

IGP - the Category Formerly Known as Vin de Pays

In regards to its wine industry, France has generally been regarded as a nation of quality that is protected by rules and regulations. Generally this can be considered to be a good thing, except for when it gets in the way of innovation. Finally, after many years of rigid controls, the French system of classification is beginning to change, becoming more fluid, simplified and customer-friendly.

When the classification system was established in 1935, there was a static line drawn between house (or table) wines and quality wines. Inside of these two divisions were two more divisions. The table wine section was broken down into Vin de Table and Vin de Pays, while the quality wine section was subdivided into Vin Délimité de Qualité Supérieure (VDQS) and Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC). This system was literally enacted into law, and was the way things were done until changes were proposed in 2006.

These proposed changes have been refined over the last few years, and will finally be completed by 2012. One of the big changes has been removing this rigid table versus quality classification. As a result, the whole category of VDQS has disappeared; its products were then meted out to the categories either above or below it. Vin de Table has been renamed as Vin de France (and both grape and vintage are allowed on the label), and AOC has now become AOP (Appellation d'Origine Protégée, and is largely unchanged).

One of the most interesting changes has occurred in the category that was once known as Vin de Pays. The category is now called Indication Géographique Protégée (IGP) and is largely unchanged in legality, but has seen a dramatic change in perception. Long viewed as a "catch-all" category with a table wine stigma attached to it, the IGP category is now showing signs of developing into a highly regarded category, much like Italy's IGT designation (the home of the Super-Tuscans).

Historically, Vin de Pays has always carried a region designation with it as well. Vin de Pays d'Oc was from the Languedoc-Roussillon region, while Vin de Pays de Côtes de Gascogne was from the Gascony region. Region is still allowed on the labels, as are grapes and methods of production that differ from the normal. IGP is a category that has fewer restrictions than wines made in the AOP regions (think Bordeaux and Bourgogne) and thus the winemakers have a greater freedom to experiment with different grapes, techniques and technologies. This is not to say that quality standards do not exist. Wines produced for this classification still need to be submitted for analysis and tasting, and still see some restrictions on grape-type and blends.

Recommendations:

Domaine de Sérème: Viognier is the entry point into the exotic/floral category of wines and this wine is a great ambassador for the French style of this grape. Grown in silty soils, this Viognier showcases a wonderful fullness of aromas that include notes of peach and orange blossom. This lighter-bodied wine

has a rich and fresh palate, with notes of apricot and slight floral accents. Excellent with lobster (non-cream sauce dishes) and poultry dishes that feature a hint of spice, 750 ml **\$16.99**

Fat Bastard Chardonnay: This oddly named wine is made from grapes from 3 different regions in France helping to give balance to both the fruit flavours and acidity. This award-winning chardonnay shows off aromas of tropical fruit (think kiwi and pineapple) and a full-bodied palate featuring flavours of pear, green apple and grapefruit with hints of vanilla and butter in the finish. An excellent wine for cream sauce dishes and pork (especially tenderloin), 750 ml **\$16.99**

Patriarche Reserve Pinot Noir: Patriarche Père & Fils is a traditional Burgundy négociant that has chosen to source pinot noir grapes primarily from the Languedoc-Roussillon region to craft this reserve-style wine. The twelve months spent in oak helps to give this wine more body and complexity than some other styles of pinot. The nose expresses notes of raspberry and red cherry with hints of vanilla and spice. All of these aromas transit into tastes on the palate that also features excellent structure and soft tannins. Enjoy with roasted duck, pan-roasted salmon and/or any dish dependant on mushrooms, 750 ml **\$16.99**

Hob Nob Merlot: The packaging on this wine would suggest that it is American or Australian, but this is actually a sub-label of the George Duboeuf house. The labeling is apt because this wine drinks much more like a new world style. There are plenty of fruit notes (think ripe plum and blackberry) on the nose, and notes of chocolate, mint and licorice on the palate. It has a medium-light body, soft tannins and a finish that features some vanilla notes. In short, this is a friendly, new world-like, drinking style that does well on its own or with plain red sauce pasta dishes (chicken or veggie) and cheeses of medium intensity, 750 ml **\$14.49**