

Discover the best wines in Provence

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Let us take you on a journey. It's a pandemic era trip without flights, trains, suitcases or hotel rooms. And with travel banned, rather than a passport, you'll need just a glass of wine and a little imagination to hop over borders.

The French speak of *typicité* and *terroir*; by this, they mean that a well-made, carefully crafted wine should say (sing even) of the region in which it was made. If you are one of the many ruing a canceled trip to Provence or planning a future one, then head to your nearest wine merchant (on-line if you'd rather not venture out) and ask for any of the following wines.

They number among the finest in Provence and include a bottle of red, dubbed the Petrus of Provence and the region's most iconic rosé. Uncork the wine well in advance, select your best glass, find a comfortable chair, pour, lean back, and relax. Take your time and inhale the sticky scents of the garrigue, wild thyme and rosemary, pines oozing amber sap, and the cooling minerality of the fierce mistral. Taste the beating sun in the spicy ripe summer fruits, with their overtones of tobacco and comforting oak. Close your eyes after every sip and picture yourself in Provence.

Domaine Tempier, Bandol, Red

Bandol reds are among the most sought-after wines in Provence. The vines of the appellation are in a sun-drenched valley behind the busy Mediterranean port of Bandol. There are numerous producers, but the best of the region remains Domaine Tempier, which produces one of the finest reds in Provence.

Bandol red improves with age for up to twenty years. Over time the tannins grow rounder, and smoky notes evolve. Bandol wines from 2015 (the last exceptional vintage in Provence) are drinking beautifully. Domaine Tempier itself is quaint. An old farmhouse sits at the end of a line of plane trees. There's just a simple tasting room in a converted annex. Visiting is a wonderfully low-key affair, and this allows the wine to do the talking. The vineyard may offer the opportunity to sample a flight of Tempier reds going back twenty years or so.

Chateau Vignelaure, Aix en Provence, Red

The Chateau claims it is the jewel in the crown of the Coteaux d'Aix en Provence. The renowned American wine critic Robert Parker once commented that the Chateau was "one of the showpiece properties of not only Provence but also France." All this fuss stems from the uniqueness of the wine. Back in the 1960s, George Brunet grafted Cabernet Sauvignon vines, which were used to produce the classed Bordeaux Chateau Lagune.

Skepticism of the wine establishment at the time, he planted outside Aix en Provence, with the stated aim of making wine in the Bordeaux fashion. Locals laughed as they knocked back the pastis and gossiped about the owner. They all said that the heat of the south of France would be too much for the Cabernet Sauvignon grape, predicting an undrinkable wine. However, today, Chateau Vignelaure reds top Provencal wine lists. When travel re-opens, make a point of visiting the cellars, which extend over five underground levels. As well as the thousands of bottles of wine, there is an art gallery.

Domaine du Paternel, Cassis, White

Seek out a bottle of Domaine du Paternel, and let your imagination take you to the sunny Mediterranean. In Cassis, pastel-colored houses line the port side and cafes bustle as chefs prepare the local specialty – bouillabaisse. A crescent of hills holds the town in a sheltered embrace, and the sun-burnished slopes above the port, vineyards produce Provence’s most delicate whites. The wine is so famous it frequently sells out by the end of the summer. A bottle of Domaine du Paternel, the appellation’s signature vineyard, is the perfect accompaniment to any seafood. The white wine offers a minerality that rolls across the palate as you taste and stands up to the saltiness of oysters, just as well as it accompanies the softer flavors of grilled sole.

Domaine Ott, Chateau Romassan, Bandol, Rosé

Before Whispering Angel came along, Domaine Ott was the go-to rosé of Provence. Slightly deeper in color than the young successor, it has fuller flavor and is a better accompaniment to meals. Pair it with a barbecue or some Thai food to discover the remarkable depth and fruity notes of this stand out Provencal rosé. It is made (predominately) with the Mourvedre grape, which so distinguishes the reds and rosés of Bandol. The wine arrives in a beautifully shaped bottle, tucked in at the waist like coca-cola bottles, and with curves in all right the places. In the nineties, Kate Moss was sashaying along the beach in Saint Tropez with the distinctive bottle poking from her bag. Sales of rosé took off and have not looked back since.

Domaine Milan, Saint Remy de Provence, Le Jardin, Red

One for the purists because Domaine Milan is a natural wine producer. Not only are chemicals not used in the fields (this earns you the title organic wine in France), but also there are no chemicals used in the fermentation of the wine. It is old fashioned winemaking, and a horse tills the soil between the rows of vines. Dubbed the Petrus of Provence, Le Jardin, shares the same soil (blue clay) and Merlot grape as, Petrus, its more well-known Bordeaux cousin. The wine always sells out and owner Henri Milan makes it a rule to increase the price every year to match Petrus. An excellent marketing perk is that your price is locked in for life when you purchase your first bottle.

By Jamie Ivey

