



# PLUMPJACK

WINES  
WINE CLUB  
July 2005

As July comes to a close, we can rejoice in the phenomenal achievement of Lance Armstrong winning his 7<sup>th</sup> Tour de France. The rigors of riding a bicycle through the incredible countryside of Southern France and battling the formidable Pyrenees is only overshadowed by the challenges that winemakers face in making clean, well-balanced wines from the same area. This month our PlumpJack Wine Club takes us on our own organoleptic Tour de France, featuring a Minervois from the western Languedoc along the southeastern corner of

France, and a Côtes de Gascogne from the southwest corner of the country. Both wines come from producers with long family histories in their respective regions, and both wines reflect their families' commitment to producing quality wines that reflect the terroir from which they come. You won't need a helmet or special shoes to take our tour, just a wine glass, a corkscrew and some good food. When the wine tour ends, the bottles will be empty but everyone will be a winner.

*2003 Domaine Chiroulet  
La Côte d'Heux  
Côtes de Gascogne  
Larroque su l'Osse, France  
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*2000 Château de Gourgazaud Reserve  
Cru Minervois La Livinière  
"Petit Causse," France*

Domaine Chiroulet is situated on the highest slopes in Gascony, at around 180 meters (600 feet) altitude in the southwest corner of France. It lies within the Côtes de Gascogne, which covers the Armagnac region in the Gers *département*. The estate takes its name from the word "Chiroula," which in local dialect refers to the winds that whistle through the hills. Domaine Chiroulet cultivates 45 hectares (110 acres) of vines aged between 10-and 40-years-old. The property faces due south and any diseases that could injure the vineyards are swept away by the winds, resulting in perfectly ripe and healthy grapes every year. The estate has been owned and operated by the same family for six generations over 150 years. In 1993, Philippe Fezas, the eldest child of the last generation and a trained agricultural engineer and enologist, was convinced that Chiroulet could produce great local wines. His goal was to create wines where the grapes and their different soils would express themselves in the finished product. According to him: "a great wine is like a piece of music, the more notes there are, the more beautiful the symphony." When it comes to white wine, Philippe quickly understood that the great wines in France come from chalky soil. He, therefore, chose a subregion, "Peyrusquet", and planted vineyards on a chalky outcrop called "Retzine." The area is known for producing white wines with floral and mineral properties. The 2003 La Côtes d'Heux, (Heux is the name of the hamlet where the domaine is situated,) is made from 100% Gros Manseng. Gros Manseng is normally a high acid grape, but the extraordinarily hot conditions of 2003 helped buffer that acidity and let the fruit sing. The fruit came from south-facing vineyards located in the middle of the Côte d'Heux (160 m) with deep brown clay soil on a chalky base. Fermentation took place in wooden vats at cool temperatures and the wine underwent malolactic fermentation. Once fermentation was finished, the wine was matured in older oak barrels over 14 months on fine lees, stirred for the first 10 months. The 2003 La Côtes d'Heux has fresh aromas of pears, passion fruit, lemon and minerals. In the mouth, the wine has a surprisingly creamy texture with intense fruit that coats the palate



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from start to finish. The fruit flavors linger for a long time and the wine finishes with enough acidity to leave the palate fresh, ready for the next gulp. The 2003 La Côtes d'Heux makes a wonderful aperitif or pairs beautifully with grilled fish or your favorite chicken dish. It would be delicious with PlumpJack Café Squaw Valley's Northern Halibut with sweet corn, Beluga lentils, corn foam, and pickled Porcini relish. The wine is extremely limited (I bought all there was) and it is a tremendous value!

The 2003 Domaine Chiroulet La Côtes d'Heux is \$12.99/bottle, \$140.30/case.



In the Mediterranean region, Minervois is home to some of the most ancient vineyards. Its name comes from the ancient city of Minerve, a stronghold built by the Romans and dedicated to the goddess Minerva. The Minervois is situated at the southern extremity of the Massif Central, between Béziers and Carcassonne. It takes the form of a vast amphitheatre, facing due south towards the Pyrenees and backing on to the Montagne Noire, surrounded by olives and oaks. The vineyards of the appellation cover 4,500 hectares, situated on ancient south-facing terraces and slopes. Forty-five villages and towns in the Aude *département*, and sixteen in Hérault make up the Minervois appellation. In 1973, encouraged by wine producers in the region, Roger Piquet moved to the Minervois and became owner of the 67 hectares of the Château de Gourgazaud. In the 1870's, Roger's grandfather, Ernest, would travel to la Livinière in the Languedoc region to find wines for his wholesale wine and spirits business in Bonnières, a small town in Normandy. The business was passed on to Marcel, Roger's father, and in 1925, Roger joined the firm. Within a period of ten years after moving to Minervois, Roger replaced all the vines on his estate and increased its size, which now covers 100 hectares. He was the first to plant Syrah and Mourvedre grapes in the region, varieties which now provide the foundation of his production. The strict application of low-pruning, the thinning of green grapes, and small yields has contributed over the years to the fine characteristics of the wines from Château de Gourgazaud. Roger was also one of the instigators of the entirely new and sole appellation in the Languedoc region, the "Cru Minervois la Livinière." Château de Gourgazaud is situated in the in the area called "Petit Causse," in the heart of the Minervois region. The grapes are grown on ancient decalcified terraces where the soil is acidic, poor in organic minerals, but rich in schist and quartz pebbles. The 2000 Reserve from Château de Gourgazaud is composed of Syrah and Mourvèdre. The grapes undergo a slow temperature-controlled fermentation that lasts about 15 days. This allows for the extraction of desirable flavor components but keeps the tannins soft. The wine is then aged for one year in new French oak barrels. Oz Clarke writes that a good bottle of Minervois will offer the "dry-earth, hot-resin fruitiness of the far south." The 2000 Château de Gourgazaud Reserve is a lush wine with rich fruit and a touch of rusticity. It has a complex mix of black fruits and herbs with soft tannins and a lingering finish. It is a wine that will go well with roasts and grilled red meats or with a variety of soft cheeses. Try it with PlumpJack Café's Cabernet-braised beef oxtails with California porcini risotto, caramelized pearl onions, and a roasted tomato-veal reduction.

The 2000 Château de Gourgazaud is \$17.99/bottle, \$194.30/case