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Wine column: South West France wines

Andy Cronshaw tries three wines from France's hidden corner



Without warning, a package of wines from the south west of France dropped on the office mat. The selection was from the lovely people at France Sud Ouest (see southwestfrancewines.com) who have been working with thewinegang.com to market bottles from this fabulous and varied wine growing region.

I have to say by the time I'd finished the wines I was ready to book my holiday in the south west of France. With wines like these to match its regional food, stunning beaches and spectacular rural scenery what could possibly go wrong?

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The best of the three was the breathtakingly good Cotes de Gascogne Domaine du Tariquet Dernières Grives 2011 (£16.90 Wines Society) pictured.

Nicely chilled, this sweet wine hits the spot with startling freshness running through its peachy, honeyed fruit. It's made from 100 per cent Petit Manseng and such is its regional typicity I'd suggest you'd find it difficult to compare it with anything else.

The nose and palate carry hints of tropical fruit such as guava and pineapple, but there's a tremendous level of acidity which stops it from ever being anything near cloying.

This is going to match a wide variety of cheeses, as well as fruit-based desserts such as tarte tatin.

The second wine was from Saint Mont – an area which is less well known than Gascony for wine but deserves wider recognition.

On the slopes of the north-facing Pyrenees, it has hot days and cool nights, and sandy, stony and clay soils.

Les Hauts de Bergelle Saint Mont 2011 (£9.99 Majestic) is a very nice example of its finely crafted wines.

Made from the relatively unheralded grapes: Gros Manseng, Petit Courbu and Arrufiac, it is crisp but concentrated and carries a glint of summer sunshine.

Again there's plenty of tropical fruit on the palate, which is checked by bright acidity. This will be the perfect match for some herby chicken or pot-roasted pork.

The third wine was Chateau Eugenie Cahors 2009 (£12.86 retailer TBA, UK distributor is Deliciously French) which is firm but delicious. There's a little Merlot to soften the dense black fruit of the Malbec but nothing of the over-extracted feel common to cheaper Argentine productions of the grape.

A couple more years in the cellar will soften this wine but it is drinking well now with the right food: roast beef, steak or hefty casseroles.

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