

# DOMAINE LAFAGE



- A staple European Cellar producer and consistent collaborator with Eric Solomon
- Jean-Marc creates a wide range of incredible values no matter their price
- Vineyards close to the Mediterranean make for vibrant and refreshing whites and rosés

For twenty years, we have worked with Jean-Marc Lafage at his estate in the Roussillon and across the border in Spain, where he consults on several projects. As good as his wines were when we first met him, they only get better with each vintage. When we first made his acquaintance in Calatayud, he suggested we visit his estate in the Roussillon, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Jean-Marc's start in the wine business was not an overnight success. While his family has been growing grapes and making wine in the Roussillon since 1791, it was Jean-Marc's early insight into the potential for the Roussillon to make a wide range of dry wines at very affordable prices that established his "new" estate. For most of the 20th century, the region was famous for its fortified dessert wines – Rivesaltes, Banyuls & Maury. Most of these wines were made at large facilities that purchased grapes from local growers, including Jean-Marc's ancestors. While his grandfather and father made wine for the family, Jean-Marc was the first to break away from the co-



operative model to make his own wine commercially. Over the generations, his family had amassed scattered vineyards throughout the region, which now totals over 160 hectares of vines, most of them in excess of 50 years in age.

Another factor in Jean-Marc's success is the diversity of the terroirs in the Roussillon. Squeezed between the far southern edge of the limestone Corbières Massif to the north and the granitic Pyrenees mountains in the south, the Roussillon is an undulating terrain of complex soil types, orientations, and exposures. Three river valleys, the Agly, Têt, and Tech, drain the region generally flowing west to east, where they meet the Mediterranean.

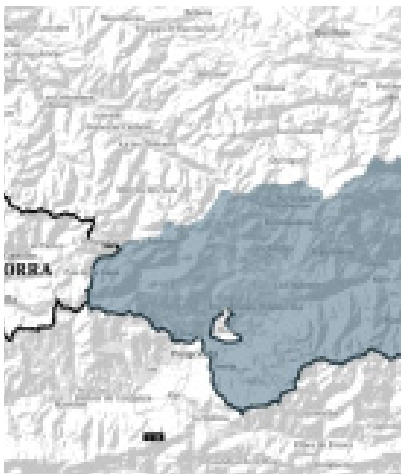
Within its borders of the Roussillon, Jean-Marc has identified six principal sub-zones in the appellation: the Crest, the Upper Agly Valley, the Uplands of Fenouillet, Les Asprès, the Mediterranean Plain, the Rocky Coast. Both the upper Agly Valley and the Crest are situated at the Roussillon's northern edge with similarly mixed clay-limestone and black schist soils. While both are equally warm during the day, the Upper Agly Valley is much more exposed to winds that are funneled from the interior, which



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## Facts at a Glance

- » Roussillon, France
- » Côtes du Roussillon
- » Jean-Marc & Eliane Lafage
- » 160 hectares / 25-400 meters
- » 10-100+ years
- » Sustainable
- » Grenache, Syrah, Mourvedre, Carignan, Grenache Gris, Grenache Blanc, Marsanne, Roussanne, Chardonnay, Rolle
- » Hand harvested, natural yeast fermentations in tank, vat, or barrel, aging in tank, foudre or French oak demi-muids



moderates the heat near the village of Maury, while the Crest, being closer to the Mediterranean, remains more evenly warm. The uplands of Fenouillet are located on the hills between the Agly and Têt rivers and near the western edge of the appellation. Here the soils are based on gneiss and granite, which retains water poorly. With a wide variation in orientations and located closer to the cooler continental influences from the interior, these sites favor late-ripening varieties and are generally harvest last at the domain. Moving south and east from Fenouillet is Les Aspès, a region at the foot of the Pyrenees where the soils are brown and red schist mixed with quartz. Fruit from Les Aspès is ripe and rich but with a distinctive minerality from the schist soils. Between the Agly and the Tech rivers and along the coast

*“I’m impressed with the Roussillon collection of Jean-Marc Lafage – a huge range, but very well made and well priced.”*

– ANDREW JEFFORD

is the Mediterranean Plain, where the soils are gravelly and alluvial. With vines situated a few kilometers from the sea, these sites benefit from thermal breezes that temper the region’s warmth, making for refreshing white and rosé wines. The Rocky Coast, where France meets Spain and where the Pyrenees Mountains descend into the sea, is a singular place in the Roussillon. Here steep vineyard sites overlap with the official boundaries of AOP Collioure and AOP Banyuls. Exceedingly steep and crisscrossed with stone built drainage channels and horizontal terraces, this is an unmistakable terroir with a distinctive human element. The soils here are composed of schist and granite making for wines that are age-worthy, intensely flavored, and with remarkable poise from a combination of low pH and high minerality.

This range of sites allows Jean-Marc Lafage to make both refreshing whites and rosés and concentrated reds and, this being the Roussillon, some fortified wines as well. Benefiting from a warm, dry climate, the estate is farmed organically. They grow Grenache (Blanc, Gris & Noir), Syrah, Mourvedre, Carignan, Marsanne, Roussanne, and Chardonnay primarily, with a significant proportion of the vines well over 50 years old. Harvesting is manual and lasts over several months due to the variations in conditions in each sub-zone they farm. The winemaking is surprisingly uncomplicated with stainless steel for the fresher whites but mostly concrete tanks for the rest with a small number of French oak demi-muids.