

THE COTEAUX D'AIX-EN-PROVENCE APPELLATION IN A NUTSHELL

HISTORY

Coming from the Gulf of Smyrna, the Greeks landed on our coast in the 6th century BC and founded Massilia, which is now called Marseille. They brought vines with them which they planted all over the neighbouring hills. From as early on as this period, vines reached the hills or *coteaux* in Aix-en-Provence where large vineyard areas subsequently developed – the oldest in all of Provence. It is from there that the vineyards spread through the rest of France, going up the Rhone Valley towards the north, following the Via Romania towards the South West and Bordeaux. The Provence wine region continued to develop, and was soon to be helped by a major invention from our ancestors, the Gaules. This was the barrel.

In the second century AD the Christians brought new life to the vineyards and business flourished in the wine sector. The authority of the Counts of Provence helped our region to find its identity. The most famous among them, King René of Anjou, had a positive influence on Provencal viticulture, helping to make the wines of the region known throughout most of Europe.

The move towards the system of official appellations of origin (AOC) was initiated by a few producers and in 1946 the wines from the region of Aix were called 'Coteaux du Roy René'. An official decree defined the appellation VDQS Coteaux d'Aix for the first time in 1956 and in 1985 the Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence officially became an AOC wine.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE APPELLATION

The Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence mainly spread over the Bouches-du-Rhone department with an extension into the Var. The demarcated region resembles a triangle, with the borders being the Durance River in the north east, the Rhone Valley in the west and the Mediterranean Sea in the south.

It is a sunny dry Mediterranean climate, with average sunshine of 2 700 to 2 900 hours per year. Annual rainfall is from 520 to 680 mm of irregular rains.

The soils are mainly clayey-calcareous, stony, and in some parts sandy or gravelly.

Authorised red grape varieties are Grenache, Cinsault, Carignan, Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz, Mourvèdre and Counoise, and white varieties are Ugni blanc, Clairette, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon, Grenache Blanc, Bourboulenc and Vermentino, or Rolle.

The surface area under vine of AOC wines is about 3 000 hectares, for an average production of 150 000 hectolitres, of which 60% is rosé, 35% red and 5% white. The maximum legal yield is 60 hl/ha.

There are 15 cooperative cellars (with approximately 600 members) which make up 40% of the production and 86 private cellars which constitute the remaining 60%.

The Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence is the second largest appellation in Provence in surface area following the Côte de Provence (14 700 hectares) and followed by the Coteau Varois (1 575 hectares), Bandol (1 250 hectares), Cassis (160 hectares), Bellet (38 hectares) and Palette (20 hectares).

The Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence region certainly has the potential to produce quality wines. Its relatively small surface area means a homogenous terroir. The good quality grape varieties are conducive to the production of good wines and enable one to obtain wine that corresponds to the taste of the 'new consumer', namely young, quite light, very aromatic wines.