

FRENCH BRAND REVOLUTION

WITH FOCUS, CREATIVITY AND AFFORDABLE QUALITY, SUPPLIERS OF NEW **VIN DE FRANCE** BRANDS TAKE AIM AT AMERICAN WINE DRINKERS

BY W. R. TISH & W. BLAKE GRAY



Simplicity and French wine, sadly, are not often in the same sentence. But Vin de France—VDF (vindefrancewines.com), the country's freshly minted wine designation—is ready to change that. Shedding the complexity and rigidity of the traditional region-based AOC system, this new wave of French wines exude a sense not only of simplicity, but also creativity—without losing a drop of authenticity. If ever a type of French wine should appeal instantly to Americans, it is Vin de France: it's based on freedom. Freedom to source from multiple areas, freedom to blend without restrictions, freedom to sport friendly and inviting labels.

A group of 10 suppliers—some negociants, some producers—recently visited the U.S. with the Vin de France trade organization, Anivin de France, to raise awareness of the category. Their insights reveal that behind the simplicity of the Vin de France designation lies some serious market-savvy brain power. “They understand the U.S. market and share a commitment to translating authentic French wines into appealing, competitive wine brands,” says Valérie Pajotin, Managing Director of Anivin de France. “Vin de France wines will truly please Americans, especially in delivering value for the price.”

Tussock Jumper

tussockjumperwines.com

VDF Brands: **Tussock Jumper, Les Alliés**
U.S. Importer: **Tri-Vin Imports [tri-vin.com]**

Who they are: Based in New York, Tri-Vin has a network of 144 distributors in 44 states. “We’re brand creators,” says Marc Oliveira, National Sales Director. “We work with suppliers who are flexible, offer great quality, and can offer cork or screwcap.” The Tussock Jumper Vin de France Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are part of a global portfolio of 17 wines from iconic regions in 11 countries. More recently, they have added Les Alliés, a strictly French label.

On Vin de France: “For a long time, regional French wines have seemed complex and difficult. People might like Sancerre but did not understand that it’s Sauvignon Blanc. **The idea behind Vin de France is to get over that intimidation factor. It’s the first time the French have tried to change their marketing approach.**”

On brand goals: “We’re looking for wines that are serious but still have that commercialness. They’re approachable, not gimmicky. They’re not sweet or forced. Tussock Jumper is more for off-premise because of the screwcap. Right now it’s on special for Whole Foods in the Midwest. Les Alliés is more for on-premise because of the look.”

Marc Oliveira



Sacha Lichine

sachalichine.com

VDF Brand: **Sacha Lichine**

U.S. Importer: **Shaw-Ross**

International Importers

[shawross.com]

Who they are: Sacha Lichine is already known for success with Provence rosés in particular. “Sacha’s father Alexis Lichine was the pioneer for teaching people in America about France. Now Sacha’s reteaching a new generation,” says Paul Chevalier, National Fine Wine Director.

On Vin de France: “France has a lot more vintage variation than the New World. Sacha is very good at blending wines across vineyards, even not in the same region. **You need the name but you also need consistency. Vin de France gives you consistency.**”

On their wines: “The new younger consumer doesn't want things that are too rough and tough. Not necessarily that light, but fruit-forward, easy-

Jacquelyn Aurora



drinking. The idea was to try to go down a path which was a little bit different. The white is Chardonnay, Vermentino, Sauvignon and Semillon. You get something that is aromatic with good fruit. The rosé is only made of Grenache. Grenache produces the most elegant style of rosé; there’s no Mourvedre, no Syrah, no Cinsault in this wine. There’s a reason for that. The red wine is Grenache, Syrah, Merlot. We like that cherry sort of ripeness, but with more body.”

Maison Tramier

maison-tramier.com

VDF Brand: **Le Petit Panier**

U.S. Importer: **Luxe Wines & Spirits**

[luxewines-spirits.com]

Who they are: Having already excelled with Roncier selling about 2 million bottles worldwide, Maison Tramier just launched Le Petit Panier Vin de France. “We’re from Burgundy. Vin de France is a way for us to find new customers who can discover what we do without having to spend \$20 for Burgundy,” explains Export Director Olivier Negraz.

On Le Petit Panier: “The concept is to have something French and natural. The idea of the label is to have a basket and pick the grapes that the Earth is offering. Here we’re looking for the typicity of the grape. **That’s why Vin de France is so interesting for us. We’re**

Olivier Negraz



allowed to use the best from everywhere in France, to do good and affordable wines. Our winemaker’s experience with Chardonnay and Pinot Noir is great. His style is very Burgundy, even if the grapes are from the south of France. The style is for the freshness. No oak, nothing. They are not sweeter. Very natural. If we’re able to do a Grand Cru Musigny, we’re able to do a Pinot Noir Vin de France.”



Frédéric Pacaut



Badet Clément & Co.

badet-clement.com

VDF Brands: **La Belle Angèle, La Villette, Alto Stratus**

U.S. Importer: **Cellar Door Selections**
“The Old Firehouse”

[cellardoorselections.com]

Who they are: Created in 1995 by Catherine and Laurent Delaunay, Badet Clément & Co is “a pure family-owned winery,” explains Managing Director Frédéric Pacaut. “Catherine’s family were growers in Beaujolais; Laurent’s family were negociants in Burgundy.” They specialize in creating branded French wines geared to international markets; their first hit was Les Jamelles, in the 1990s, from Languedoc.

On Vin de France: “**Vin de France is a fantastic quality opportunity which is price-conscious.**”

On blending: “Suppose we have some wonderful Chardonnay we source in the Languedoc. In some years it has wonderful fruit but it doesn’t have enough crispness. If you blend it with Chardonnay from Gascogne, that has the right profile. You can add the qualities you need.”

On their brands: “La Belle Angèle we created for all markets; it allows a good price point if you want to sell it by the glass. It allows a good case price if you want to stack it. La Villette we created for the U.S. Alto Stratus we created to do a top, top Carignan, which is 100% old-vine fruit. Alto Stratus is more on-premise. But the category doesn’t need to be on- or off-premise.”