

Drinking the Landscape

NEWLY REBRANDED, FORTANT GIVES NEW IDENTITY TO LANGUEDOC

by Lana Bortolot

Easy living and easy-going wine are synonymous in the Languedoc, and the Boisset Family's revitalization of a heritage wine brand there will help convey that for a new generation of wine-drinkers.

Perhaps like no other wine region in France, in the Languedoc, "the IGP and AOC wines are based in the Mediterranean way of life," says Head Winemaker Laurent Sauvage. "The wine styles are influenced by nature and climate."

Restablishing the Fortant brand in Sète, a canal-lined port city about 35 miles southwest of Montpellier, the Boisset Collection aims to recall the golden age of wine in that city—the 1920s and 30s—when it was a center for trade and cooperage.

The first phase of the rejuvenation involves refurbishing the 1877 water-side cellars and warehouse formerly owned by Robert-Elie Skalli, a French Algerian-born wine producer who established territory in the Languedoc. When Boisset purchased the assets in 2011, he knew he wanted to create a new identity, not only for the company, but for the wines and terroir, focusing on microclimates. Under the rebranded Fortant, three distinct terroirs define the south of France: mountains, hills and coast.

"We came up with this new vision of

Fortant's varietal wines express the three terroirs of Languedoc: coast, hillsides and mountains.



the Languedoc and more widely of the south of France," says Sauvage. "We are the first winery to have a landscape approach with this scope."

The top terroir boasts elevations as high as 1,800 meters, large diurnal temperature shifts and soils composed of schists and volcanic rock, giving the Mountain Grand Reserve wines structure, complexity and acidity. Hills Reserve, so named for its inland, hillside, garrigue-influenced terrain, expresses the clay-limestone soils and yields wines that are medium- to full-bodied but owe their freshness to the influences of the Mistral and Tramontane winds. Finally, the sea-level coast terroir produces wines that express citrus and tropical fruits, tinged with a saline aspect.

This year, the company launched a new communications campaign anchored by a web series called "Terre de Fortant," starring an Indiana Jones-type explorer who embarks on a "three-grape quest" through the terroirs. It will be supported by a dedicated web site and promotions via social media.

"The DNA and the values of the winery are pioneering spirit, innovation, heritage and the Mediterranean way of life," Sauvage says, "Fortant the Explorer is totally in coherence with those." ■■



A NEW LOOK AT FORTANT

COAST: Fortant "Littoral" range

Terroir: Crisp and aromatic, the seaside vineyards enjoy a fresh and constant climate that delivers aromatic wines with notes of fresh fruit.

Varietals: Chardonnay, Muscat, Grenache, Cabernet-Sauvignon and rosés made from Grenache and Merlot.

SRP: \$10.99

HILLS: Fortant "Collines" range

Terroir: The typical Mediterranean garrigue scrubland, where thyme and rosemary give the wines spiciness layered with rich, ripe fruit. 50-250 meters above sea level with a hot, dry climate with cooler nights.

Varietals: Chardonnay, Viognier and Malbec.

SRP: \$14.99

MOUNTAINS: Fortant "Grands Monts" range

Terroir: Vines grow on the foothills of the Cévennes and Black Mountains at an altitude of 250-400 meters above sea level. A diversity of soils make the wines crisp and complex, expressing fruits over floral, and backed by minerality and structure.

Varietals: Carignan and Pinot Noir.

SRP: \$19.99