

The latest news from the Languedoc – July '09

Bienvenue !

A wonderfully warm and sunny Spring with the average high temperature during April, May and June in Montpellier of

22°C

with a recorded high of 34°C



Spring is over, and it has been particularly glorious this year, and summer has arrived hot on its heels.

This month we have included some topical articles on the declining wine industry and an explanation of the different winds in the region and how they affect the weather.

We are also launching our fabulous new web site this month, so please take a look and tell us what you think – all feedback will be gratefully received !

www.ab-real-estate.com

Les Vignobles (vineyards) - heritage or history?

Anybody who spends a reasonable amount of time here in the Languedoc-Roussillon will no doubt have seen vineyards being torn up (l'arrachage de vignes), the process of which seems to be accelerating at an alarming rate. The trunks (or souche) are left in a forlorn pile in a corner of what was once a thriving vineyard and very much a part of the heritage of this region.

The land is sometimes left as open fields, planted with wheat or hay, and occasionally even sold as building land (where allowed) to accommodate the ever growing need for housing.

We spoke to some of the vigneronns in St Geniès de Fontédit (Hérault) and they told us that due to increasing costs and fees, whereas once it provided a good living that enabled them to purchase property, invest and expand, nowadays they can barely make enough to simply exist. Financial incentives offered by the government to pull up vines are sorely tempting, particularly when the work is not only skilled, but hard, and offers little return.



The compensation offered can be as much as 13,530 euros per hectare (almost 2½ acres) depending on the size of the vineyard to be pulled up and the variety of grape. This year, 2009, offers the highest rate which is why there is so much sudden activity.

The wine industry has been hit by a decline in demand producing a chronic oversupply of wine, currently estimated at 750 million bottles a year. Languedoc-Roussillon, by far the largest region in terms of vineyard surface in the world, is the source of much of Europe's overproduction - the so-called 'wine lake'.

The European Union's Agriculture Commission has proposed radical reforms to reduce production and increase sales, not least of which is that growers tear out more than 1 million acres of vines by 2010/2011 to deal with Europe's wine glut. European producers who can't sell their wine at decent prices are forced to distill billions of bottles of perfectly drinkable wine into pure alcohol for use in disinfectants, cleaning products or gasoline additives.



Historically, people used to buy French wine because it was a given that it was the best. Wine producers rested on their laurels in supreme confidence, and perhaps complacency. However, France's strict laws controlling the advertising and labeling of alcohol has until recently prevented winegrowers from doing much to reverse the decline of the wine industry.

The Loi Evin came into effect in 1991 and bans alcohol advertisements on television or in cinemas, restricts them on radio, strictly controls messages and images, and forbids alcohol industry sponsorships of sporting events. All advertisements must include a message to the effect that alcohol abuse is dangerous to health.

Winegrowers say they are not against fighting alcoholism, but cannot do anything about the trend if they are not allowed to promote the quality of their products.



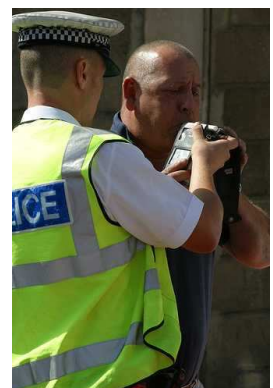
Stiff competition from New World wines is hard to counter when French winemakers have not updated their marketing strategies and have their hands tied under the Loi Evin. French exporters are also finding it hard to compete against powerful global brands with big marketing budgets and low prices. All countries are suffering under the economic crisis as costs go up and up, such as petrol for example, bringing less return. However, it seems that France has the highest charges to pay and are the hardest hit with many leaving the business for good.

In addition, people all over the world know of great French regional wines such as those from Bordeaux and Burgundy, whose names remain some of the strongest marketing 'brands' in wine, but how many know wines from Corbières or Faugères?

Wine critics argue that the average consumer doesn't understand the AOC (the regional naming standard) in France but would recognise a grape variety, for example, Chardonnay (which is how New World wines are labeled). However, decades of regional quality standards have put many French winemakers at a competitive disadvantage, keeping them from putting a varietal label on their wine. Thankfully this is starting to change and labels are being redesigned, making it easier for wine drinkers to understand what they are buying.

The French drink less wine than they used to due to tough campaigns against drink-driving in recent years, and a newfound responsibility behind the wheel. Recent government health and safety campaigns have also made the French more aware and conscious of the damaging effects alcohol consumption can have to health.

The average French adult drank 58 litres of wine last year, compared with 90 litres per head in 1980 – a drop of about 35%. Only 37% of the French now consider themselves regular drinkers, against 61% in 1980. On top of that, the French consume now nearly half as much wine as they did 35 years ago.



The younger generation now seek a 'quick hit' from their alcohol in the form of spirits and alcopops, coupled with a preference for beer rather than wine.

If current trends continue, the commission predicts that, by 2010, 15 percent of European wine will be surplus, and the continent will import more wine than it exports.

Since the revolution in transportation at the end of the 19th century, this region has been exclusively dedicated to the growing of grapes for wine production. The wine producers of Languedoc-Roussillon have become producers of excellent wines that are now sold all over the world. Will this heritage continue, or will it merely become part of its history ?

High speed fibre optics are on their way



You will no doubt have noticed the strange narrow trenches along the roads and through the villages.

These are for new fibre optic cables which are being laid and linked to local exchanges. It may take some time, but it should ensure a better connectivity to the local exchange which will lead to a faster internet service.

The 20th Century finally arrives (in the 21st) in our quiet little villages ...

New flights

Well, Ryanair are expanding their service – and not just the 'holiday season' routes but also some more all year round destinations.

The latest to join the portfolio are Edinburgh and Frankfurt flying into Carcassonne.

The Languedoc-Roussillon benefits from great links – road, rail and air – with airports outside the area that are effectively only a couple of hours drive along the motorway, such as Gerona and Marseille, offering an even greater choice of routes.

For further details please visit their website www.ryanair.com.



The 5 winds of Languedoc-Roussillon

There are times in this region during the summer months when you pray for a bit of wind, and other times you curse it depending on which direction it's coming from. Apparently the Languedoc is the windiest region of France. This is why lines of wind turbines are springing up along the coast and inland hilltops. The windiest area is along the coast between Narbonne and the Spanish border. This makes for good sailing and wind-surfing.



Fortunately, the Mistral, which brings Siberian cold and drives people mad, is localised in Provence. However, in Languedoc we have the **Tramontane** which blows from the north-west and is the local, gentler version of the Mistral wind. It is a dry, pretty violent wind that is cold, almost bitter in winter but very welcome in the summer.



The **Cers** wind blows from the west or south-west and often heralds sunny warm weather, blowing the clouds away and bringing bright blue skies and sunshine, even though temperatures are cooler. It is generally cold in winter, and warm in summer, but always dry.

The **Scirocco** is a south wind bringing hot dry air from Africa. This wind blows rarely, and then only for a few hours, leaving everything covered in a fine film of sand carried over the Mediterranean Sea from the Sahara Desert.

The **Autan** is a warm wind of the south-east of France (around Perpignan). It can be particularly strong west of Carcassonne and often heralds heavy rainfall. A few days before it blows, a calmness descends and during this period the Pyrénées can be seen from 150 kilometres away. The locals will tell you that bad weather will settle in for either three, six or nine days on end. It is also known, rather dramatically, as the devil's wind and the wind of death.

And finally the **Marin**, which is a warm wind that blows in from the Mediterranean Sea from the south-east. It tends to raise the general ambient temperature, but brings with it banks of low humid cloud. It causes heavy rain in coastal areas in the winter and in summer tends to dissipate but leaves the area smelling of the sea and your skin tasting of salt.

The Best Beaches

If you've come to the Languedoc-Roussillon looking for a beach, then you've come to the right place. Languedoc takes up half of France's Mediterranean coast with four of the five Departements of the region bordering the Mediterranean Sea. There is 177km (110 miles) of coastline and 42 beaches to choose from – ranging from truly fantastic to completely awful, but does include some of the most beautiful beaches in the south of France. The beaches tend to be long, wide and sandy with the low, flat plain behind. Only at Sète and Cap d'Agde do the mountains extend to the coast and create cliffs.



Espiguette, in the Camargue, is said to be Europe's longest beach and is backed by sand dunes. It is a little difficult to find and a bit of a walk from the car park, but worth it for its beauty and peacefulness. Portiragnes and Serignan are lovely beaches near to Béziers. Portiragnes has no facilities but Serignan does have a couple of beach bars/restaurants and you can hire sun loungers and parasols. Valras is great if you have children as there are many ice cream parlors and play facilities, not to mention restaurants and toilets.

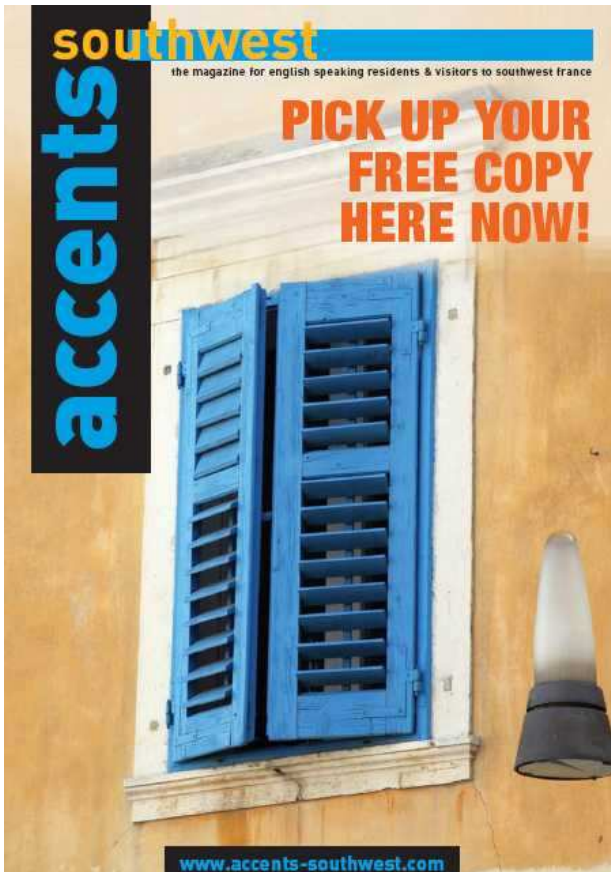
The charming seaside town of Leucate has two beaches and some great restaurants. La Franqui beach has the sea on one side and the etang (inland lake) on the other. The north end of the beach at Argèles is beautiful with views of the Pyrénées and bordered by pine trees, at the other end it is more commercial with plenty of facilities for the kids.

If you fancy a bit of a skinny-dip, then Cap D'Agde's nudist beach is excellent but costs €5 per person to get in.

Don't forget the suntan lotion !



Read about life in Languedoc-Roussillon



A new free monthly magazine has been launched in Languedoc-Roussillon for english speaking residents and visitors.

accents southwest was launched in June 2009 and is a glossy lifestyle magazine with news and features about life in the area.

Editor Alison Tully said: The magazine is for english speakers of all nationalities who are living in, moving to and visiting the Languedoc Roussillon region. We know our readers all have one thing in common – they are all looking for relevant and useful information, which is what **accents southwest** aims to provide. Our accent is on broad mix of content, including local events and regional information, features, interviews, reader stories, food and drink, homes and gardens, shopping and a range of key issues such as health and money.'

The team at **accents-southwest** are keen to hear from anyone with an interesting story or news of an event in their area. You can contact them by emailing editor@accents-southwest.com or calling 04 68 83 23 77.

accents-southwest is available in outlets across the region including tourist information offices and airports and selected shops, café-bars, restaurants, hotels and tourist and leisure attractions

To find out where to pick up a copy in your local area or to subscribe for an email or printed version of the magazine, visit www.accents-southwest.com

A selection of Featured Properties



Lovely character house, 6 bedrooms, swimming pool, lovely views of the countryside, plus small house to turn into a Gîtes, near Carcassonne

398 000€ AFI SAB0869



Beautiful stone farmhouse, fully renovated, independent apartment, view on vineyards, pool, 2.5ha/6.25acres, idyllic setting near Narbonne. An absolute bargain!

555 000€ AFI SAB0671



Unique secured Marina development, luxury 3 bedroom villa, several terraces, a small garden, Jacuzzi, large garage and boat mooring with leaseback (available without leaseback for 699 000€)

630 000€ AFI SAB0970



Bungalow/Villa, 3 bedrooms, lovely garden, heated pool, garage, located in the Béziers countryside on the outskirts of a village with all amenities

285 000€ AFI HAB0073



Exceptional Maison de Maître 9 bedrooms (7 en-suite), 2 Gîtes, pool and pond in large mature garden with adjoining 0.4ha of vineyard, running B&B and Gîtes, garage, 200m² to convert, good location

1 290 000€ AFI SAB0969



Charming 19th century village house entirely restored, 3 en-suite bedrooms, granny flat and/or guest house, intimate courtyard, sunny terraces with pool, garage, walking distance to shops, quiet

475 000€ AFI SAB0968



Fully renovated stone village house, 3 bedrooms, garden that could take a pool, and possibility to buy a large stone barn and smaller renovated house

280 000€ AFI HAB0068



Contemporary Designer Villa, heated indoor and outdoor pools with jacuzzi, lovely mature garden with pine and oak trees, charming and relaxing ambiance, with REDUCED PRICE it is now a very good deal!!

1 170 000€ AFI SAB0825

À Bientôt

I do hope you continue to enjoy our newsletter. If you have any ideas for articles of interest, please do let me know.

Again, please take a look at our new website and tell us what you think.

Don't forget we are here if you have any queries regarding the sale or purchase of property and also now holiday rentals and property management.

Have a wonderful summer and we will be in touch again in the Autumn.

Call us on

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or

**0871 990 2000
from UK**

or by email on

ab@ab-real-estate.com

and we now have a Skype address
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With best wishes

Annelise Bosshard
Managing Director
AB Real Estate



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