

Lionel de Ravel and Jacqueline Cole



## Maison Gabriel Meffre

[gabrielmeffre.com](http://gabrielmeffre.com)

VDF Brands: **La Châsse, Le Cirque**  
U.S. Importers: **Vision Wine & Spirits**  
[[visionwineandspirits.com](http://visionwineandspirits.com)]  
and **Plume Ridge** [[plumeridge.com](http://plumeridge.com)]

**Who they are:** Rooted in Gigondas, the company started by Gabriel Meffre in 1936 grew to be one of the largest landowners in the southern Rhône. “Today we make 22 million bottles a year, about 60% Rhône wines and about 40% southern France,” notes Jacqueline Cole, export sales manager.

**On Vin de France:** “We started making Vin de France as soon as the category came out. We really like the ability to grow across the different regions. With Vin de France, if you have a difficult vintage in one area you can look further for grapes.”

**On their brands:** “La Châsse is more of a traditional, classically coded wine for people who like the European profile. Le Cirque has a slightly higher residual sugar level, just about 6-8 grams. These wines are definitely for off-premise.”

**On blending:** “Vin de France allows you to make fun blends. Le Cirque has a Sauvignon Blanc-Muscat blend. We like the floral aromatic tones you get from the Muscat with the bracing acidity from the Sauvignon Blanc. We do a Chardonnay-Gros Manseng. The Gros Manseng is a nice offset of the Chardonnay. **Our winemaker loves the category for the freedom it gives her. She likes wines that are easy drinking and round.**”

## Val d’Orbieu

[valorbieu.com](http://valorbieu.com)

VDF Brands: **Brise de France, Le Val, Plaisir de France, So Parisian**  
U.S. Importer: **Val d’Orbieu Americas, USA** [[uccoar.com](http://uccoar.com)]

**Who they are:** With four-plus decades experience, Languedoc-based Val d’Orbieu remains the largest still wine cooperative in France, its 2,500 members spread over 11 wine cooperatives and 60 estates. More important, they are standard bearers as French brand-makers (most notably Réserve St Martin). Interestingly, to market their four Vin de France labels in the U.S., the large co-op has teamed with a small, young U.S. agency—Vintage Epicure, headed by three partners who had worked at Pasternak Wine Imports. “Our take-to-market strategy is vineyard to bottle. We act as an importer but we do not take possession of the goods,” explains Gregg Mutschler, Director of National Accounts for the U.S.

Gregg Mutschler and Steve Rowland



**On their VDF brands:** “We are thrilled to be working with Val d’Orbieu,” asserts Richard Genova, Vintage Epicure President. “It’s not just their size and vineyard holdings. They really get it. **This is the first French producer I have worked with that has vision from the market backwards, rather than the vineyard forward.** Their enologist judges his own success by us selling more wine in our market.”

## Groupe Taillan

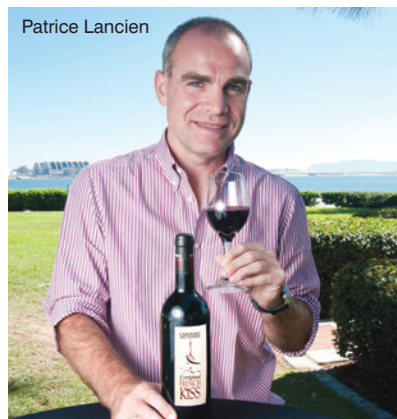
[compagnierhodanienne.fr](http://compagnierhodanienne.fr)

VDF Brands: **French Kiss, Jean Berteau, Voiturette, Le Faisan**  
U.S. Importer: **L&L Imports**  
[[l-imports.com](http://l-imports.com)]

**Who they are:** Groupe Taillan was created in 1961 by Jacques Merlaut. The first company he founded in France was Rhodanienne (Rhône), followed by Ginestet (Bordeaux) and Joseph Verdier (Loire Valley). “We sell 60 million bottles a year,” says Patrice Lancien, Director USA. “With our group, we can offer a full package for importers.”

**On developing French Kiss:** **“We have one of the best enologists in France.** We tasted a lot of popular samples in America with our importer, in order to understand consumer expectation. Then we selected the 10 best and we sent them to our enologist. He made three profiles and we picked

Patrice Lancien



one, and that is how French Kiss was born. American people like it a lot. And they love the name.”

**On their other VDF brands:** “In addition to French Kiss, we have several brands that deliver great value at different price points. Voiturette is more of a French profile; it is straight varietal, not oaked. Le Faisan is a Rhône-style blend. Grenache/Syrah for red, Grenache Blanc/Marsanne for white.”

## Grandissime

grandissime.com

Brands: **Le Hameau, Grand Plessis, Grande Réserve**  
U.S. Importer: **Plume Ridge**  
[plumeridge.com]

**Who they are:** Founded 10 years ago by Didier Grandeau, an export director in Bordeaux, Grandissime began offering Bordeaux wines, then progressively added wines from other regions. “We started making Vin de France wines two years ago,” recalls Nicolas Dufour, America Sales Manager. “Our wines were so successful that we had to find grapes from additional regions. Now it’s possible to make specific blends for customers. We call ourselves ‘Exclusive Wine Stylists.’ One-third of the business is private labels.”

**On house style:** “We want to make wines with a modern twist. We work on the tannins to make sure they are very smooth, very silky. We try to extract a maximum of fruit. Everything



is stainless. We don’t use any oak on the Vin de France wines. We could. If somebody asks for a wine with oak, we can add it. But this is not the trend. We put the grape varieties on the labels of the Vin de France wines because it’s easier for the consumer to understand. France is the only country where people are mainly drinking wine with food. Most places people are drinking wine by itself. Our wines can be enjoyed by themselves.”



## Les Domaines Auriol

saint-auriol.com

Brands: **Le Carla, Pavillon de Gaujac, Le Bistro de Montmija**  
U.S. Importer: **Metrowine Distribution**  
[metrowine.com]

**Who they are:** “We are based in Perpignan. We are about 20 people sourcing the wine and bringing it to the consumer,” says Emmanuel Montes, Export Director. “One of our specialties is organic. We export 1 million cases, 20% of it organic. We are one of the top organic producers in France. That’s based on our relationship with the growers. You have to know where the organic wines are.”

**On Vin de France:** “Vin de France is the way for France to be in competition with other countries. We can use the varietal name. We can blend across regions. We can compete with Argentina and California on the same level. We can adapt the quality for the market, which is very unusual. Vin de France is the future. It’s a young, friendly, hip new thing. It’s super exciting.”

**On their brands:** “Le Carla is a little forest near our main estate; we stole the name from our region. Montmija is the main brand for our wines. We extended the range to include varietal wines in Vin de France.”

Victor Coulon and Pierre Courdurie



## Lionel Osmin & Cie

osmin.fr

Brands: **Villa, Heart of Darkness, La Réserve**  
U.S. Importer: **H. Mercer Imports**  
[hmercerimports.com]

**Who they are:** The company started in 2010, but Export Manager Pierre Courdurie explains, “We have more than 20 years experience. Lionel was at Maison de Vin de Jurançon. Something

was missing in our region. There was no negociant covering all the different places in south France. We were looking to bring something to the market with a more modern approach.”

**Their approach:** “We don’t have the money to buy vineyards. The idea was doing a negociant in the south of France, but having a deep impact on the growers. We are dealing with about 35 producers. We know all the best vineyard sites and know all the growers. We can choose the section of the vineyard we want. We do the winemaking in their cellars and then we bring the juice to a central warehouse.”

**On Heart of Darkness:** “The idea came from studies about resveratrol. Tannat is the grape that contains the most resveratrol. We have a whole range of Darkness: Heart of Darkness for the Tannat, Deep Darkness for the Malbec, Pink Darkness for the rosé made from Negrette.”