

Dom Gayda, L'Archet Maccabéo 2005 Vin de Pays d'Oc

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I know I have been banging on about it since at least 2003 (see [Maury/Fenouillèdes](#) and [Le Soula Blanc 2001](#), for example) but there is a little corner of Roussillon in southern France that is arguably the most exciting in Europe to judge from how many top quality outside winemakers it has attracted and how many exciting wines it has produced. The infuriating thing - I know, I have made this point before - is that it doesn't have a name to call its own. It's the upper Agly valley, on the schists above the villages of Maury and Calce. Until quite recently it at least had its own Vin de Pays des Coteaux Fenouillèdes but it was careless enough to lose it, so now the wines have to be sold as either Vin de Pays des Côtes Catalanes or Côtes du Roussillon-Villages (both covering much bigger areas) depending on which grape varieties go into the wine.

My first report was made on the basis of a big wine tasting at Maury where names such as Thunevin, Chapoutier, Lurton, d'Arfeuille and Ferraud were already buzzing around what they saw as a honeypot for red wines oozing power and mineral character. Since then, others have poured in, notably but not exclusively UK-based Masters of Wine and South African winemakers. Thanks to the glorious Le Soula Blanc I have become besotted by the firm, dry whites produced from ancient vines on these mountain terraces inland from Perpignan.

Le Soula Blanc, a joint enterprise between Gérard Gauby, Eric Laguerre and UK importers Richards Walford, is now on the wine lists of, apparently, all of Paris's top restaurants, is a wine for ageing and is not cheap - over £20 a bottle. (Vintages drinking beautifully now are 2001, 2002 and 2005.)

But here is a much less expensive alternative, already drinking well. Domaine Gayda, coincidentally, also has a South African connection: Marc Kent of Boekenhoutskloof in [Franschhoek](#) is in charge of the final blends at this new winery-cum-restaurant south of Carcassonne near Brugairolles. This new outfit, with winemaker Vincent Chansault from the Loire, seems determined to sell everything as a Vin de Pays d'Oc, blending the produce of different parcels quite widely spread throughout the western Languedoc and Roussillon.

Dom Gayda, L'Archet Maccabéo 2005 Vin de Pays d'Oc for example is mainly 80 year-old Maccabéo vines grown on terraced schist in the upper Agly valley but has been stiffened with 10% Grenache Blanc grown in the hills above La Livinière in the Minervois. ([Maccabéo](#) is the same as the Viura of Rioja and is widely planted all over Catalunya and northern Spain.)

This 14.05% wine, attractively packaged with screwcap in a slightly unnecessarily heavy bottle, was fermented and aged for nine months in old French oak and has lots of that mineral quality that schist can impart with real intensity thanks to the age of the vines. Le Soula and the [Domaine Lafage Blanc](#) about which I raved earlier this year have a more interesting grape mix but this wine is delightful already and could be thought of as a sort of slimline Soula which could be enjoyed at any time over the next year or two. It is much more serious than the price suggests.

The Gayda website gives details of importers in Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Sweden, UK and the US [here](#). In the UK the importer is New Generation Wines, a general wine import company owned by Anthony Record, the owner of Gayda. I am assured the wine is available retail at £8-10 from Noel Young of Trumpington and www.nywines.co.uk, Bona Wines of Tetbury, DeFine Food & Wine of Cheshire, Worth Brothers of West Midlands, Falernian Fine Wines of Wales, Wine Direct of Hailsham and www.winedirect.co.uk, Cambridge Wine Merchants, Bedales of Borough Market in London) SE1, Ava Wines in Northern Ireland and Wine Etc of West Sussex. The principal US importer is Indigo Wines. It's available at the cellar door for a bargain seven euros.

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