

Mas des Dames, Côteaux du Languedoc



Mas des Dames translates as Farm of Ladies. It was christened by current owners Lidewij and Adrien Kuijper-van Wilgen of Holland upon learning that their three young daughters were the third generation of daughters to be raised on the Mas in recent memory (the farm dates from 1750). Lidewij and Adrien abandoned a world of advertising in Amsterdam in favor of the French countryside in 2002. It was an idyllic dream, one they put into play.

Their criteria was simple: a small farm with vineyards in walking distance. They found Mas des Dames tucked back on a flank of a hill outside of Murviel-lès-Béziers. Murviel is a forgotten medieval village with narrow, circular streets spreading concentrically outward, and it sits on a point of high ground in the hinterland behind the ancient Mediterranean city of Béziers. The Mas was perfect, except the house was in shambles and the vineyards were farmed for maximum production. A period of renovation ensued while Adrien continued working in advertising in Paris and Lidewij (a.k.a. Lea) went to enology school in Béziers. For Lea, this wasn't easy; in the first week, the professor openly mocked her as a ne'er-do-well foreigner who wouldn't last. In the end, only three students out of thirty graduated, and she was one of those three.

Today, the girls go to the local school, Adrien commutes to Paris, and Lea works the vineyards with one employee. At harvest Adrien jumps in to help make the wine (wine, after Lea, has always been his passion). On their hillside they have 22 little vineyard parcels surrounding the house, comprising 32 acres. They have taken all yields down to less than 35 hectoliters per hectare (AOC regulations permit 50 hl/ha for red and rosé and 60hl/ha for white; Vin de Pays rules allow up to 80 hl/ha). They are serious about sorting, and discard a significant portion of grapes. Lastly, they are quite aware of the bitter tannins that press wine can give, so they forgo nearly all of their press wine. This disregard for quantity has scandalized many a local farmer, but it is fundamentally why Mas des Dames has propelled itself into the top rank of Languedoc producers.

The Wines:

- *Vin de Pays blanc*: Grenache Blanc, ranked VdP because the appellation doesn't permit 100% varietals. The soils on the Mas' hillside are diverse, and these vines grow in chalky limestone soil that is full of crustacean fossils, much like in Chablis. If you want to see what kind of character Grenache Blanc is capable of, you would be hard-pressed to find a better example than this. Aromas of hay and almonds are underpinned by a streak of minerality that lingers on the palate with lip-smacking presence. The particular soil that nourishes this 2.5-acre parcel is integral to the wine.
- *Côteaux du Languedoc "La Dame" rouge*: Based on Grenache, with Syrah and Carignan, this is the domaine's flagship. It is a fresh, supple (what silky texture!), classy wine, one rich with Languedoc's thyme.
- *Vin de Pays Côte Rouge*: Based on Syrah, with Grenache and then a dollop of Alicante Bouschet, Côte Rouge is a ripe wine brimming with a core of black fruit. It is broadly flavored, roundly textured, and finishes with *garigue* spice. The old Alicante parcels grow in distinctly red soil a stone's throw from the Grenache Blanc parcel, but on another contour. Alicante Bouschet is a cross between Grenache and Petit Bouschet, propagated in the latter half of the 19th century. Petit Bouschet in turn is an earlier cross between Aramon and the red-pulped Teinturier, an ancient variety valued for its deeply colored juice. Alicante Bouschet certainly shares that characteristic, and it is the only Teinturier crossing that is classed *Vitis vinifera*. Mas des Dames has two old parcels (pre-WWII?) totaling two acres.
- *Côteaux du Languedoc "La Dame" rosé*: This is serious stuff, with texture and spice rarely found in rosé. The blend is roughly 40% old-vine Grenache, 40% Mourvèdre, and 20% Syrah, all hand-harvested and selected, and a portion of the wine is made in three-year-old barrels. Production averages around 450 cases.

www.masdesdames.fr