

# la Clape



## PRESS PACK LA CLAPE AOC LANGUEDOC

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**la Clape**  
AOC LANGUEDOC  
\* Sud de France

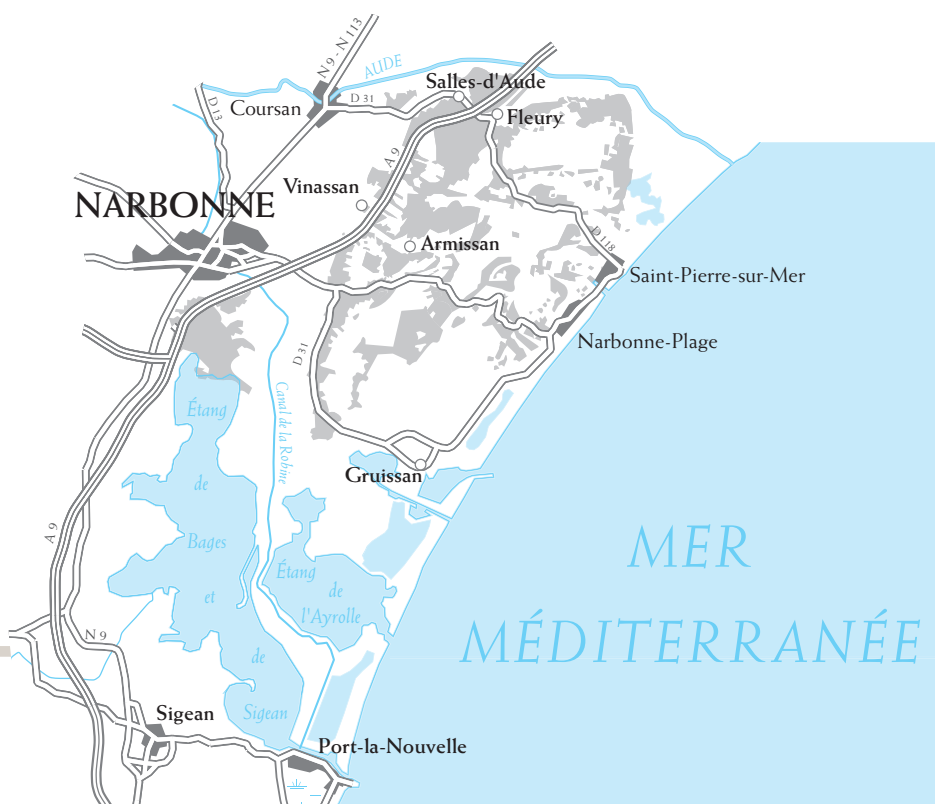
# la Clape

## Environment and area

Situated in the Aude, la Clape vineyards nestle by the mountain range of the same name, by the shores of the Mediterranean near Narbonne. Part of the AOC Languedoc, this denomination stretches over five communes, produces 30,000 hectolitres annually and is close to becoming a cru in its own right. In 2007, the producers approached the INAO (l'Institut National de l'Origine et de la Qualité) requesting official recognition of the AOC La Clape denomination. The request was approved in May 2009 and should come into effect between 2010 and 2011.

### A vineyard by the Mediterranean

Situated in the Aude, La Clape stretches between Narbonne and the Mediterranean covering an area 17 kilometres long by 7 kilometres wide. The sea forms its eastern border, to the west are the river Aude's alluvial plains, with lagoons to the south; it rises to 214 metres at Pech-Redon whose high cliffs dominate the sea, its valleys and hillsides covered in pine groves, vines and garrigue.



### Key figures

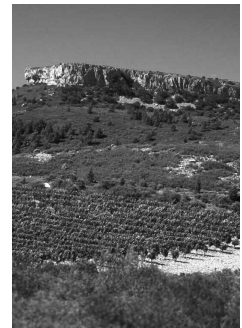
- Area under production :  
**1 000 ha of AOC Languedoc,**  
**of which 625 hectares are**  
**AOC Languedoc-La Clape.**
- Production zones : 5 communes  
(Armissan, Fleury-d'Aude, Narbonne, Salles-d'Aude, Vinassan.)
- Number of producers :  
**36 independent producers**  
**4 caves cooperative**

#### Production

- Annual production :  
**43 000 hectolitres of AOC Languedoc with**  
**30 000 hl of AOC Languedoc-la Clape**
- Average yield : between 35 and 40 hectolitres per hectare
- Colours : red, rosé and white

# la Clape

## Making wine : a tradition since the Roman era



*Wine production started at La Clape towards the end of the II century BCE. It reached its zenith when the small town of Narbonne became the capital of the Narbonnaise, a province conquered by the Romans. It was they who started seriously cultivating and developing vines around the La Clape hillsides. Today, the area's own denomination - AOC La Clape - is about to become recognized by the INAO.*

Human beings were already ensconced in La Clape 100,000 years ago. But it was only with the advent of the Phoceans (600 BCE) and, especially, the Romans (118 BCE) that wine production took off. When the Romans colonised the area towards the end of the II century BCE, they were delighted by this tree covered area which had a similar climate to Italy. In those days it was still an island, the largest in the gulf of Narbonne. Julius Caesar awarded land to the best of his troops who soon threw themselves enthusiastically into wine production. Soon, La Clape, known as Insula Laci, wines were being exported to Toulouse and Bordeaux as well as throughout the Empire. La Clape producers were even the first to benefit from the privilege of planting granted by the Senate to Roman citizens in Narbonne.

### La Clape's golden age

From the XII century onwards, a period of intense economic development, Narbonne became a great centre for international trade, its influence spreading far and wide. Towards 1650, out of twelve boats sailing from the town's port, ten were full of wine. And although the vineyards around Narbonne were affected by oïdium and phylloxera late in the day, these two pests destroyed all the vines in the XIX century. It was 50 years before La Clape's vines were reborn on the island which had been joined to the mainland by soil washed down by the river Aude and changes to the coastline.

### Producers with a vision

The rebirth of La Clape is owed to the vision and enthusiasm of a few producers, most particularly the Countess of Woillemont. As first chairman of the "syndicat de défense du cru la Clape", in 1951 she succeeded in gaining official recognition of the production zone as Appellation d'Origine VDQS "La Clape" (see notes page X). In the 1970s, thanks to producer Jean Segura, the area's white wines became well known thanks to one grape variety, Bourbelenc (or Malvoisie). And, although the producers chose to come under the AOC Coteaux du Languedoc in 1985, they agreed parallel, more restrictive, regulations than those of the decree which was, itself, modified on 18 May 1998. In 2007, the producers approached the INAO (l'Institut National de l'Origine et de la Qualité) requesting to be allowed to use the name AOC La Clape. The request was approved in May 2009 and should come into effect between 2010 and 2011.



## La Clape : a 'pile of pebbles' facing the sea

Thanks to the number of lakes on the island it was known as Insula Laci ; nowadays they remain as ponds. For over 600 years La Clape was a steep, heavily wooded escarpment, the largest in the Aude delta archipelago. Between the I and XIII centuries, the sea reached Narbonne even, to the east, bi-passing it. Even in 150 CE Narbonne was a port and la Clape an island. But with climate change, the Aude flooded regularly, and the land gradually spread into the sea thanks to scree and stones being carried down Pyrenean streams to the main river. By the XIV century the la Clape island joined up with the mainland whilst its deforestation added to the soil erosion. It has since then been known as the Occitan for 'pile of pebbles'.

*« La Clape, a pebble covered in greenery, dominates the village of Gruissan. Who remembers that the plain below was once a vast sea, and this pebbly mountain, a virgin island ? » L'Express, May 2006.*

# la Clape

## La Clape Syndicat sets its sights on becoming a Cru

*Close to Narbonne in the Aude, la Clape vineyards form part of the AOC Languedoc. Under the chairmanship of recently elected Christophe Bousquet, the Syndicat has set its sights on becoming an independent Cru. It is more than possible that the project could come to fruition between 2010 and 2011. Agreement was reached in principle in May 2009 by the INAO. Watch this space.*

Christophe Bousquet, 43, of the château Pech-Redon, near Narbonne, succeeded Michel de Braquilanges as chairman of the Syndicat des Vignerons de la Clape in February 2009.

### A Cru within sight

This workaholic has no doubt that his mission is to 'ensure the recognition of la Clape as a Cru'. It's true the project reminds one of an old sea serpent going back over 20 years. But this time, it includes every producer in the area. There's a spirit largely brought about by the success of the Sentiers Gourmands\*, an occasion which brought together all the producers. Young people and "neo-vignerons" have also played a part in re-launching the project. 'Today, everyone believes in it', underlines the new chairman, whose other ambition is to 'develop wine tourism throughout the area' within 2 or 3 years.

### May 2009 : a step forward

In May 2009, the la Clape area which was part of the AOC Languedoc organisation, broke into the new hierarchical structure of this great family. The Syndicat has, in fact, achieved its aim as the management committee of the INAO approved the project on 29 May 2009. The new AOC La Clape could officially see the light of day between now and the harvests of 2010 or 2011.

*\* ramble through the vines with stops for good food and wine tastings accompanied by la Clape producers.*

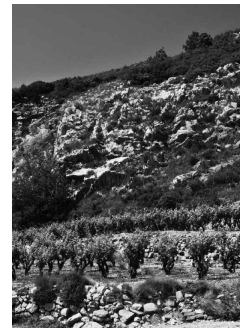
### Noteworthy dates

- 1945 : The Syndicat of la Clape producers makes its appearance
- 1951 : Decree recognising the la Clape area as a VDQS (vin délimité de qualité supérieure) covering the five communes of : Armissan, Fleury-d'Aude, Narbonne, Salles-d'Aude et Vinassan (JO of 12 septembre 1951).
- 1973 : The la Clape massif becomes a protected site, With 15 000 hectares, it's the largest in the Languedoc-Roussillon.
- 1985 : Decree of 24 December 1985 defines the Appellations d'Origine Contrôlée Coteaux du Languedoc and the Coteaux du Languedoc-La Clape.
- 1998 : 18 May, modification of decree defining the AOC Coteaux du Languedoc (stricter production conditions)
- 2007 : Deposit, in January of formal request for recognition of the AOC La Clape denomination with the INAO (Institut National de l'Origine et de la Qualité).
- 2009 : approval of the AOC La Clape proposal by the INAO on 29 May.

*« It's true the project reminds one of an old sea serpent going back over 20 years. But this time, it includes every producer in the area. »*

# la Clape

## A mosaic of terroirs



*Diversity is behind the character and riches of the la Clape vineyards. Although linked geographically, the altitude, sea influence, incredibly varied types of soil and varying outlooks all add up a true mosaic of terroirs.*

### Environment

A combination of narrow, windy marl valleys, water falls on steep slopes and steep cliffs facing the Mediterranean all mean that the la Clape countryside is quite unlike the surrounding plains. Registered as a special site by the Conservatoire du Littoral since 1973, the mountain is home to outstanding flora and fauna ; indeed since 2000 it has been listed as a Natura zone so as to protect the birds and their habitat. The vines act as a natural wind break, and some vineyards have been specially designed with this in mind, as part of a common effort.

### Climate

La Clape's climate is dry and hard, with sunshine and gusty winds beating against the naked rocks. La Clape's position as one of the sunniest in France (over 3 000 hours of sunshine annually) is due to the 13 winds that blow over it. Among them, the Tramontane, Cers, Ponant, wind from Spain, Lebech or Gregaou all share the job of chasing away the clouds that could cover the lovely island. Occasionally, southern storms threaten to blow away the local windmills. Occasionally, la Clape resembles a tropical island. Ravines overflow, pines and reeds succumb to the elements. All this strengthens the vines : water quenches their thirst and cleans them at the same time, the wind dries and airs them, the sun feeds them whilst filling the grapes with sugar. It's a hard climate which guarantees great quality wines.

### Soils

The last link to the high Pyrenees and isolated by a convenient fault line, la Clape used to be totally surrounded by water. Protecting an ancient bay, it guaranteed the excellence of Narbonne's port. La Clape still reflects the changes of time. The sea eroded it mercilessly stripping plant life from the limestone of its majestic cliffs. Grottos and chasms riddle the slopes. Underground streams criss cross it, purifying the soil as they go. A great variety of soils co-exist : layers of flat, sharp angled stone, red soils made up of ferrous oxide, grey or yellow calcareous marl, red or green sandstone... La Clape's soils provide a great base for the various grapes, which feel thoroughly at home in them. Hard stones mean tough vines which soon develop their full potential.



## « Sentiers Gourmands »

Every May, the Syndicat of la Clape wine producers organize "Sentiers Gourmands" – days when enthusiastic fans of vines, wine, good food and Languedoc heritage are accompanied on a ramble around the area, with regular halts for refreshment. The sixth such event in 2009 attracted over 1 200 people. Armed with straw hats and small bags containing cutlery, a tasting glass, notebook and pencil, participants enjoyed meandering over six kilometre between vines and lagoons stopping for superb meals organised by the Narbonne chef Marc Schwal (Les Cuisiniers Cavistes) in the heart of the vineyards and accompanied along the way by local wine producers. Price for 2010 between 39 € - 43 € per person, with a child's basket at 10 €.

*« Vines here surround the homesteads. One thing that makes la Clape so special is its incredible diversity. Indeed, individual domaines often reflects one specific facet of the whole. »*

# la Clape

## Grapes in harmony



*In the past ten years, la Clape producers have replaced over half of the area's grape varieties. Today they are producing 30,000 hectolitres annually of AOC Languedoc-la Clape in three colours. Red wines make up 80 % of all production.*

### Grapes

To have the right to be part of the Coteaux du Languedoc appellation together with the "La Clape" denomination, wines must be made exclusively from the following :

#### **Red wines :**

Main varieties : Grenache, Mourvèdre, Syrah

Complementary varieties : Carignan, Cinsault

Grenache grapes must make up at least 20 % of the total, whilst the main varieties must make up at least 70 %. Regulations state that at least two of the main varieties are used in the blend.

#### **Rosé wines :**

Main varieties : Grenache, Mourvèdre, Syrah

Complementary varieties : Carignan, Cinsault

The two main varieties must represent at least 60 % of a blend, and both main varieties must be included.

#### **White wines :**

Main varieties : Bourboulenc, Clairette, white Grenache, Marsanne, Picpoul, Rolle, Roussanne

Complementary varieties : white Carignan, Maccabeu, Terret, Ugni

Bourboulenc must make up at least 40 % of the whole. At least two of the main varieties must be included.

### In a glass

#### **Red wines :**

On the whole, these age well, are usually very open and well balanced with good tannins. On the nose, they're full, complex with spicy and garrigue aromas. Can be laid down for over four years and mature well in barrels.

#### **Rosé wines :**

Particularly well known, white la Clape wines are based on Bourboulenc which is also known as Malvoisie. Thanks to them the wine is beautifully gold in colour with floral aromas, full of finesse and very elegant with occasional fresh hints of aniseed. A harmonious mouth, fresh and rounded, it remains young for 2 or 3 years.

#### **White wines :**

Reminiscent of the whistling of cicadas and the heady perfumes of pine trees the grapes, which are the same as for the red wines, are mostly bled, these are summer wines par excellence. Soft and rounded, they are full of fresh sea breezes, with fruity aromas and hints of flowers.



## Key figures

### **Terroir**

- Area : 15 000 ha of which 1 000 hectares in AOC Languedoc-La Clape.
- Length : 17 km.
- Width : 7 km.

### **Production**

- Red : 80 %.
- Rosé : 10 %.
- White : 10 %.

*« The red and white grapes grown on AOC registered land represent 95 % of the total which is well above the average for the AOC Languedoc. A phenomenon due to the early classing of la Clape as an AOC zone. »*

# la Clape

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