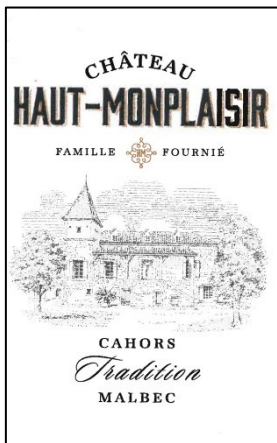


# Château Haut-Monplaisir (organic)

## Cahors



*The château has been run by Cathy and Daniel Fournié since 1998, and the vines have been grown organically since 2009. The reds have the panache of the third terraces of the Lot. Respect for the soil and, above all, for the maturity of the fruit is evident under each of the labels. The range is gaining in precision and even the classic cuvées offer a taste of a Malbec that is delicate and full of confidence.* -La Revue du Vin: Guide to the Best Wines of France 2024



There are things about Cahors that stick in one's memory. The first is that the appellation sits snug in the Haut-Pays, or high country, equidistant from the Atlantic Ocean, the Pyrenees, and the Mediterranean. Another is that autumn, particularly the crucial ripening month of September, is normally far drier in this region than in both Bordeaux and much of the Languedoc. Then there is the soil itself; it's red, based on limestone but flush with iron oxides. Iron was once smelted here, and this element, coupled with the intrinsic qualities of the native grape, accounts for the extraordinary minerality that anchors the region's best wines. The big thing about Cahors, however, is that it is the ancestral home of the black Malbec grape.

The heart of the appellation is the Lot Valley, and it brings Napa Valley to mind (without the fancy wineries). The Lot River snakes down a distinct valley with a wide alluvial floor, a pastoral landscape quilted with vineyards. The indigenous Malbec was cultivated here during Gallo-Roman times long before Bordeaux became established, and it made Cahors' reputation. Throughout the Middle Ages the wines of the Haut-Pays outranked Bordeaux in prestige, and those from Cahors in particular were often used to beef up the color and backbone of Bordeaux's garnet-colored wines. Bordeaux, despite taxes extorted by its control of river and port, was never able to exile its rival. It took phylloxera in the late 1800s to do that. Today Cahors is in the midst of a renaissance, but even so its vineyard acreage is only 15% of what it was in the mid-1800s.

Cathy and Daniel Fournié of Château Haut-Monplaisir farm 74 acres, 10 of which are classified as IGP Côtes du Lot while the remainder is all appellation Cahors (previously they farmed 44.5 acres and older vintages have this figure on the back label). Since 2009 all of these parcels have been farmed organically, and certification came in 2012. Daniel went from conventional to organic viticulture and in the process became absolutely convinced that the latter has profoundly improved the health of his vines and their fruit. If you were looking for a persuasive advocate of farming with a green thumb, he would be an excellent candidate.

All of Haut-Monplaisir's vines grow in parcels surrounding the domaine on what the locals call the third terrace of the Lot Valley. There are three such terraces, or benches, made up of densely rich red clays mixed with glacial gravel deposits sitting overtop limestone bedrock. The second and third terraces sit furthest away from the river on higher ground and have long been considered the finest vineyard sites in the valley, responsible for its densely dark "black wine." High above the third terrace are the vineyards of the *cause*, or karst plateau with its small oak trees, where the clays give way to limestone and the wines are more marked by dynamic acidity.

Cathy took over the vineyards in 1998 from her father, who had sold the crop to *négociants*. She and Daniel had a keen interest in making their own wine but realized they needed help. They reached out to Pascal Verhaeghe, the dynamic proprietor of Château du Cèdre whose vineyards grow on the third terrace. Pascal immediately saw the potential of Haut Monplaisir's site. He could also see that if great wine were made here then Cahor's revival would be all the more successful, and that was far more important to him than possible competition between the two domaines. Thus it came about that Pascal offered Daniel advice in the cellar while his brother Jean-Marc did the same in the vines, beginning a relationship between Haut Monplaisir and Château le Cèdre. It exists to this day, closer than ever with the young generation of both families who grew up together now taking over their respective domaines.

Recently, Cathy and Daniel's daughter Mathilde joined the team, and they make four cuvées of Cahors, all 100% Malbec (Tannat and Merlot are often blended with Malbec to make Cahors—Tannat can add body, acid, and more tannin, while Merlot originally was brought in to soften Malbec's tannin but often has trouble ripening properly in the appellation). The wines are never fined and only filtered lightly if required, but usually there's no filtration. The grapes are always de-stemmed and the juice is never acidified (not even in the broiling 2003 harvest). The result is a hearty range of wines with a distinct sense of refinement. These are wines with a brooding, high-toned quality of wild elegance, and full of Cahor's telltale iron-rich minerality.

<http://chateauhautmonplaisir.com/index.en.html>