

France: Champagne's Aube

The Côte des Bars is the viticultural region of the Aube department. Only 25 miles northeast of Chablis, it is closer to Dijon than it is to Reims, yet it accounts for nearly one-fifth of Champagne's vineyard land. The rolling hills of Kimmeridgian clay and marl are largely planted with pinot noir, often producing a fuller and rounder wine than that grown in the Cretaceous chalk of Champagne's heartland. The Aube's inclusion in Champagne has historically been hotly debated (even leading to riots in 1911), yet the Aube has long been an important source of grapes for many of Champagne's major names.

Today, the Côte des Bars is becoming increasingly recognized for its own producers as well. One of the best known is Drappier, who makes a superb, single-vineyard Champagne called Grande Sendrée. Fleury is also well established, the first in Champagne to be certified biodynamic by Demeter. Rising stars include Cédric Bouchard, Bertrand Gautherot and Dosnon & Lepage, all of whom began producing Champagne only in the last ten years, attracting international attention for their highly individual, naturally grown and terroir-expressive champagnes. Another name to note is Jacques Lassaigne, a source of rich, pure chardonnay from nearby Montgueux. —PETER LIEM

Greece: Laconia

Laconia is the most remote part of the Peloponnese, a forked tongue of land in the southeastern corner hemmed in by water and mountains. The area was famous in ancient times for its wines—the port of Monemvasia is thought to have given its name to what became known as Malvasia, or Malmsey—but its isolation has caused it to be late in joining the Greek wine revolution. Spurred on by the success of his northern neighbors in Mantinia and Nemea, Yiannis Vatisstas began to untangle the area's complex array of grapes so he could highlight the best varieties in his wines; so far, he's come up with a brilliant, honeyed kidonitsa redolent of *kidoni*, or quince, and a peachy, mineral-laden petroulianos. His son, Theodoros, advises looking out for smirneiko, a promising red variety. George Tsimpidis, who opened Monemvasia Winery in 1997, is doing more research in a quest to discover what went into the original, highly touted Malvasia, and a handful of other wineries have started to bottle wines to sell outside the region. So far, only Vatisstas' wines are available stateside. —TARA Q. THOMAS

Spain: Levante

Though Spain's sun-drenched Levante produces an enormous amount of wine, the region has always been more likely to draw visitors for its paella Valenciana or its juicy oranges than for the fruit of its vines. Today, a group of producers from Valencia to Alicante is working to change that.

At the heart of the renaissance is monastrell, the rustic red variety planted on the calcareous soils of Jumilla and Yecla, as well as farther west in Valencia and Alicante. Old vines (many a century old) have barely survived in a place where it almost never rains and the heat can be extreme. Under these conditions, producers such as Julia Roch e Hijos (Las Gravas), Bodegas Bleda (Divus), or Bodegas El Nido (Clio) in Jumilla; Rafael Cambra (Uno) in Valencia; and Juan Carlos López de la Calle, winemaker for Artadi in Alicante's El Sequé, are proving that monastrell can produce distinctive and exceptionally rich wines.

A revival has begun to the north as well, where the climate is more benign, the landscape greener. In Utiel Requena, José Antonio Sarrión is working to tame the hyperproductive bobal, while close by, in Moixente, Pablo Calatayud at Celler del Roure is attempting to revive another nearly lost variety, mandó. —PATRICIO TAPIA

Italy: Sicily's Mount Etna

Etna is Europe's highest volcano—and, at nearly 11,000 feet, it's more than twice the size of its famous cousin to the north, Vesuvius. Despite a state of continuous activity (a small eruption occurred in May 2008), viticulture has been practiced on the lower slopes of the volcano for several centuries. The rich volcanic soils, variety of exposures and altitudes ranging from 1,150 to more than 3,200 feet are among the reasons that growers risk farming in such a volatile area.

The three traditional varieties cultivated in the region—nerello mascalese and nerello cappuccio for Etna Rosso; carricante for Etna Bianco—are capable of yielding wines of great mineral expression and flavor, yet they show some restraint thanks to the high altitudes. Vine age also contributes to the complexity of the wines: Some sites on Etna are more than 100 years old, with a few that predate phylloxera.

Much of the credit for today's *rinascimento* on Etna goes to Giuseppe Benanti of Azienda Benanti. In addition to seeking out and preserving older vineyards on the mountain, Benanti's modernization work in the early '90s included clonal research with Etna's native varieties, as well as experiments with international grapes like cabernet sauvignon and chardonnay. Benanti's best wines are the traditional Etna Rosso and Etna Bianco. Other producers to watch include Tenuta delle Terre Nere (owned by Marco and Iano de Grazia), Murgio and Frank Cornelissen (see p. 55). —WOLFGANG M. WEBER

