LIMESTONE VS. GRANITE

CHEVALIER MARCH 2021



Granite, in contrast, is an igneous rock formed from the slow cooling of magma beneath the earth's surface. Countless features differentiate soils derived from these two rock types and thus play a role in grapegrowing and winemaking. Among them, we can cite limestone's basic pH versus granite's acidic pH, key to the vine's vigor and mineral uptake. We can also look at drainage: limestone soils tend to break down to clay, which holds water much better than the highly draining sand created from the weathering of granite. Likewise, clay-limestone soils can be moderately fertile, providing nutrients crucial to the plant's growth, whereas granitic soils tend to be very poor in organic matter and make the vine work hard for sustenance.

With three wines from limestone sites and three hailing from granitic sites, you'll have the chance to taste the differences for yourself. You'll even sample the same grape variety, Vermentino, grown across both terroirs for a direct comparison. Pay attention to the aromatics of each, but most of all, sense the wines as they roll over your taste buds. Do calcareous wines present a different shape, feel, or texture on the palate in relation to their granitic counterparts? Do both express the elusive concept of minerality, and in the same way? Remember the countless variables, including climate and winemaking, that factor into our judgments. And if you can't draw any meaningful conclusions, so be it—you still have six stellar bottles of vino to enjoy all the same. —ANTHONY LYNCH

Tilled granite vineyard at Abbatucci

### LIMESTONE vs. GRANITE

oil is one of the defining components of terroir, and any vigneron will argue that its importance is paramount. Many growers will even go so far as to attribute the character of their wine to the soil in which the vines take root, as if a patch of dirt were responsible for the complex aromas, flavors, and textures we value so much in a glass of fermented grape juice. Then there is the mysterious concept of minerality—a trait highly sought after, yet barely understood. Must be the rocks, right?

Soil itself—the unconsolidated material that coats the surface of the continents, consisting of a mixture of broken-down rocks, minerals, organic matter, gases, liquids, and living organisms—most certainly plays a critical role in the growth of grapevines and, by consequence, the wines they produce. Much harder to determine is how soils derived from different types of rocks yield wines that taste one way or another. With some basic geology and (of course) our trusty palates, we can tackle this timeless question glass in hand. This month's shipment examines two terroirs we often encounter in the world of wine: limestone and granite.

Limestone is a sedimentary rock formed from the deposition and accumulation of organic materials containing calcium carbonate, such as corals and seashells.

Rocky limestone vineyard in Burgundy. © ANTHONY LYNCH

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BELIEVING THAT Clos Sainte Magdeleine's **limestone**-rich soil and proximity to the Mediterranean would be perfect for Vermentino, Kermit long tried to convince the Sack family to plant the grape variety and make a white wine from it. About eight years ago, they finally did. This 2019 represents the second vintage of this simultaneously crisp, succulent, and saline *blanc*.

This rare Provençal gem was fermented with native yeasts and aged on its lees in a sandstone amphora, a vessel that allows for a light

oxygenation comparable to the effect of barrel aging, but without the impact of oak on flavor. As a result, the Baume-Noire develops lovely texture, all while retaining the flavors of its terroir. In Cassis, this means wild herbs, sea spray, sun-ripened fruit, and plenty of stoniness—truly exquisite!

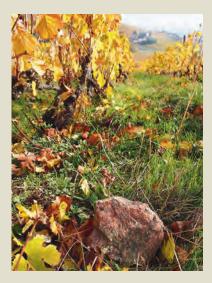
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JUST AS BURGUNDIAN CHARDONNAY is known for being sensitive to the nuances of place, Vermentinu yields notably different wines between—and within—the appellations of Corsica. In the **granite** hills above the capital city of Ajaccio, white wines are among the island's most delicate, typically featuring gentle floral suggestions and a charming peachiness. Born halfway between mountains and the sea, Jean-Charles Abbatucci's biodynamically grown Vermentinu also presents a whisper of salinity, making it a lovely apéritif or the ideal match to Mediterranean-inspired *antipasti*.

# 2019 BROUILLY "REVERDON" CHÂTEAU THIVIN \$28

THIVIN'S BROUILLY is no ordinary Brouilly. The vineyard, Reverdon, is a *lieu-dit* on the pink **granite** slopes opposite the famous Côte de Brouilly—one of the appellation's best sites, and a far cry from the clay plains below, where much of the Brouilly produced is grown. In fact, this terroir is more similar to top-flight Fleurie, a comparison that makes total sense when you consider the Reverdon's aromatic finesse and plush, tender mouthfeel. Precision, soaring floral aromatics, finely etched tannins, a ripe core of dense fruit, and a granitic crunch on the back end are the hallmarks of this momentous cuvée from the Geoffray family of Thivin.



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A VARIETY with centuries of history on the Karst (or Carso) Plateau in Italy and Slovenia, Terrano is mentioned as far back as the fourteenth century, when *vini terrani* were offered to one Conte di Lozo, an ambassador of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV. Edi Kante bottles small quantities of Terrano in addition to a collection of gorgeous whites. His wines show the stony signature of Carso **limestone** in both colors, giving them a special link to this unique place.



Medium-bodied and intensely aromatic, Terrano boasts a fascinating aromatic palette, hinting at violets and tart black currant, along with a twang of bitters and spices. Its low alcohol, bracing acidity, and chalky tannin make it a wonderful food wine; slice up some prosciutto for an infallibly mouthwatering pairing.

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THERE WAS ONCE a Guy Larue from Saint-Aubin, a young man drafted into the army in 1938, sent to the front against the invading Germans a year later, taken prisoner, and moved to a farm deep in current-day Poland for five years of forced labor. He found his way home in 1945, several months after the war ended, having endured seven years away from his family and village, with no one aware if he was still among the living. All the young ladies of the area had already married, and he worried he might have missed the boat. Patience paid off. Not only did he meet his future wife in due time, but she was the owner of several choice parcels of



Saint-Aubin, including a plot in Sur le Sentier du Clou—perhaps not the village's most famous *premier cru*, but one of the most sought after by vignerons for its perfectly placed, mid-slope, east-facing position. The high **limestone** content gives this Pinot plenty of spice and ripe cherry with great acidity and persistence. Today, the couple's son Didier is the proud owner and steward of the land.

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GREAT HERMITAGE is a rare bird nowadays as international styles, high prices, and a virtual monopoly by a select few large houses have rendered this great appellation inaccessible to most. The goal of the Barruol/Lynch collaboration, then, is to evoke the legendary Syrahs of a bygone era via studious selection of vineyard sites and rigorous respect for traditional production methods, such as wholecluster fermentation, long *élevages* in neutral wood, and unfiltered bottling. This Hermitage is true to

its school: deep, smoky, intensely fragrant, powerful, and fine-grained, with a regal presence on the palate. It can be enjoyed young with some decanting, yet it promises to blossom into a spectacular expression of this exalted **granite** slope.













2019 Bouches-du- Rhône Vermentino "Baume-Noire" Clos Sainte Magdeleine PROVENCE	Vermentino	Vines planted in 2013–2014 Limestone, clay	Serve <i>cold</i> 48–52° F Decant optional	Anise, sea mist, herbs, lemon Crisp, clean, stony, slightly bitter	Drink now
2019 Vin de France <i>Blanc</i> "Faustine Vieilles Vignes" <i>Domaine Comte</i> <i>Abbatucci</i> <b>CORSICA</b>	Vermentinu	40-year-old vines Granite	Serve <i>cold</i> 48–52° F Decant optional	Flowers, peach, maquis herbs, pear Delicate, gentle, precise, saline	Drink now
2019 Brouilly "Reverdon" <i>Château Thivin</i> BEAUJOLAIS	Gamay	45-year-old vines Pink granite, sand	Serve <i>cool</i> 54–58° F Decant optional	Peony, cranberry, raspberry, spice Juicy, silky, elegant, crunchy	Drink now through 2025
2015 Venezia Giulia Terrano <i>Kante</i> FRIULI	Terrano	10-year-old vines Limestone, clay	Serve <i>cool</i> 56–60° F Decant optional	Black currant, violets, amaro bitters, balsamic spices Pure, explosive, vivid, chalky	Drink now through 2030
2017 Saint-Aubin <i>Rouge 1er Cru</i> "Sur Le Sentier du Clou" <i>Domaine Larue</i> BURGUNDY	Pinot Noir	Vines planted in 1966–1995 Limestone, clay	Serve slightly cool 58–62° F Decant optional	Cherry, red currant, black tea, clove Bright, suave, restrained, charming	Drink now through 2030
2018 Hermitage Rouge "La Pierrelle" Barruol/Lynch NortHERN RHÔNE	Syrah	30- to 50-year-old vines Granite	Serve slightly cool 60–64° F Decant recommended	Graphite, smoke, cured meat, ripe black fruit Savory, deep, powerful, majestic	Drink now through 2040

front cover: Fossilized seashells in limestone. © GAIL SKOFF Granite formation off the coast of Corsica. © GAIL SKOFF far left top: © clos sainte magdeleine far left bottom: © anthony lynch middle top: Pink granite in the Reverdon vineyard. © сна́тели тніvіn / middle bottom: Kante's cellar carved out of limestone. © антному цунсн near left top: © Dixon brooke / near left bottom: © Louis Barruol



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66 My vineyards in Cassis are the epitome of a seaside terroir of marine bedrock. Limestone is of course an ancient seabed, and my wines consequently express great minerality and salinity.
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JONATHAN SACK, Clos Sainte Magdeleine



Pink granite in Brouilly. © CHÂTEAU THIVIN

**6** There is very little organic matter in granite soils, as they consist of fine sand composed of crystals resulting from the decomposition of the bedrock. They therefore have very little capacity for water retention, so they drain quickly and force the plant to dive deeper for nourishment. Additionally, granite soils have an acidic pH (between 5.5 and 6) that hinders the mineralization of any organic matter. It's on this type of soil that Gamay expresses the most finesse and crystalline minerality. **9 9** 

CLAUDE GEOFFRAY, Château Thivin