

WINE CRUISING

A Guide to Wines Along the Canal du Midi in Southern France

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Grapes Growing along the Canal

DEDICATION

We would like to dedicate this book to all the wonderful and generous people we meet cruising along the Canal du Midi. While working on this book, many persons graciously assisted us with information, translation, ideas, and suggestions.

Christine Behey-Molines, Export Manager for Conseil Interprofessionnel Des Vins du Languedoc (CIVL) took time from her busy schedule to provide us with a wealth of information. Eric Sinico, manager of the Boutique Pub at CIVL assisted us with photographs and kindness. Laurent de Roulhac, manager of Le Chai d'Homps spent hours enthusiastically explaining the subtleties of Minervois wines. Dominique and Catherine Amiot shared their home, hospitality, and love of wine with us. Caryl Sanderson shared her smile and creative energy while rescuing us from misadventures.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Like many American baby boomers, our first experiences with wine consisted of Lambrusco or a very rough Chianti in a wicker wrapping, and if we were going upscale, Mateus or Blue Nun.

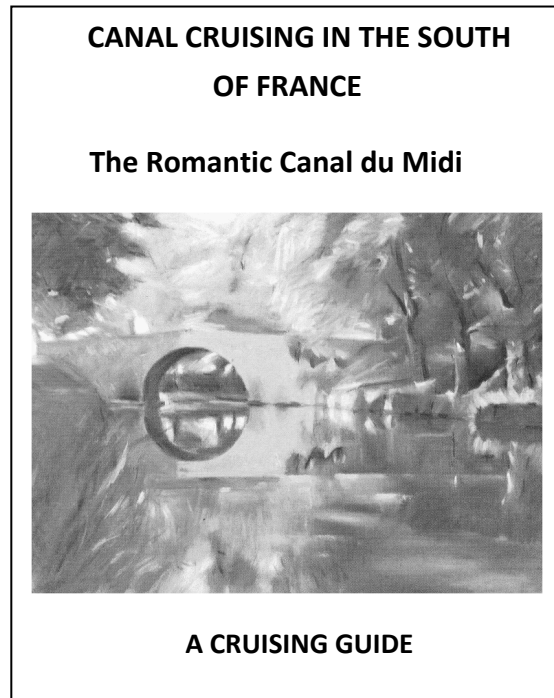
A major part of our “education” came on our honeymoon. We spent a lovely day tasting wines in Sonoma Valley and agreed our favorite was a Leo’s Cellar Cabernet. When turning around to return to the vineyard, Davis asked Kathy how far they had traveled. She replied 15 miles. The odometer showed we had traveled all of 1.6 miles in six hours. We were hooked on wine.

Initially, we preferred white wines, particularly California chardonnays. Gradually, we shifted to Cabernets, Zinfandels, and French red wines. Now, we flow with the seasons, preferring whites and rosés in the summer and reds in the winter.



Monique and Stephan conducting field research*

After being family guests it was suggested we buy part ownership in *Folie à Deux*, our canal boat based in Port La Robine, France. We were also promoted to research assistants for Canal Cruising in the South of France: The Romantic Canal du Midi by Pixie Haughwout and Ralph Folsom available at www.SeaFeverGear.com.



Our book is designed to accompany their well known cruising guide, adding information, depth and appreciation of the “wine experience” in the South of France.

*When in France we assume *nom de plumes*!

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PREFACE...HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Cruising the Canal du Midi in the South of France is a romantic escape, a journey into history, a gastronomic delight, an opportunity to move very slowly in a wine-lover's paradise. This book grew out of our curiosity and love of wine. It was created to make the wine experience while cruising the Canal more meaningful and fun.

The first two chapters are background material and resources for exploring wines along the Canal. We also suggest visiting the Web sites listed in the appendix of the book for additional information, changes and current festivities. Chapters Three through Five explore the types of wines along the Canal and detail their qualities. We signal wine alerts and opportunities to taste and purchase, most within easy walking distance of the Canal du Midi. Chapter Six provides a potpourri of wine thoughts, amusements and ideas.

It is tempting to stock up on wine at the first store you encounter, buy large quantities of unknown bottled wines, or purchase *en Vrac* (wine in large jugs or boxes called bibs). Resist that temptation! Better wines and memorable surprises await you along the way!

In our years as "research assistants" for *Canal Cruising in the South of France*, we have seen many changes. Please tell us about what you find, new wine tasting opportunities, favorites, and anything else that will be helpful for future editions. *Merci.*

RECENT VINTAGES

A doctor advising Italian composer Gioachino Rossini told the composer that his problems were “excesses of wine, women and song.” Rossini replied saying he could take care of the music. The doctor asked, “Which of the other two, will you give up?” Rossini replied, “It depends on the vintage!”

2003 was remembered as the year of the heat wave. News accounts reported 10,000 people died in Europe. The Languedoc region was among the hottest and driest areas, resulting in “exceptional climatic conditions” that are reflected in the robust wines of that year. Harvests were 10% to 20% lower than usual. Many reds from 2003 exhibit an intense warmth and heartiness. *Wine Enthusiast*(*WE*) gave Languedoc wines 90 points that year.

2004 was a year of varying conditions, called “capricious” by winemakers in Languedoc. 2004 was a year of quality with nicely colored wines, well balanced and presenting a flavorful potential thanks to comparatively high acidities. (88 points from *WE*.)

In Languedoc and elsewhere in France 2005 was touted as the vintage of the century. The hot days of the months of July and August were followed by a “beautiful freshness” in the night allowing slow maturation. The result was rich tannins and a magnificent extraction of deep red colors. “The 2005 wines offer silky tannins, a

fruity matter, a remarkable balance... All the opinions are unanimous: 2005 announces themselves superb with wines all in fineness!” (CIVL). (Only 87 points from WE.)

Several appellations recent vintages have again been touted as another “wine year of the century.” Languedoc wines received consistently strong ratings from *Wine Enthusiast*; 91 points in 2006 and 2007, and 90 points in 2008.

TOP CHOICES FOR A WEEK OR TWO ON THE CANAL

Most readers of this book are likely to be first-time cruisers, have a limited time on the Canal and will juggle the various desires of their mates. Below are our top wine recommendations, some general and some specific to each of the three regions.

General:

- Try rosés. Rosés are wonderful in this area of France.
- Try wines in a local market. Local markets offer unique food, shopping and wine opportunities.
- Try a sparkling white Limoux and a red Fitou. Both are hard to find in North America but part of the South of France wine experience.

Western Canal du Midi: Toulouse to Carcassonne

- Order a Big Red with Cassoulet in Castelnaudary
- Check out the food and wines on market day in Carcassonne-Place Carnot (Tuesday, Thursday,