

FRANCE: South West

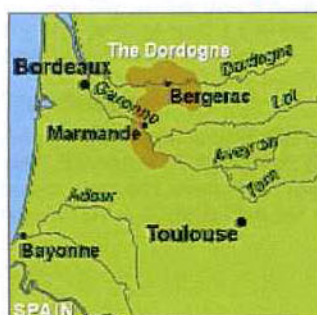
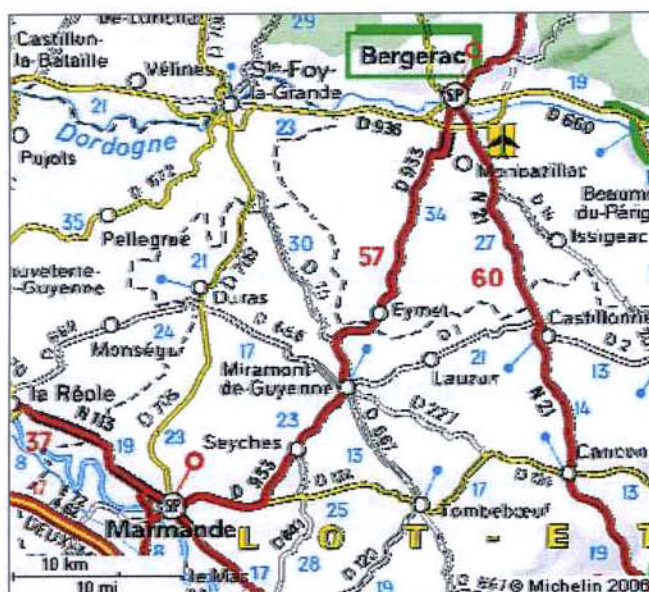
The Dordogne

The Wines of Bergerac, Duras, Marmande and Buzet

By Paul Strang



The old town of Bergerac on the Dordogne River.
 © Mick Rock/Cephas



The map above does not cover the complete extent of this micro-region. On the left its position is indicated within the main wine region.

To see the locations for recommendations in this Guide, use the on-line maps. These fully clickable Michelin maps allow you to plot routes and print locations. This service is accessible only to Gold subscribers.

A gentle Atlantic climate modified by southern sunshine

The vineyards of Bergerac, Duras and Marmande adjoin those of Bordeaux without a break; and Buzet is only a few miles upstream from Marmande. They share with Bordeaux the same grape varieties and thus form a northern grouping in the South West quite distinct from the wines of the Lot and the Tarn to the southeast and Gascony to the southwest. Bergerac (including Monbazillac, Saussignac, Pécharmant, Rosette and Montravel) straddles the river Dordogne, while Duras, Marmande and Buzet belong rather to the Garonne. Both rivers by now have shed their mountainous character and flow towards each other through lush alluvial valleys, home to sunflowers, maize and fruit-trees, the vines for the most part gracing the hillsides as they climb away from the valleys.

This gentle land enjoys an Atlantic climate modified by southern sunshine. The Dordogne department is part of the modern-day Aquitaine region, but it is roughly equivalent to the old French province of Périgord. This province is prized by visitors more for its castles and manor houses than its churches. It is especially loved for its Périgord cooking, for which the wines are a varied and perfect foil.

Geography

Vines in Bergerac grow on limestone, clay and marl hillsides with more Merlot planted here than Cabernet Sauvignon. There are also some scattered flint deposits which impart citrus and peach flavours to the better whites. To the east there are also some traces of iron. The area sandwiched between the rivers Dordogne and Garonne extends over a limestone plateau with the Duras vines growing on the sandy clay and limestone slopes left behind from the erosion of the River Dordogne. Elsewhere there is a diversity of soils; clay-limestone, clay-gravel and ancient alluvial soils.

Overall there is a mild maritime climate influenced by the Gulf Stream, with hints of Mediterranean influence giving drier summers with higher daytime temperatures than the neighbouring Bordeaux vineyards. September and October bring fine weather allowing grapes to achieve good maturity. Winters are mild. The average annual temperature is around 13°C and the annual rainfall 800mm. There is low risk of frost due to the influence of the rivers and their tributaries.

Château de Tiregand

Address: 24100 Creysse

Tel: 05 53 23 21 08 **Email:** chateautiregand@club-internet.fr

Web: www.pays-de-bergerac.com/english/tourisme/site_remarquable/chateaux/tiregand/index.asp

The best-known and longest-established Pécharmant property. Xavier de Saint-Exupéry, currently in charge here, is distantly related to the famous aviator. A beautiful long low château set in a large park makes this a must to visit. Almost exclusively a red wine estate, producing wine in the gutsy, minerally Pécharmant style.

Useful information: Some English spoken, groups by arrangement, otherwise no appointment required, no charge for tasting.

Chateau Masburel

Address: 33220 Fougueyrolles

Tel: 05 53 24 77 73 **Email:** chateau-masburel@wanadoo.fr

Web: www.chateau-masburel.com

A beautifully restored Montravel estate, belonging to another English female grower, Olivia Donnan, the wife of a former boss of the English Mars chocolate company. Her Montravel (the whites are all dry) is among the best. She is experimenting with planting at densities of up to 13,000 vines per hectare, three times the norm in this area.

Useful information: Ask about groups, no charge for visiting, but appointment essential.

Domaine Mouthes-Le-Bihan

Address: D281, 47120 Saint Jean de Duras

Tel: 05 53 83 06 98 **Fax:** 05 53 89 62 70

Email: contact@mouthes-le-bihan.com

Web: siteschl.free.fr/mouthes

New-wave growers in Duras, Jean-Mary and Catherine Le Bihan bridge modern and traditional styles of winemaking and are among the most interesting winemakers in the South West. There are also 20 or so Arab horses here for visitors to meet.

Useful information: No English, probably no groups, no charge and appointment essential.

Domaine du Petit Malromé

Address: Le Lac, 47120 Saint Jean de Duras

Tel: 05 53 89 01 44 **Fax:** 05 53 89 01 44

Email: petitmalrome@wanadoo.fr

Web: www.domainepetitmalrome.com

Geneviève et Alain Lescaut, are organic growers making fantastically good value Côtes de Duras wines in all colours and styles. A small estate, run on artisan lines by real enthusiasts.

Useful information: No English, no charge. Small groups only. Appointment essential.

Domaine Elian da Ros

Address: Laclotte, 47250 Cocumont

Tel: 05 53 20 75 22 **Fax:** 05 53 94 79 29

Email: e_daros@club-internet.fr

Another organic new wave grower, Elian da Ros, trained in Burgundy and Alsace. Hand-crafted wines of originality and superb quality, including examples of the local Abouriou grape. This is a cult vineyard which should not be missed.

Useful information: Not much English, free tastings, premises not suited to groups, and appointment essential.

Musée du Tabac

Address: Maison Peyrarède, Place du Feu, 24100 Bergerac

Tel: 05 53 63 04 13 **Fax:** 05 53 61 90 02

A visit to this museum can be conveniently combined with a visit to the Maison des Vins close by. It traces the history of tobacco, its arrival in Europe, its exploding popularity during the 19th century and the development of accessories for its use.

Events

Fête des Vins et Montgolfiades, Duras

This festival of *montgolfiades* (hot air balloons) takes place at Duras in mid-August with wine tastings going on after landing.

Useful information: For information on the wine events see www.cotesdeduras.com and on the ballooning telephone Thierry Bonnet (Mobile telephone: 06 86 07 91 25).

Chamber Music at Château de Tiregand

Takes place in the *chais* of the château, a little way east of Bergerac during August and September.

Useful information: For programmes consult www.francefestivals.com.

Fête des Vins de Buzet

Takes place at Nérac usually during the second weekend of August. Depending on dates, a visit could be combined with the Duras fête above.

Useful information: Details from the Tourist Office **Tel:** 05 53 65 27 75 **Fax:** 05 53 65 97 48

● Drives

The Bergerac Vineyards

Leave Bergerac westwards by D32 to Le Fleix. After the village take a right turn (remain on the D32) then soon take a small road to the left up a steep hill through woods (D32E2) through Fouqueyrolles to Château Masburel for a visit. Continue west to Château de Montaigne and either picnic in park or regain the main road in the valley (D936) towards Sainte Foy and lunch at Escapade (look for an un-numbered right turn just before the town). In Sainte Foy turn right signposted Miramont and Marmande, then left before the station and then bear right at roundabout (D18 becoming D14) through Saint Philippe, keeping left following signs to Saussignac and Monbazillac. Take D4 into Saussignac, and visit Château Richard and/or Clos d'Yvine. Rejoin D14 to return to Bergerac.

● Walks

A Visit to Bergerac Old Town

This is possible only on foot and is best on market day (Wednesday or Saturday) Enter by Grand'Rue opposite the cathedral. The market soon appears on your left. Continue down the street past the church of Saint Jacques, and in the Place Cayla fork half right to the Musée du Tabac (Tobacco Museum) and the Maison des Vins for visits. Leave via the old port for lunch at L'Imparfait and return through old streets to your starting point.

A Visit to Château de Tiregand

Drive to the estate and visit the *chai* which is a little way through the woods away from the château. Ask for the possibility to visit the garden behind the château with marvellous views over the valley. Having bought a bottle at the *chai*, wander at will through the extensive park and woods.