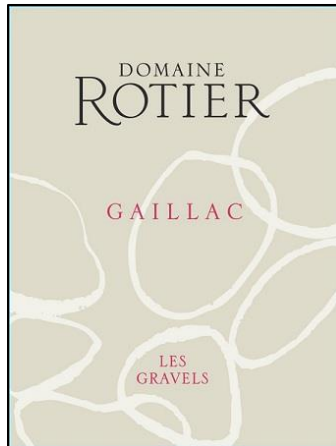


# Domaine Rotier (organic) Gaillac



*Domaine Rotier's Alain Rotier makes some of the best and most consistent wines in Gaillac.*

—Andy Howard, MW, Decanter Magazine, July 2017



The really eye-opening thing for any wine aficionado boning up on Gaillac is to learn that once upon a time, before *Crossing the Rubicon* became an idiom, the region was one of two grand crus for the Romans during their occupation of Gaul (the other cru was the vineyard area over in the northern Rhône around Tain, Ampuis, and Vienne). As Andrew Jefford has pointed out, Gaillac predates Burgundy for top-notch wine by 1,000 years and predates much of Bordeaux by 1,500 years. The reputation was such that in the Middle Ages the Benedictine monks of the Abbaye St Michel in Gaillac created a set of rules for wine production in order to better protect Gaillac's image for fine wine. François I considerably reinforced the image when he gave his counterpart Henry VIII of England 50 barrels of Gaillac at their historic meeting in 1520.

Then came the upsets: the growing power of Bordeaux and its taxing of wine coming down river from the hinterlands; the devastating *Le Grand Hiver* frost of 1708-09 that utterly froze so much of Europe; phylloxera in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; wars and economic depression in the early 20<sup>th</sup>. Today the vineyard surface of Gaillac is around one-twentieth of its former glory.

Maybe that's why this venerable region today exports only about 5% of its production (the locals are all too happy to drink the rest and guard their secret well!).

As for Domaine Rotier, the short history begins in 1975 when Alain Rotier's parents bought a domaine in Gaillac. Slowly, they began to restore its largely abandoned vineyards, and so made a small contribution to the region's resurrection.

In 1985 Alain himself joined them, filled with a passion for winemaking that led the family to pull from the cooperative to make and bottle their own wine. At the same time, at Alain's urging, the domaine switched from the use of synthetic to organic fertilizers in the vines.

In 1997 Alain's brother-in-law Francis Marre came on board, enabling the elder Rotiers to retire. Francis took over the vines and Alain went full time in the cellar.

In 2001 Alain and Francis decided to move to high-density plantings in all new plantations, going to 6,170 vines per hectare rather than the conventional 4,000. Think about that for a moment: it was a very ambitious undertaking. And it succeeded; today, yields are naturally down in those parcels, and quality is clearly up.

In 2005, having long been uneasy with much of conventional farming, they decided to go fully organic in the vines. In 2009 they went for certification, a three-year process that was completed in 2012. These days alternating rows are sown with oats, barley, and other deep-rooted plants over winter to enrich and aerate the soil.

In 2013 they began reducing sulfur additions, culminating in the *sans soufre* Cuvée Esquisse. For the other wines, the partners are content with the minimal levels of SO<sub>2</sub> additions that they have come to use in their winemaking evolution (levels which, they point out, fall *below* the minimally prescribed threshold for biodynamic wines).

Today these two farm 35 hectares (86 acres) of vines. The majority are local varieties: Duras, Braucon, Prunelart for reds, and Loin de l’Oeil for white. Their vineyards grow on the left bank of the Tarn River on what is the second, or middle, bench of that river—and it’s a steep climb up 200 meters to reach the top of that bench where their vines grow. This zone is called *Les Terrasses de la Rive Gauche*, after the left bank’s series of alluvial terraces that essentially are gravel mounds, much like the terraces or benches on the Médoc Peninsula. The zone lies between the towns of Gaillac and Albi.

There are two other zones in Gaillac, both on the right bank. The one closest to the river is much richer in clay than Rotier’s zone on the left bank, and growers there have tended to favor Bordeaux varieties in their vineyards. The second zone on the right bank is further north on higher ground and is much more about sedimentary limestone and bedrock than about clay or alluvial gravels.

Albi, by the way, is famous for its cathedral. Built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, it rose upon the ashes of the 20-year military campaign known as the Albigensian Crusade. This was the crusade launched by the Church in alliance with the crown that ravaged Languedoc and destroyed its heretical Cathars. As a seat of power for the Cathars, (a.k.a., the Albigensians) Albi was chosen by the Catholic Church to be the site of the enormous and altogether militaristic Cathédrale Sainte-Cécile, which to this day claims to be the largest brick building in the world. Its construction made clear to the locals that the Catholic Church was here to stay.

The domaine makes approximately 13,000 cases each year.

<https://domaine-rotier.com/en/>