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## Languedoc round-up, summer 2023



*Olivier Faucon of Mas Combarèla, pictured above, is just one of so many over-achievers in France's most extensive wine region. The Languedoc may not be the simplest region to understand, but can you afford to ignore it?*

(...)

**Jancis :** Intrigued by [Tam's enthusiastic tasting notes](#) on the wines of Mas Combarèla, I set off in late July to visit the domaine up in the hills in the south of the Terrasses du Larzac appellation in an isolated spot between Montpeyroux and the little village of St-Jean-de-Fos.

One of my hobby horses is that wine producers tend to be dangerously lax about security. In far too many wineries anyone could walk in and add a potentially lethal or commercially dangerous substance to a barrel. But this criticism certainly couldn't be levelled at Olivier Faucon (pictured above), who has surrounded the winery and house he has built with a high wall and security gate. Even though he knew exactly when I was arriving, the gate was shut and I had to ring the bell and wait for this ex marketer from Paris. When I asked him about all the security his explanation was, 'Our family is from northern France. When I travel I need to have walls and a gate.' (Tam has regularly been exposed to Faucon's wines as a member of the Languedoc [Outsiders](#)' group.)



*The walled and gated winery and house at Mas Combarèla*

He may not be a native but to judge from his wines, he seems to have intuited the local conditions pretty seamlessly. He says he was inspired to change direction and become a vigneron by Richard Leroy of the Loire, who, similarly, had no wine background – worked in a Paris bank – but has come to be a celebrated wine producer. Another inspiration was a series of cartoons about wine, notably *Les Ignorants*, after which one of his wines is named.



He went to wine school in Beaune and asked to work at Cal Demoura, not too far from what would become his own domaine, a site he chose because of the cool nights thanks to cold air from the mountains to the north. He'd accumulated a bit of capital and initially planned to buy a domaine, sussing out territory all over the south of France. But in the end he bought old-vine vineyards in this wild, hilly, windswept countryside whose produce used to go to the local co-op. They are mainly round his winery plus a few hectares the other side of St-Jean-de-Fos and some even higher up near Arboras, making a total of 12 ha (30 acres) at 150 up to 500 m (490–1,640 ft).

His first vintage was 2016. He built the winery in 2018 and the house in 2019, the year the property was certified organic. 'For 10 years, my income has been zero. The Crédit Agricole is my friend', he says about the dominant bank in the south of France. His wife still works in market research in Paris with a salary he describes as 'correct'.

75-year-old Carignan vines surround the property but through a little wood of truffle oaks to the south, in a strip surrounded by trees and scented garrigue, is what he calls his Clos Secret, effectively a hidden valley, planted with 50-year-old Cinsault vines which produce a particularly characterful wine. A strip of limestone runs diagonally through the property. South-east of it is soil laced with ferrous oxide, north-west of it is sandy.

Faucon has imported a mass selection of Chenin Blanc cuttings from the Loire and also has some old Carignan Blanc vines and some Vermentino, which must now be called Rolle in France, thanks to Italian lobbying. He told me that an appellation for white Terrasses du Larzac is in the works and that quite a few growers there have Chenin planted.

He certainly has an original array of wine names but when I asked this ex-marketing person how Languedoc wines should best be sold to the public he said, 'I don't know'. If they were all of the quality and sophistication of Mas Combarèla's range, it might be a bit easier.

Jancis Robinson

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## [Mas Combarèla, Des Si et des Mi Rosé 2022 Languedoc](#)

**16**

(16/20 = 92/100)

*50% Grenache, 30% Mourvèdre, 20% Cinsault. Picked on 22 August after vine shutdown. Vigneron Olivier Faucon said, 'Historically I didn't like rosé but I used to work in Asia and liked their food. Rosé goes very well with it. I want lots of flavour without having to take out the colour.' Short press. Certified organic.*

Less distinctive than the reds though very floral and aromatic – just a bit technical-tasting. Little bit too chewy on the end.

12.5%

Drink 2024 – 2025

## Mas Combarèla, Des Si et Des Mi Blanc 2022 IGP St-Guilhem-le-Désert

**16**

(16/20 = 92/100)

*This could be AOP Languedoc. Used to be 100% Grenache Blanc but from 2020 it's 70% Grenache Blanc. In 2022 includes 15% Carignan Blanc, 10% Rolle (Vermentino), and 5% Chenin Blanc for the first time. 10% aged in barrique. Certified organic.*

Very lively on the nose with a hint of lime and blossom. Apparently it does age quite well but it would be a good aperitif.

12.5%

Drink 2023 – 2025

## Mas Combarèla, L'Éclat 2021 IGP St-Guilhem-le-Désert

**16.5**

(16.5/20 = 93/100)

*Second vintage. 60% Carignan Blanc, 40% Chenin Blanc – a mix of south and north of France! 40% aged in barriques. Certified organic.*

Very pale. Substance on the palate comes from the Carignan and freshness from Chenin, I assume. Very refreshing. Racy. A bit of texture and ambition. Gastronomic.

13%

Drink 2023 – 2027

## Mas Combarèla, Des Si et Des Mi 2022 Terrasses du Larzac

**16.5**

(16.5/20 = 93/100)

*This wine, intended to be a fruity wine for early drinking, was until the 2021 vintage bottled as AOC Langudeoc. The name is a local expression meaning 'things like this and things like that'. 55% Grenache, 25% Carignan, 17% Syrah, 3% Cinsault. Made and aged in tank. To be released September 2023 (needs a year's ageing for Terrasses du Larzac). Certified organic.*

Transparent garnet. Powerfully fruity nose. Good fresh fruit and just a little tannin on the end. Very approachable already. Charming.

13.5%

Drink 2023 – 2027

## Mas Combarèla, Le Clos Secret Cinsault 2022 IGP St-Guilhem-le-Désert

17

(17/20 = 94/100)

*100% Cinsault. Interesting vintage because of the drought, says vigneron Olivier Faucon. On 14 August there was 14 mm of rain and then a few showers at the end of August and in September. The grapes swelled after rain – the same phenomenon as in Bordeaux. The vines shut down before then. Délestage at the start of fermentation and afterwards daily remontage during fermentation. Then infusion. No pigeage. Long extraction. Faucon blends in some Cinsault from another plot. Matured in concrete eggs only (no oak). To be released September 2023. Certified organic.*

Transparent garnet. Intense nose. Very supple indeed on the surface even if there are lots of tannins underneath. Real vivacity and bite. Morello cherry. Long.

14%

Drink 2023 – 2030

## Mas Combarèla, Les Vieux Mazets Carignan 2021 IGP St-Guilhem-le-Désert

17

(17/20 = 94/100)

*100% Carignan, average age 75, the oldest vines round the winery. Mazet is a local name for an old cabin in a vineyard such as there is on this property. Frost shrank the crop – all the countryside was ‘like winter’ for two months after it. The wine is inspired by Daniel Domergue’s Minervois Clos Centeilles. Made like Le Clos Secret. Sometimes carbonic maceration but not in 2021. All destemmed. To be released September 2023. Certified organic.*

Glowing mid crimson. Less aromatic than this producer’s Cinsault. Lots of gentle fruit and lovely gentle texture with meaty freshness. I wouldn’t guess this was Carignan if served blind and I cannot give a higher compliment! Some tannin.

13.5%

Drink 2023 – 2030

## Mas Combarèla, Ode Aux Ignorants 2021 Terrasses du Larzac

17.5

(17.5/20 = 95/100)

*50% Syrah, 30% Grenache, 15% Carignan, 5% Mourvèdre. 95% vines from the high Arboras site. Long élevage in 500- and 228-litre barriques, old and new, plus about 40% in concrete or tank. Aimed at the cartoonists who inspired vigneron Olivier Faucon and wrote a book Les Ignorants. They were the first to taste this wine. Exported to Finland in tiny quantity as a parallel import because of [Tam’s enthusiastic tasting notes](#). To be released end 2023. Certified organic.*

Mid garnet. Savoury nose. Then delicate and very appetising. So gentle! Long. Dry finish. So much going on here!

14%

Drink 2024 – 2032

## [Mas Combarèla, Lueurs d'Espar 2020 Terrasses du Larzac](#)

**16+**

(16+/20 = 92+/100)

*70% Mourvèdre (the maximum allowed in Terrasses du Larzac) plus 20% Carignan and 10% Syrah. Mourvèdre is called Espar in the Hérault and Gard departments. On 25- to 30-year-old Grenache roots, grafted in 2017. 2.5 years' élevage in quite a lot of new oak. Also a sandstone amphora. Certified organic.*

Spiky and still with quite a bit of tannin.

14.5%

Drink 2025 – 2035

## [Mas Combarèla, Lueurs d'Espar 2018 Terrasses du Larzac](#)

**17**

(17/20 = 94/100)

*70% Mourvèdre, 20% Carignan, 10% Syrah.*

Deeper colour again for the older wine! This has mellowed nicely. Molten liquorice.

14.5%

Drink 2022 – 2028

## **Old vintages**

## [Mas Combarèla, Des Si et Des Mi 2016 Languedoc](#)

**16.5**

(16.5/20 = 93/100)

*60% Grenache, 20% Syrah, 15% Carignan, 5% Cinsault.*

Pale ruby. This has developed a certain gaminess on the nose. Soft and gentle but still with good freshness. Cherry juice this time! But still with some tannin.

14.5%

Drink 2017 – 2025

## Mas Combarèla, Le Clos Secret Cinsault 2016 IGP St-Guilhem-le-Désert

**17**

(17/20 = 94/100)

*100% Cinsault.*

Transparent cherry red. Very charming evolution on the nose. Lovely sweet start and some herbal influence. Fresh and precise. Not as facile as most 100% Cinsaults. Long and neat. Original! 'I prefer difference to perfection', claims vigneron Olivier Faucon.

14.5%

Drink 2018 – 2027

## Mas Combarèla, Les Vieux Mazets Carignan 2016 IGP St-Guilhem-le-Désert

**16.5**

(16.5/20 = 93/100)

*100% Carignan. 20% carbonic maceration. Fermented in tronconic oak vat. First vintage. In the first year or two vigneron Olivier Faucon used selected yeast and some SO<sub>2</sub> and aged the wine for one year but now he ages it for two.*

Deeper colour than the 2021, strangely. Rich and dense. Just very slightly more rustic than the 2021.

14%

Drink 2018 – 2025

## Mas Combarèla, Ode Aux Ignorants 2016 Terrasses du Larzac

**16.5**

(16.5/20 = 93/100)

*45% Syrah, 25% Grenache, 25% Carignan, 5% Cinsault, 'At least 14.5%', says vigneron Olivier Faucon.*

Deep crimson. A certain gaminess on the nose and very rich and firm. Quite different from the 2021. A bit more mainstream and very slightly rustic. Lots of new oak in this. Still a bit chewy.

14.5%

Drink 2019 – 2026