nicely broad and rich, with a good sense of minerality that pulls this wine up at the sides, into a long finish. Drink this wine over the next year with a cold seafood platter, goat cheese crostini with red peppers or grilled fish.

2015 Chateau Val Joanis Luberon (\$18)

One of my favorite books about Provence is Peter Mayle's enchanting autobiography, *A Year in Provence*. It is a story of the trials and tribulations Mayle and his wife endure after they leave their lives in London, to restore a small farmhouse near the village of Ménerbes. This small village is located in the Luberon, which is really a series of three small mountain ranges that frame the northern boundary of Provence. I will not give away the story, but I envy Mayle and his life. Being a wine guy is a pretty good way to make a living, but writing best selling novels while sitting in a high valley of the Luberon? That is the life.

While it lies on the border of Provence, Luberon is technically the southeast end of the Rhone Valley appellation. In the complex way that the French classify their political jurisdictions, the Luberon falls into both the Vaucluse (Rhone) and Alpes-de-Haute-Provence departments. All of the wines are technically Rhone wine appellation, although those produced on the southeast side of the mountains, like Val Joanis, share more in common with Provence reds.

The Chateau Val Joanis is the most historic estate in the region and seen as a benchmark for the wines. Vines have been propagated on the property since the time of the Romans, and the man who established Val Joanis, Jean de Joanis, built the chateau in the early 1400's directly on top of their ruins. The estate was occupied by the Arnaud family, who kept

it until the 17th century and the estate was given the status of a fief in 1754. In the 19th century the property fell into ruins. It was purchased in 1977 by Jean-Louis Chancel. Between 1979 and 1999, he planted 460 acres of vines. He also commissioned the architect Jean-Jacques Pichoux to build a modern winery building, inspired by the architectural style of the Dominican Order. Today the winery produces a series of red wines under the Luberon designation, as well as a lovely Rosé.

As I mentioned before, the wines of the Luberon share similarities with both Rhone and Provence reds. To make this wine they use equal parts of Syrah and Grenache, from vines that are between 18 and 38 years old. All of the grapes are hand harvested and fermented and aged in stainless steel. When you open this wine please be sure to decant it for up to a half-hour before serving, and give it a light chill to cellar temperature. This is because the initial bouquet is quite ripe, the sign of Provence reds, with deep notes of fresh and dried cherry, creme de Cassis, black licorice, bay leaf and dried thyme. The Rhone character pokes out on the palate, as the plump fruit gives way to minerality, which frames this wine into a long finish. You should drink this wine over the next three to four years and you can serve it with just about any hearty dish, from pasta Bolognese to grilled rack of lamb.

Coquilles St. Jacques a la Provencale

You do not really need to serve Provence Rosé with food, but I think it is incredibly versatile and especially with seafood. This version of Coquilles St. Jacques is classic Provencal, using lighter ingredients than the cream based versions of northern France. If you can find day boat scallops with roe attached, by all means trim it but include that in this dish. Roe adds great color and a spectacular brine-y quality that plays beautifully with Provence Rosé.

2 tbsp. olive oil
12 sea scallops, each cut in half across the grain and dried on paper towels
salt and fresh ground pepper
1 tbsp unsalted butter
juice from 1/4 of a lemon

Persillade

2 tbsp finely chopped Italian parsley
1 garlic clove, finely chopped
Combine these two ingredients in a separate bowl

Warm the olive oil in a non-stick frying pan over high heat. Season the scallops with salt and pepper to taste. Add to the pan and saute for not quite 1 minute on each side. Add the butter and when it foams, add the persillade. Toss for a few seconds, then add lemon juice. Serve with slices of grilled or broiled French bread.

Ragout d'Agneau aux Artichauts *Lamb and Artichoke stew*

Even if you do not typically like lamb you should give this recipe a try with the Val Joanis or any Cotes du Rhone. In slow braised dishes like this the flavor of the meat is much more subtle. Of course you can always substitute beef if you prefer but add a little more time to the braising to allow it to break down and become more tender.

1. Warm 2 tbsp of olive oil in a heavy sauté pan (with lid) or Dutch oven over medium heat. Add the lardoons and sauté until colored on all sides, about 10 minutes. Remove them to a plate. Add the lamb pieces to the now empty pan and season with salt. Brown on all sides, about 20 minutes. *I found this works better in two batches, and I raised the heat to medium high)*

3 tbsp of olive oil
3 oz of salt pork, cut into thin strips (lardoons)
3 lbs of lamb stew meat, from a shoulder roast.
Trim fat and cut into 2 inch cubes
salt
1 12 oz can of chopped tomato
4 cloves of garlic
1 cup of white wine
1 tbsp Herbs de Provence
4 young artichokes, trimmed, quartered and chokes removed
8 oz of frozen pearl onions, thawed

2. Drain the pan of extra fat and add the tomato, garlic and white wine. Raise the heat (*if you have not already*) and scrape the pan to dissolve any brown bits (*fond*). Add the Herbs de Provence, reduce the heat to low, cover and simmer for 1 hour.

3. In a second pan (also with a lid), warm 1 tbsp of olive oil over low heat. Add the prepared artichokes and onions and season with salt. Cover and sweat them for twenty minutes, giving the pan a shake from time to time to prevent sticking. Add the reserved lardoons, cover and continue to cook over very low heat until the artichokes are tender. Once the meat is tender, combine the contents of both pans and serve. Classically this dish is served over rice, or with buttered noodles. You can also add small, scrubbed new potatoes to the meat for the last half-hour of cooking and serve without additional starch.