

Entry-level French wines are simplifying their approach to appeal to consumers

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AFTER picking up the wines to be tasted in last week's column, my observations of entry-level French wine stuck with me. I've been lucky enough to be involved in wine in one capacity or another for almost 12 years, and in that time a lot has changed. But no single country has attempted as dramatic an overhaul in its entry-level wines as France.



It's the wines from the south of France (specifically from the Languedoc appellation Vin de Pays D'Oc) that now dominate the \$10-\$15 price point. A decade ago, the far more modest shelf space given to \$10-\$15 French red would have been filled with Beaujolais, entry-level Bordeaux, and only a couple of wines from the Vin de Pays D'Oc region.

The latter category has exploded. Unlike the sometimes intimidating labels on Burgundy and Bordeaux, most Vin de Pays D'Oc wines promote the grape in the bottle rather than the region in which the wine was made. In fact, most wines from the most prestigious (read: expensive) wine regions in France wouldn't be allowed to label their wines so simply.

The following French wines all have a more than a few things in common -- they're from the Vin de Pays D'Oc region, they're reds, they're all from 2005, none were bottled under natural cork, and their labels (like many Aussies) feature animals on the label.

Elephant on a Tightrope

2005 Cabernet Sauvignon
(Vin de Pays D'Oc, France -- \$12.48,
available at Liquor Marts and beyond)

Mint, blueberry, earth and leather feature most prominently on the trunk -- er, nose -- of this red. Blueberry jam and blueberry tea flavours emerge on the palate, butting heads with earthy, dry tannins. This prevents the medium-bodied Elephant on a Tightrope (bottled under a synthetic cork) from tasting like an overripe Australian-esque fruit bomb, for better or for worse.

