

Liberté, Égalité . . . Qualité

THIS JUST MAY BE THE NATIONAL MOTTO OF FRANCE'S
NEW WINE REVOLUTION: INTRODUCING **VIN DE FRANCE**

by Meredith May / photos by Nikki Ritcher

France has reinvented its wine trail.

Introducing **Vin de France** wines, a new designation that unshackles winemakers and growers from the country's restrictive appellation system rules and restraints, opening the doors for *any grape variety* to be grown, bottled and labeled *anywhere in France*. And it's blessed by the French government.

ANIVIN DE FRANCE, a trade organization composed of representatives from independent producers, co-ops and négociants, was established in 2009 with the goal of creating market-driven wines in France, allowing the country to better compete with the world's other wine-producing countries, where regulations are not so strict.

"Terroir in France changed the taste of the planet," explains board member Laurent Delaunay, President and Winemaker for Burgundy-based Badet Clément & Co. As a marketer/producer and négociant, Delaunay realizes that Burgundian wines are here to stay, "but grand cru wines, champagnes, etc., are for the specialist and connoisseur. Now, with more people drinking wine, Europe needs a category to adapt to the challenge for a *national* wine from France."



A New World of Flavor arises from Vin de France, an official national appellation created and supervised by French organization ANIVIN DE FRANCE. Its leaders toast the revolution: Laurent Delaunay, President and Winemaker for Burgundy-based Badet Clément & Co.; Valérie Pajotin, Managing Director of ANIVIN DE FRANCE; and Bruno Kessler, President, ANIVIN DE FRANCE.



Winery Exchange Importers Kathleen Burns, Suzanne Bergstrom and winemaker Laurent Delaunay.



Wines like Pâtisserie 2012, a Vin de France blend of Grenache, Syrah and Merlot, from Badet Clément & Co. and imported by Winery Exchange Inc., retails for about \$10. It is pleasantly ripe and fruit-driven, drawing from the flavors of the traditional French cherry cake, the clafoutis.

Without the restrictions of an A.O.C., Syrah can be grown in Bordeaux, Grenache can be bottled as a varietal on its own and proprietary names can be used for unique blends—their common ground: the country of France.

Consisting of both growers, producers and négociants, the 30-board members of ANIVIN DE FRANCE have decades of experience among them. The group represents both large and small companies, both high-end and value wineries, all making distinctive varietals and cuvées with freedom they’ve never had before.

“Each company is quality-controlled and audited,”



Blend No. 8, from world-renowned French producer Sacha Lichine (see page 44), combines Grenache, Syrah and Merlot under the Vin de France label. Lichine has developed a line of New World wines from France: Sacha Lichine–Vins Sans Frontières, which consists of a selection of growers and wines crafted throughout the region of France. His wines are imported by Shaw-Ross International.

How to Create a Vin de France

- Grow grapes in France.
- Register with FranceAgriMer, a branch of the French Ministry of Agriculture that ensures the quality and authenticity of French food and beverage products.
- Upon registering, a certification number will be issued, completing the ANIVIN DE FRANCE membership application process and subjecting the wines to all FranceAgriMer control measures.



A selection of Vin de France releases at a recent tasting in San Francisco.



Importers Keith Lacewell and Corky Long of L&L Imports/Arkansas, with ANIVIN DE FRANCE President Bruno Kessler (center). L&L Imports “L’original French Kiss, a Vin de France Cabernet Sauvignon, shows a new generation of wine labels with French savoir faire. Bruno Kessler is also its winemaker.



insists Valérie Pajotin, Managing Director of ANIVIN DE FRANCE. “Grow it the way you want: any varietal from any part of France. But the quality has to be there.” Bringing value wines to market is key. “The prices generally range from \$9 to \$12,” points out Pajotin, “but there are some wines that are selling for \$40 or more.”

Targeting mass-market sales is not what the French organization has in mind. ANIVIN DE FRANCE President Bruno Kessler remarks, “We don’t want to be the cheapest; we want to bring the qualities that French wines are known for: quality and finesse. After all, we’ve been making wines for centuries. France as a country, with Vin de France, is a brand. Each bottle reflects the country, varietal(s) and a vintage. With Vin de France, there is trust and transparency: easy and reliable.” ■■

Vin de France Facts:

- Vin de France now represents 25% of French wine exports.
- Sales of Vin de France have more than quadrupled in three years.
- The U.S. market only represents 4% of the market share abroad, but volume more than tripled from 2011 to 2012 in this country.
- Number of Vin de France producers: 756 recorded members from every growing region in the country.

ANIVIN DE FRANCE in New York City

by Lana Bortolot

In a city where excess is the norm, the “less is more” promise of Vin de France wines will lighten the hearts of New Yorkers who love the taste of French wines, but not the dent they can make in their monthly budget.

“We can show the diversity of France at approachable prices,” said ANIVIN DE FRANCE President Bruno Kessler, who says it presents a “new world of French marketing” with competitive pricing and high-visibility packaging. Looking at the success of non-vintage bag-in-box brands (some 7.3 million liters shipped to the U.S. last year), Kessler’s group sees potential to expand the offerings now that the U.S. Alcohol and Tobacco Tax & Trade Bureau says they can include vintage year. New York State ranks number one in its French table wine consumption, with more than a million nine-liter cases according to information from UBIFRANCE, the French Trade Office.

The new classification will ease wine-buying with messaging that Kessler says is both “classy and easy to understand with a capacity to be adapted for each palate.” Managing Director Valérie Pajotin notes, there’s also built-in advantage: “We don’t have to explain to anyone where is France and that we make wine.”

The key advantage is that vintners free to create new expressions of wine by blending grapes from different regions, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Atlantic, providing wine drinkers broader range of quality wines from France to taste.

Further, vintners can blend local varieties such as Colombard with international grapes like Sauvignon or Chardonnay, opening the gateway for consumers to try wines with unfamiliar grapes. Relaxation of the rules will also allow more development of novelty brands that evoke a lifestyle or emotion (think Cupcake or Ménagement a Trois wines). Patisserie du Vin, the French-American joint venture, is the first such concept brand *à la française*.

It’s not just the marketers, however, who are enthusiastic: even producers in established regions welcome the infusion. “I am very happy about the wine revolution in France. For us it’s like the 21st century starts now,” said Thierry Coste, president of the Cooperative Les Vignerons de Florensac in Languedoc-Roussillon.

“We will track to ensure these are wines of origin and will have third-party control of that,” says Kessler. “It will be an open and transparent system similar to Chile, Australia and California.” You can call it a New World twist on an Old World concept.

“This is a historic moment in French wines; it’s a new paradigm for us,” said Bertrand Girard, who heads Val d’Orbieu, also in Languedoc-Roussillon. “We have lost ground totally with value wines. Now we have a new weapon for changing consumers’ minds.”



Tussock Jumper, a Vin de France wine imported by Tri-Vin Imports of Mt. Vernon, NY, features a varietal Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. The wines are featured in Whole Foods Midwest and East Coast this winter. “With a French origin, these wines have automatic cachet,” says importer Marc Oliveira, who works with 144 distributors in 42 states. “The U.S. market is varietal driven and this modern package is a plus.”