

example, switched back and forth on the question of new wood; sold some parcels of his land and bought others, the area under vine varying between twelve and fifteen hectares; and in recent years he has reduced the number of *cuvées* he produces to as few as possible. Today he makes one white, one rosé, and two reds. All of them are in the top flight of Languedoc wines.

Olivier was lucky to have started when he did, because in 1985 land in Jonquières was going for a song. He acquired it bit by bit, just as he had developed his *chais*. His reputation, however, was made instantly and he became an overnight star.

Olivier does not believe in convention: he creates his own. His white vin de pays★★, for example, is a strange cocktail of Terret, Carignan Blanc, and Grenache Blanc, rich and delicate at the same time. Of his two reds, "Les Etats d'Ame du Mas Jullien"★★ may be a quaffing wine but it has real distinction, while the serious red wine of the house, called "Les Depierre-les-Cailloutis"★★★, is a Languedoc best-seller, so successful that it is hard to buy any without reserving it in advance. Olivier sells half his output to private buyers, only a quarter to *cavistes* and restaurants, and the remainder of the wine goes for export.

Readers should be warned, however, that by the time they manage to visit Olivier at Mas Jullien, everything may have changed, everything, that is, except his enduring passion and energy.

## B47 Guilhem Dardé

### MAS DES CHIMÈRES

34800 Octon

☎ 04-67-96-22-70 A/B

Guilhem is as good value for money as his wines: his arboreal jet-black moustache and eyebrows, twinkling eyes, and mischievous sense of humour guarantee a memorable visit. His domaine is in the lee of the plateau of Larzac. This arid *causse*, home only to unthirsty sheep, was the scene of epic

peasant resistance to the French Government who were determined to extend their military establishment there, much to the fury of the local sheep-farmers who send their milk to nearby Roquefort for conversion into cheese. Guilhem, with his more infamous general, Bové, was a leading light in the Confédération Paysanne which quietly but effectively told the Government where it got off. There followed another campaign to prevent a moto-cross circuit and property development round Lake Salagou, just below Guilhem's village and his vines. Guilhem's personal success here earned him the mayoralty of Octon.

It is typical of Guilhem that, when he decided to leave the local *coopérative* in 1993, he did not ask them, but simply set up on his own. A mutually acceptable settlement followed. He used to have seventeen hectares of vines, the grapes of which he sent to another *coopérative* at Clermont L'Hérault, but he dug these up.

His remaining twelve hectares leave him independent. A totally free spirit; he likes to make wines within the appellation, because it makes him feel good. But as a winemaker he does not care whether his wines are vins de pays or whatever. Take his 100% Cinsault for example, which he calls "Oeillade"★★ after a plant which may or may not be the same as the unfashionable Cinsault – in the local markets grapes similar to Cinsault are enjoyed as table grapes and called "Oeillade". Whatever the truth, this wine has a delicious bouquet and flavour of bitter cherries: its charm and good acidity make a flavoury summer bottle.

Then there is his 100% "Carignan"★★, with an unusually flowery character when Guilhem vinifies it traditionally. Some of these grapes get a *macération carbonique*, and the resulting *assemblage* shows off the typical gentle bitterness of the *cépage*.

His red AC★★★ is the wine for which he is best known and it would be hard to find a better example, certainly at the price this one sells for. Tasted from the barrel, the

constituent Syrah, Grenache, and Mourvèdre make a fascinating comparison: the Mourvèdre in particular showing velvety spice, the texture being nearly as singular as the flavour; or the round Grenache with its gentle suggestions, when so very young, of the pharmacy; or the Syrah, aged in old Sauvignon Blanc casks from Bordeaux, with rare overtones of good meat stock.

"Hérétique"★★ is the name given aptly to Guilhem's Merlot-Cabernet vin de pays, rather classy in its field, but a wine which may need more time to come to its best than his AOC wine. An abundance of rich fruit will no doubt see off the tannins one day.

## other good larzac growers

### Charles Capaud

Domaine La Croix-Chaptal,

34725 Saint-André-de-Sangonis

☎ 04-67-16-09-36

### Madame Mireille Bertrand

Domaine de Malavielle, 34800 Méricons

☎ 04-67-96-34-67

## cabrières

This terroir almost adjoins Faugères to the east and enjoys the same band of schistous soil. It is surrounded by hills and dominated by the striking profile of Pic Vissou which is some 490 metres (1,600 feet) high. The *coopérative* dominates the production, which includes a rosé wine of which the village is very proud. There is only one independent producer, and independent is indeed the word.

## B48 Guy Mathieu

### DOMAINE DU TEMPLE

Les Crozes

34800 Cabrières

☎ 04-67-96-07-84 A

Mathieu is an ex-President of the local *coopérative*. When he started to make and bottle his own wine, he felt he should resign

from this job, although he still sends a good proportion of his grapes its way.

The property has a long history involving many of the medieval great and good, as well as some downright rogues and thieves. Guy Mathieu is the archetypal peasant grower. He had the very good fortune to buy up, for next to nothing in 1990, the dilapidated estate, which had fallen on neglected times. It could quite possibly be the most isolated *mas* in the whole of Languedoc: at the end of a three-kilometre road which serves no other dwelling, although it is flanked on either side by nothing but vines. All of these, except those around the Domaine du Temple, belong to other *coopérateurs*.

Guy has twenty hectares of grapes all of which are picked by hand. They include some very peachy Viognier★, Cinsault which is used to make two rosés, one★ with Syrah added, the other with Grenache and Mourvèdre. The three reds are all extremely good value: the "Cuvée Tiveret"★ from Syrah, Mourvèdre, and Grenache, all vines which Mathieu planted himself as soon as he had moved in; a Tradition called "Jacques de Molay"★★, from Syrah and Mourvèdre only, which has rather more matter and is altogether more serious; and an oaked version of the same★ from old vines. Guy uses only twenty-five per cent new oak, but the wood is fairly prominent and needs time for its tannins to resolve. He is assisted in the *chais* by the peripatetic Guy Bascou (see domaines Condamine l'Evêque and Gourgazaud).

After a tour of more sophisticated growers further afield, a visit to Guy Mathieu in his wonderfully tranquil setting, with a glass of his good red in the shade of the old *mas*, makes a delightful relaxation. However, be prepared for dissertations of a political incorrectness which may take the breath away.

**right** the irrepressible Guilhem Dardé, of Mas des Chimères, and Mayor of Octon

