

## FRANCE: LANGUEDOC

**F**OR the wine lover, excitement comes in many guises – from the first heady sip of a grand cru to the discovery of an impressive new winemaker. And if it's excitement you're after, the Languedoc offers more bang for your buck than almost any other wine region in France.

While the next decade will probably see the number of vigneronns drop by up to a third, this will be a clearing of dead wood, allowing the talent to shine through. There was no shortage of candidates for this list of the Languedoc's best, each accompanied by a tasting note for one of their most exciting wines – the only problem was limiting their number to 10.

**ABBOTTS**

Australian Nerida Abbott, who makes the wines with fellow Aussie Nigel Sneyd, has a PhD in the flavour chemistry of Syrah and has spent the past decade exploring the grape's potential. 'What I like about the variety,' she explains, 'is the fact that it adapts to its terroir, so that its expression differs according to the site it's grown on. You get totally different characteristics in a Syrah grown in Cabardès from one in the Coteaux du Languedoc.'

While Abbotts makes wines in many different styles – including a 100% Carignan, Cordis – it's becoming known for its Syrahs. The top-ranking cuvées are Cumulo Nimbus, an elegant Minervois, and Accendo, a turbo-driven Syrah from the Coteaux du Languedoc.

■ Abbotts, Cumulo Nimbus, Minervois  
1999 \*\*\*

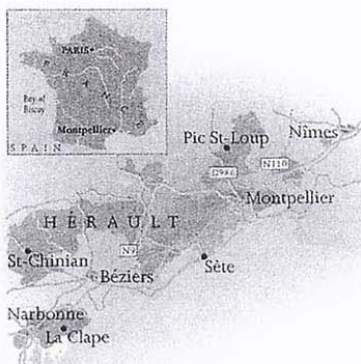
Slightly earthy nose, with plenty of mocha-tinged berry fruit. Dark berry fruit, almost jammy, with velvety tannins. Pleasing balance and warm, chocolatey length. Up to 2008. £14.99–15.99; DeF, Evi, Gre, Sie, Wmb

MAP: MAXINE HEATH



PHOTOGRAPHS: NIGEL BRADLEY

Clockwise from top left: Gérard Bertrand of Château de l'Hospitalet; the picturesque Canal du Midi at Paraza; Jacques and François Lurton of Château des Erles; Minervois, one of the Languedoc's top A.C.s; Australian winemaking team the Abbotts; and Château Villerambert-Julien



# 10 LANGUEDOC STARS

Over the last decade, the Languedoc has earned a reputation as home to some of France's most exciting wines. **NATASHA HUGHES** picks out 10 top producers