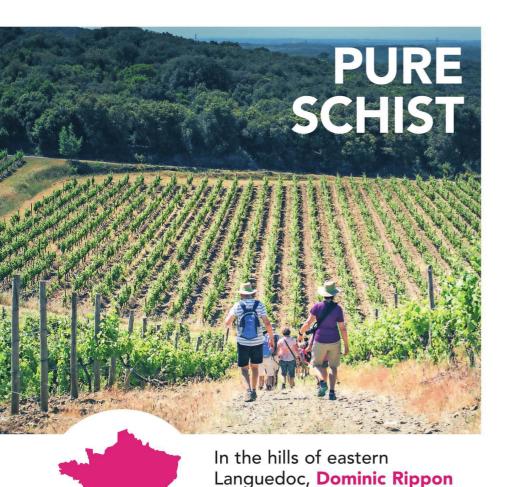
-Vineyard views



he vineyards of
Faugères perch
majestically above the
city of Béziers, in the
Hérault département, in the
foothills of the wild Cévennes
mountains. Vines cling to gently
undulating hills, interspersed
with woodland and garrigue
scrub. The sometimes fiercely
hot Mediterranean summers are
tempered by the influence of
forests, and a vineyard altitude
of up to 400 metres.

Trendy terroir

Faugères is best known in wine circles for its schist soils; some of France's most ancient earth. Schist is high fashion these days: even a little of it is enough to set wine journos' pulses racing, and Faugères is one of the few wine appellations in the world (along with Priorat in northeastern Spain) that can boast an almost homogeneous schist terroir. Deep fissures in the soil allow vines to plunge their roots several metres deep, in search of vital water reserves; sucking up the beguiling mineral flavours for which Faugères is renowned.

Dominic's choice

DOMAINE OLLIER-TAILLEFER

Tel: (FR) 4 67 90 24 59 olliertaillefer.com

Choice wine 1:

Faugères Blanc "Allegro" 2020 An unoaked blend of roussanne and vermentino (rolle) grapes with a touch of white carignan. Fresh, ripe citrus aromas with floral hints. Wonderful presence on the palate; fat and mouthfilling. A great partner for smoked trout. €13.50 / bottle

Choice wine 2: Faugères Rouge "Castel

explores one of southern

France's most singular terroirs

Fossibus" 2017
Syrah, mourvèdre and grenache grapes are joined by a little carignan, "to retain freshness as the wine ages". Long maceration and oak ageing for this full-blooded red. Floral yet earthy aromas, mixed with cherry and liquorice. Balanced and suave on the palate.
€19.50 / bottle

DOMAINE DE L'ANCIEN MERCERIE

Tel: (FR) 4 67 90 27 02

Choice wine:

Faugères Rouge "Les Petites Mains" 2019

One of the best value reds in Faugères, blended from old vine carignan, syrah, grenache and a touch of mourvèdre, for elegance. The wine is organically made and unoaked, showing pure ripe dark fruit aromas. The palate is powerful and grippy, with impressive concentration. €12 / bottle

Faugères has only enjoyed appellation d'origine status for its red and rosé wines since 1982, partly because the area was historically better known for the production of Fine de Faugères – the local brandy, which is currently undergoing a renaissance of its own. Red grapes are syrah, grenache noir, lledoner pelut, carignan, mourvèdre and cinsault, 79% of which make robust, yet elegantly perfumed red wines. Meanwhile, 17% of Faugères is dry, food-friendly rosé.

On the up

Faugères had to wait until 2005 to make *appellation*-controlled white wines, from the roussanne, marsanne, grenache blanc, vermentino, viognier and clairette grapes. Although these whites represent a mere 4% of Faugères's total wine production, they are quickly gaining a reputation for their combination of exotic richness and cool finesse.

The impression of unspoiled sun-baked wilderness in the Faugères vineyards is reflected



Above:

Domaine Florence Alquier's range

Left:

Exploring the Faugères countryside in their healthy credentials: 58% of land is farmed organically, and 40% is already certified organic – compared with a 9% average across France.

But Faugères's ambition in this regard is only in its infancy. The *appellation*'s president,

Nathalie Caumette, sees an eventual full conversion to organic viticulture (which she describes as "imperfect") simply as an "intermediate objective" for Faugères's vineyards, on the way to an even braver future in harmony with nature.

CHÂTEAU LA LIQUIÈRE

Tel: (FR) 4 67 90 29 20 chateaulaliquiere.com

Choice wine:

Faugères Rouge "Nos Racines" 2019
Unusually, this wine is made with
(the once maligned) carignan
grape, from 100-year-old vines,
grown at an altitude of 350 metres;
blended with 5% grenache.
Deeply coloured, with sloe, flowers
and Marmite aromas. Plump and
silky on the palate, with all of
carignan's trademark freshness.
€14.10 / bottle
*Buy in the UK from
thewinesociety.com

DOMAINE FLORENCE ALQUIER

Tel: (FR) 6 01 78 43 29 domaine-florence-alquier.com Choice wine:

Faugères Rouge "Rieutord" 2017
Excellent, complex Faugères,
softened by five years bottle
age. A thoughtful blend of
50% syrah, 30% carignan, 15%
grenache and 5% mourvèdre,
with some oak ageing. Earthy
and mineral on the nose, with
floral cherry notes. Full and
explosive in the mouth. Great
with roast lamb or game stew.
€16.80 / bottle



Dominic Rippon has many years' experience in the wine trade, both in the UK and France, and now lives among the vineyards of Languedoc-Roussillon