

MAS LA CHEVALIÈRE OVERVIEW



THE LANGUEDOC REGION

The Languedoc is legendary in French winemaking history, as it was here that the Romans first planted vines in 4 BC. The region is comprised of an impressive range of terroirs, allowing for the cultivation of a vast diversity of grape varieties. The climate is just right for Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in the high altitudes and cool temperatures of the foothills of the Massif Central and the Pyrenees. Clay soils and schist on sunny slopes benefit Syrah, Merlot and Grenache, while the oceanic influences allow for the full expression of Sauvignon Blanc and Viognier, and warm microclimates facilitate the maturation of Cabernet Sauvignon and Mourvèdre.



LAROCHE IN THE LANGUEDOC

Michel Laroche was one of the pioneers in the resurgence of quality winemaking in the south of France in the early 1980s. In 1996, he created Mas La Chevalière, a state-of-the-art winery on the grounds of a splendid 18th-century guesthouse, with the goal of producing wines that truly reflect the diversity of the Southern French varietals, climate and terroir.

LAROCHE VINEYARDS

The Mediterranean climate guarantees ample sunshine, however, the winery strives to find the coolest terroirs for each grape variety, making it necessary to adjust the orientation and altitude of the vineyards to allow for optimal maturity and fullest expression of varietal flavors.



The 45 hectares (111 acres) of vineyards are comprised of cooler, high-altitude sites for whites and hillside terraces for reds. The wines are classified Indication Géographique Protégée (IGP) because irrigation is used to avoid heat stress (and thus, hard, bitter characteristics in the wines) in the southerly, sunny climate. The diversity of the soil, climates and grape varieties afford an exceptional range of white and rosé wines, all light and fresh, and red wines that are rich, balanced and well structured. Mas La Chevalière is currently undergoing active conversion to organic viticulture.

WINEMAKING

It is a strong conviction of the Laroche team that all efforts in the vineyards should be perpetuated in the winery. Mas La Chevalière is considered a reference point in the region for the quality of the winemaking equipment in the state-of-the-art winery, which is designed specifically for organic winemaking. All processes in the facility allow for the complete expression of each grape variety and each vineyard site. All varietals and vineyard parcels are vinified separately in one of 42 temperature-controlled tanks of various sizes. The conversion to screwcap closures for the majority of Mas La Chevalière wines took place in 2004.



L A R O C H E

MAS LA CHEVALIÈRE HISTORY



While Michel Laroche knew he was fortunate to be a successful winemaker in the magnificent region of Chablis, he was a natural-born explorer, and the physical boundaries of his vineyards felt too limited for him. He had a great desire to broaden his horizons, travel beyond his native hills and create wines from different grape varieties in other regions.



In the early 1980s, Michel toured the vineyards of Central Europe and California and then the South of France. In the Languedoc in 1985, he did his first “surgreffage,” or “top grafting,” with Chardonnay, a variety that was virtually unknown in the region at the time. The experiment met with immediate success, largely because Michel placed equally high standards on his winemaking in the South of France as he did in Chablis, with special emphasis on the purity of fruit that is so essential to all Laroche wines.



A decade later, in 1995, he was so certain of the region’s quality potential that he decided to purchase Mas La Chevalière, close to Béziers, with more than 40 hectares (98.8 acres) in production. The location represents a strategic spot in the middle of the vast Languedoc region, where in every direction one can discover an infinite variety of different soil types and microclimates. It was this diversity that lured Laroche to acquire the Peyroli vineyard, with a cool climate ideal for growing white wine grapes, and Roqua Blanca with its much warmer climate, dedicated to red wines for Mas La Chevalière and La Croix Chevalière, the most elegant wine of Mas La Chevalière, which is produced only in the very best vintages.



In 2003, Laroche built an ultra-modern winery on the property, equipped with all of the facilities to fulfill a winemaker’s dream, driven by an obsession to produce great wines. Prior to converting his vineyards to organic viticulture, Laroche designed a winery specifically for organic winemaking. Mas La Chevalière is considered a reference point in the region for the quality of its winery equipment, which allows for the thorough expression of each grape variety and each vineyard parcel.



MAS LA CHEVALIÈRE VINEYARDS



Languedoc is the most ancient of the wine regions in France and the largest in the world. The area has more than 300,000 hectares (740,000 acres) under vine, about one-third of all French vines, and represents three times the size of the vineyards of Bordeaux and more than four times the size of the Australian vineyards. The landscape of the Languedoc is incomparably rich and varied.

Climate and altitude are the most critical factors in the production of wines from the South of France. In Languedoc, the climate is essentially Mediterranean. Summers are hot and dry, and temperatures in spring and autumn are generally warm, despite a few possible frosty mornings in April. Winters tend to be mild and sunny with temperatures rarely falling below 0°C (32°F). Rainfall is minimal (among the lowest in France in some areas), and the strong tramontane inland wind helps dry the grapes and prevent disease. This is the ideal climate for cultivating vines.



The majority of the Mas La Chevalière vineyards are influenced by a Mediterranean climate, while the western region of Carcassonne has oceanic influences from the Atlantic, and the proximity to the Pyrenees puts the vineyards around Limoux in danger of spring frosts. The soil composition in Languedoc varies from chalk, limestone and gravel-based soil inland to more alluvial soil near the coast.

Mas La Chevalière has three vineyards: Roqua Blanca (100 percent red grape varieties), with a warm, dry climate, which produces rich and elegant wines; Mas Peyroli (100 percent Chardonnay), planted in altitude which preserves the freshness favorable for the development of the Chardonnay flavors; and the vineyard that spreads out at the bottom of the Mas, with a diversity of noble grape varieties.



Like Domane Laroche's Chablis vineyards, Mas La Chevalière is in conversion to organic viticulture. Laroche has a keen sense for innovation, which was proven again in 2011, with the development of a weather station in Roqua Blanca to help to organize the work in the vineyard. This is particularly helpful in organic viticulture, as many operations in the vineyards must be carefully planned in order to have the maximum impact on the vines.

The Peyroli vineyard is planted with 12 hectares (29.65 acres) of Chardonnay. It is situated on a west-facing parcel at 450 meters (1475 feet) above sea level, at the foothills of the Massif Central, on steeply sloping hillsides with marl-limestone soil from the tertiary period. The vines are harvested late and an excellent level of acidity is preserved as a result of the cool climate and high elevation.



Roqua Blanca is an estate with 30 hectares (74 acres) of red grape varieties located 15 kilometers (9.3 miles) to the north of Béziers. Here, the climate is relatively warm, with a variety of parcels facing west and east on limestone and dolomite soil from the Jurassic and Cretaceous periods and sandstone and marl soil from the tertiary (Miocene) period.

MAS LA CHEVALIÈRE WINEMAKING



The harvest at Mas La Chevalière lasts from late August to mid-October, depending on the grape variety and the climate. The whites are picked first, followed by the reds, occasionally with some overlap. Respect for viticulture and grape quality are paramount, and the ultimate goal is always aromatic freshness. The winery strives to draw out the distinctive characteristics of each grape variety, allowing nature to do its own work as much as possible. The use of oak is moderate and is involved only in the production of the top-end wines, for added complexity.



Mas La Chevalière is considered a reference point in the region for the quality of its winery equipment, which allows for the thorough expression of each grape variety and each parcel. Blending occurs when the fermentation is completed and the wine is settled. Maturation takes place in stainless-steel tanks for the aromatic whites and fruity reds. Oak barrels are used for the fine red wines that have sufficient structure. The success of these wines lies not only in power and concentration but also in their balance and finesse. The conversion to screwcap closures for the majority of Mas La Chevalière wines took place in 2004.



Mas La Chevalière is a unique project in South of France, as the winery was designed for the vineyards. Peyroli and Roqua Blanca can deliver exceptional fruit, yet maintaining the highest quality from the vineyards to the fermentation tanks requires special attention, mostly during pressing and settling. Mas La Chevalière's winery equipment is designed specifically for its processes, to carry the grapes from crates to sorting table and from sorting tables to destemmer without pumping (which can spoil grape skin, and therefore, aromas). Gentle pressing under protective conditions keeps fruit aromas intact. Cooling systems also play a major role in the process, to protect grapes from any spoilage. All plots are vinified separately in one of the 42 tanks of various sizes, but all are temperature-regulated.

It is a strong conviction of Laroche team that all efforts in the vineyard should be prolonged in the winery. Mas La Chevalière is currently undergoing active conversion to organic viticulture; the winery was designed specifically for organic winemaking, with an emphasis on reducing the addition of sulphur dioxide and water consumption in the winery.

