

How human intervention enhances terroir

Pic Saint Loup wine growers are able to draw on a wide array of soil types: hard and soft limestone, conglomerate, dolomite, marl, fluviatile or cryoclastic limestone scree, for instance, even though clay and limestone marl are predominant. Despite their diversity, the soils share some common features: low fertility; high stone content; good drainage; no restrictive horizons, hence allowing roots to plunge deep into the soil; and available water content distributed deep below the surface. More intricate knowledge of these soil patterns, over the years, has allowed growers to begin revealing a sense of place even in wines from specific sites.

“When wine growers start harvesting in Lauret, Saint-Mathieu-de-Trévières has already been harvesting for a week,” points out Christophe Peyrus, for whom climate undeniably plays an essential role in the Pic Saint Loup – the evidence is tangible – but, who also believes that soil types determine terroir. He goes on to explain: *“Our appellation covers a large family of limestone, each with its own historical evolution and positioning. In terms of texture, the abrupt scree in the foothills of Mount Hortus has nothing in common with the hard limestone at Cazevieille, and this has a crucial influence on the profile of the wines.”* This observation, based on empirical evidence, originally led six villages to group together in order to define specific plots for producing VDQS wines (Vin Délimité de Qualité Supérieure). Most of the villages were located in U-shaped valleys, in the foothills of Mount Hortus. *“Our elders had defined the boundaries of the appellation using traditional farming wisdom. Based on these original foundations, in 1994, wine growers began exploring the identity of the sites that form the area.”*

Specific geological resurgences – in Corconne (‘gravette’), Mortiers (black marl and dolomite with superficial scree and colluvium) and Cazevieille – are atypical features, as is Saint-Gély-du-Fesc, home to characteristic continental conglomerate and sandstone. Generally speaking, the Pic Saint Loup embraces three main vineyard settings: clay-limestone plains, sloping scree and vines grown on hard limestone, situated on high ground.

The upper slopes

Located along the Pic Saint Loup/Viols le Fort and Mount Hortus to Corconne plateaux, this line of hills forms the original appellation area. It is home to noble soils formed of shattered limestone scree located beneath cliff faces. The soils are generally deep, porous and free-draining. They boast excellent drainage capacity and extremely good water management throughout the vine’s growth cycle. As summer drought conditions very gradually take hold, they also promote consistent, balanced ripening. *“This is the appellation’s 4 x 4 soil: it is suitable for all our grape varieties provided the grower knows what’s deep below the surface,”* explains Christophe. South-facing sites beneath cliff faces are used primarily for Mourvèdre, a demanding and very late-ripening grape, whereas cooler, North-facing vineyards are well-suited to Syrah. Grenache is grown preferably on slightly drying marl soils situated on high ground, because it needs less water. *“This type of soil yields more complex, dense, thick wines with freshness, crunchiness and acidity. As a rule, it has a greater propensity for producing wines for cellaring.”*

The lower slopes

Here, limestone marl is the most common soil type on the surface. However, it varies greatly in nature (proportion of clay, thickness and density of the marl, depth of the soft layer etc.). Some provides excellent water reserves, while other types are slightly more drying. The climate