vinetur

Languedoc Vineyards Slam Wine Guide

Mas de Daumas Gassac and La Grange des Pères Clash with RVF

Wednesday, September 4, 2024



A recent controversy has shaken the French wine world, particularly in the renowned wine region of Languedoc, where two of its most celebrated vineyards, Mas de Daumas Gassac and La Grange des Pères, have clashed with one of the country's foremost wine publications, La Revue du Vin de France (RVF). The dispute centers around the latest edition of the magazine's annual guide, Le Guide des Meilleurs Vins de France 2025, commonly referred to as the "Green Guide." Both vineyards have publicly expressed

their dissatisfaction, following what they consider unjust treatment in the guide's latest rankings.

The South of France's regional newspaper Midi Libre reported on the situation, headlining the tension as an "OK Corral-style showdown" between these influential producers and the prestigious publication. At the heart of the issue are the ratings given to both estates. Mas de Daumas Gassac was awarded only one star out of a possible four, while La Grange des Pères, one of Languedoc's most iconic names, was conspicuously absent from the guide altogether. This perceived slight has sparked a vocal backlash from both estates.

For La Grange des Pères, this dispute with the RVF is not a new one. The conflict can be traced back several years, following a scathing remark made by Laurent Vaillé, the late winemaker behind the estate. Vaillé took issue with RVF's criticism, calling its team "idiots" after the magazine reproached the vineyard for not submitting its wines for review. Laurent Vaillé's brother, Bernard, explained that Laurent's frustration stemmed from accusations that the estate saw itself as "above criticism." The situation escalated following Laurent's tragic death by suicide in 2021. Unverified rumors surfaced, some of them allegedly fueled by RVF, that the estate might be sold, with speculation even pointing to Frédéric Pourtalié, a close family friend, as a potential new manager. Bernard Vaillé, devastated by his brother's death, denied any plans to sell and even considered suing the magazine for defamation, though he ultimately decided against it due to legal complexities.

La Grange des Pères' decision to refrain from submitting its wines to RVF's evaluations has since become a point of contention. For its part, RVF maintains that its team is more than willing to visit vineyards in person for tastings, even if producers do not submit wines voluntarily. However, the magazine noted that La Grange des Pères declined an invitation to participate in the latest edition.

Mas de Daumas Gassac, another major player in the Languedoc region, has similarly expressed displeasure with its treatment in the 2025 edition of the Green Guide. Roman Guibert, son of the estate's founder Aimé Guibert, has sought dialogue with the editors of RVF to request more consideration for the legacy and quality of the estate's

wines. However, his efforts have reportedly been met with silence. Speaking to Midi Libre, Guibert described a perceived elitism among the critics, referring to them as "Parisians somewhat stuck in their bubble." He has questioned the methodology behind the ratings, arguing that the guide has failed to properly account for the estate's unique contribution to the region's wine scene.

The one-star rating awarded to Mas de Daumas Gassac has particularly irked Guibert, especially given the estate's history and pioneering role in establishing Languedoc as a respected wine-producing region. While RVF editors, including its chief, Denis Saverot, have defended the rating system, the estate's reaction highlights a growing sense of frustration among some winemakers who feel underappreciated by mainstream critics.

In response to the mounting criticism, Denis Saverot has acknowledged the depth of discontent but defended the guide's decisions. He pointed out that a single star is still a mark of distinction and that the evaluation takes into account the entire range of wines produced by a vineyard, including more entry-level offerings. Saverot also noted that Mas de Daumas Gassac's négoce label, which encompasses these more affordable wines, factored into the overall assessment. Saverot was reportedly taken aback by the strength of Guibert's comments but maintained that the guide's judgments are rooted in fairness and transparency.

Saverot's response has been conciliatory, expressing a willingness to meet with both Bernard Vaillé and Roman Guibert to address any misunderstandings. However, he also downplayed the severity of the criticism, arguing that a lack of criticism would be more damaging to the guide's credibility. Saverot's remarks hint at the broader challenges facing the French wine industry, where competition is fierce, and the stakes are high. In recent years, producers have faced declining wine consumption domestically, increasing pressures from global markets, and the burden of upholding regional reputations in a climate of shifting tastes.

The conflict between these two prominent Languedoc estates and one of France's leading wine publications underscores a number of tensions within the wine industry today. On one hand, there is a palpable divide between traditional wine critics and certain winemakers, particularly those who feel marginalized by the capital's more

established institutions. The heated reactions from both Mas de Daumas Gassac and La Grange des Pères suggest that some regional producers perceive a disconnect between Paris-based reviewers and the realities of running a vineyard outside the more famed appellations like Bordeaux or Burgundy.

On the other hand, this controversy also highlights the enduring influence that wine critics and publications like RVF continue to wield, even in an era of digital media and globalized wine consumption. The stakes for receiving favorable reviews are still high, and a lower-than-expected rating can have material impacts on a vineyard's reputation and sales.

For now, the controversy remains unresolved. Whether or not the dialogue between these vineyards and RVF leads to reconciliation remains to be seen. What is clear, however, is that the relationship between critics and winemakers is as complex as ever, particularly in a country where wine is not just a product, but a cultural symbol intertwined with regional pride and national identity. This public spat has brought these underlying dynamics to the surface, casting a spotlight on the often fraught relationship between tradition, critique, and the evolving world of French wine.

The ongoing tensions could have lasting implications for both the vineyards involved and the broader wine community in Languedoc. As one of France's most dynamic wine regions, Languedoc has increasingly attracted global attention for its diverse and high-quality wines. However, this incident serves as a reminder that recognition from traditional wine authorities is still a critical factor in shaping the reputation of a vineyard, both in France and internationally.

Whether this dispute will prompt RVF to reassess its relationship with regional producers or lead to broader changes in the way wine criticism is approached remains an open question. What is certain, though, is that the stakes are high, and both the critics and winemakers will be paying close attention to how this situation unfolds.