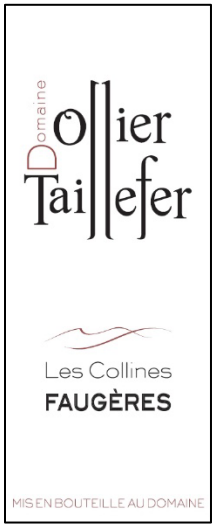
Domaine Ollier-Taillefer (organic*)
Faugères

This domaine produces wines full of naturalness and humanism, without searching for extremes.

–Bettane & Desseauve, 2016 Guide des Vins

[Grande Réserve 2018] is one of the finest wines I have ever tasted from the Languedoc, with an aesthetic sensibility that recalls the wines from the great Gérard Chave!

–John Gilman, View from the Cellar, August 2022



What sets Faugères apart amid the labyrinth of Languedoc appellations are two things: its geology of schist, and its high elevation. Relative to other Languedoc appellations, it's also small and rather stunningly compact, being one of more than twenty appellations in Languedoc but owning less than 1% of the total vineyard surface. This meager percentage encompasses seven village communes in a solid block along the first ridge of the Cevennes Mountains inland from Béziers.

Faugères's rock was originally sedimentary and layered. By heat and compression, it underwent metamorphism to turn into gray-blue schist (a word that traces its root back to the ancient Greek word meaning to split--the same root for our word schism). At some point following this metamorphosis, Faugères bedrock got heaved up on its side as the Massif Central pushed upward. This angle of repose allows the vine roots to penetrate deep between the layers of this dark stone in their search for water. The stone, and its height above Languedoc's swath of plain, give red wines here a black fruit profile, one that runs vertically with sleek, even slick, texture. (By contrast, wines produced from limestone terroirs in neighboring Saint Chinian emphasize red fruit, and run on a more horizontal plane, often with more robust, chewy tannins.) Paired with Languedoc's soaring verdant aromatics, it's a profile that makes for wine with compelling personalities. This is especially true for wines coming from vineyards in the highest zones of Faugères.

The city of Béziers lies just over a dozen miles from the southern edge of the appellation. That distance takes you across the plain of Béziers and up onto what Andrew Jefford calls Faugères's ramp of schist. The first village in the appellation is Antignac, and from there the road continues climbing to pass Laurens and continues ever steeper until reaching the top of the ridge, and that's where you find the village of Faugères. At that point, the road crosses the ridge and falls sharply down its north side into the valley of the Orb River. Most of the vineyards are on the south flank of this ridge, and typically the further one goes down on the flank, the warmer the temperatures and the more powerful the wines.

The villages of Faugères and Fos and their vineyards are the highest in the appellation—as high as 350 meters—and Fos is the most remote in the far northeast corner of the delimited area. This is the home of Ollier-Taillefer, a domaine run by siblings Luc and Françoise Ollier. Their parents bottled their first wine in the mid-1970s (before their vows, he was an Ollier and she was a Taillefer), having come from four generations of growers in the region. The oldest vines Luc and Françoise farm today are Carignan, growing in a parcel planted by their great grandparents in 1910. These grapes go into their Grande Réserve cuvée.

Luc joined the domaine in 1990. Eleven years later he took the viticulture on a sustainable path under the umbrella of the Terra Vitas agency. In 2003, after eleven years as the director of the Faugères syndicate, Françoise joined the domain. In 2009 they went organic with their farming and the domain received certification three years later. In 2012, with limestone from a quarry near the Pont du Gard, they built a new and quite beautiful cellar that uses a geo-thermal heat exchange to cool and heat the building. It backs up against a hillside, with its roof covered by a deep layer of soil for added insulation, and fundamental operations within are handled by gravity. All water used is captured and recycled.

They farm 36 hectares (89 acres) of vines broken out among 50 parcels, each hand harvested. A good half of that surface grows between 300 and 350 meters around Fos, and almost all of the Fos sites were planted by their parents on virgin land. They were farmed pragmatically under *lutte raisonnée* guidelines until 2001 when all conventional products were stopped. And those sites are completely isolated and surrounded by forest. Their altitude automatically results in lower yields. It also allows them to make wines with high-toned aromatics and moderate alcohols (Grenache at their altitudes ripens fully at 13.5 degrees, whereas down the ridge at Antugnac, along the southern border of the appellation, similar ripeness translates into 14.5 to 15 degrees--an enormous difference). The resulting wine springboards right into the the verdant lushness of *garrigue* that so characterizes the best of Languedoc's wines and that Faugères captures so succinctly. Schist is an acidic soil but paradoxically produces wine with relatively low acid levels. In wine, this is compensated for by the lift of minerality imparted by the schist. Ollier-Taillefer's high elevation takes this one step further, making for wines with particularly fine balance between ripe fruit and degrees of alcohol. This is strikingly apparent in their flagship, the Grande Réserve, raised in tank and unencumbered by wood, a wine bursting with pure finesse.

The written record first makes mention of a "de Falgarias" in 934AD, from Latin "Filicaria" or fern --today's *fougère* in French. Maybe that's where the village got its name, although there are no ferns to be found in the landscape today. At least one local historian believes that the name Faugères referred to beech forests, but likewise there are no beech these days. Who knows? A lot can change in 1,000 years.

Compared to neighboring appellations, Faugères's 2,000 hectares of vines is dwarfed by Saint Chinian's 3,300 hectares immediately to the west, and Saint Chinian is far more diffuse with schist along its interior and limestone, clay, and sandy soils forming its lower zones closer to the plain. Minervois, further westward, is larger still at 5,000 hectares and even less homogenous.
http://olliertaillefer.com/

*Certified organic by Ecocert in France but not by the USDA in the US.