

Ep 172: Discovering Lirac, a Cru of the Côtes du Rhône & one of the Southern Rhône's hidden gems with Rodolphe de Pins of Château de Montfaucon



Janina Doyle 00:00:07 Welcome to Eat Sleep Wine Repeat, a podcast for all you wine lovers, who, if you're like me, just cannot get enough of the good stuff. I'm Janina Doyle, your host, Brand Ambassador, Wine Educator, and Sommelier. So, stick with me as we dive deeper into this ever evolving, wonderful world of wine. And wherever you are listening to this, cheers to you!

Hello, wine friends, and welcome back to another episode where I am pleased to say after such great feedback, several episodes ago, when Master of Wine student Anna Spooner took us on an overall journey of the Southern Rhône Valley, well today we are getting stuck into one specific cru. And that, my friends, is Lirac.

Now I know for many of us when we crack open a Côtes du Rhône we know we're getting that juicy fruit, that smooth sipping experience and you always get these really friendly tannins. But here is the thing, there are incredible sub-regions to explore, especially the hidden gems known as the crus. And this, if you know the right cru, can give you great value.

So today, I'm very excited to shed some light on one of these very underrated crus that definitely deserves a spot on your Rhône radar. We are talking about well-priced wines. Crafted by family-run operations in stunning landscapes. Plus, they're all about sustainability, either organic or heading that way.

So today, I'm talking with Rodolphe de Pins, the winemaker and head of the family at Château de Montfaucon, who's devoted himself to revitalising his wineries reputation, which has led to the knock-on effect of raising the reputation for the Lirac region as a whole.

Don't forget you can go to my show notes where you'll find a link to the transcript and equally there will be other links to take you to Lirac's website and Vin Rhône. However, I shall let Rodolphe introduce you properly to the wonderful wines of Lirac.

Janina Doyle 00:02:20 So, Rodolphe, I want to start with a very important question, which I always want to ask my guests. How did you specifically decide to become a winemaker? What grabbed you? Was it your destiny or was there a moment?

Rodolphe de Pins 00:00:37 It's a bit because of the estate. And I don't know if you know Montfaucon. Montfaucon is a very old estate. There is a castle from the Middle Age, 11th century years old. And my parents said – we are four boys. I have three brothers and said, it'd be good if someone takes care of the estate so that the history can keep on going.

And it happened to arrive on me and to study agriculture. And I did study general agriculture and I didn't know what I was going to do. And when I studied agriculture, I realised that I was really attracted by wine because it was a different product than all the other products, like wheat, potatoes, whatever, the market will decide the price and you couldn't really express yourself. And in wine, you could at least decide what kind of wine you want to make and you can also sell to the people that understand what you're doing.

So with wine, you can do the viticulture, you can make the wine and sell it. So, it was very interesting. And then I dive into this world, because I didn't know it very well, and get really passionate by it. I don't know.

Janina Doyle 00:03:57 Well, you talk about getting really passionate. I've done my research a little bit. You've gone and worked at Henschke, which I've gone to visit many years ago and seen those incredibly gnarly vines wrapped around the...

Rodolphe de Pins 00:04:11 Hill of Grace.

Janina Doyle 00:04:12 Oh, my God! By the church an iconic moment. So ,you've worked at Henschke, you've come back to the Rhône, you've worked at Vieux Telegraphe, which many people will know is an iconic, another iconic winery. So, you've picked some pretty nice places to get some experience, right?

Rodolphe de Pins 00:04:30 Yeah, I got very lucky. In fact, after my engineering study of agriculture, I decided to travel. I always liked to travel and to see what happened over this wine world that was moving, especially in the new country. So, I did a Masters in UC Davis, California.

Janina Doyle 00:04:52 Ah, okay.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:04:53 And that's the reason the professor I was working for was connected to the Henschke family, and he just advised, "You should contact them." And after I finished my Masters, I contacted them, and they said, "Well, come."

And it was one of the most and best experiences of my life, discovering all the work they're doing over there. And I was very impressed and probably learned a lot also because they had a very scientific attitude in their viticulture and wine making. Everything was thought and done.

And it was very good for me to learn. And plus, they are so generous and lovely people. They came last vintage to visit me again. So, we have a very strong relation since I've lived with them over six months.

Janina Doyle 00:05:46 And actually, I suppose it's a pretty good winery as well to contrast with the Rhône with the fact that they focus on Shiraz and they do Grenache. And these are the main grape varieties growing in Lirac. So, was that actually quite an interesting contrast to be working with those same grape varieties but seeing them grow in a completely different terroir, a different climate.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:06:08 Yes, it was very interesting to see that. And although I didn't have much experience in Lirac at that time, because I was not installed as a winemaker. I hadn't any winery at that time.

But what I learned the most is the adaptation of your area where you live and where the vines grow and what you do to maybe take the best out of it with all the constraints you may have in the environment. And they were doing super well to do that and also to keep all that genetics, old vineyards because there is something special with that in Australia with ungrafted vines and so on.

Janina Doyle 00:06:55 So, after that experience, was it the family calling saying, come back to Lirac, come back to Lirac? What got you back to this cru of the Côtes du Rhône.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:07:05 Yes, my father wasn't a winemaker. He was just looking after the vineyards. He used to work in a bank. And he really asked that one of us come back and take care of the estate. And so that's the way everything starts.

But after all this experience and he was selling his grapes to the cooperative, I say, I will come back if I can build a winery, rebuild the winery and make my own wine because it's the final achievement after growing grapes, making your own wines. You put your, I must say, your identity and your philosophy and your thinking in the wine you want to make.

Janina Doyle 00:07:47 Amazing. And for anybody who doesn't know about Château de Montfaucon, which is where you are, the wines you're making, I mean, this is one of the wineries that's really lifted Lirac up, which is incredible. So, can we talk about Lirac? You are very welcome. Everybody, go drink that. Everyone, just drink some Lirac wine. So, where is Lirac?

Rodolphe de Pins 00:08:12 So, Lirac is in the Rhône Valley in the southern part. And for the people who know Avignon, Provence, you go 17 kilometres north and it's on the west bank. And sometimes to help to locate it, I just say it's just in front of Châteauneuf-du-Pape, the other side of the river.

So, you see Châteauneuf-du-Pape and then you cross the Rhône, you're in Lirac. And also south of it, there's another quite famous appellation called Tavel, where it has a border in between Lirac and Tavel. And there's, of course, a few growers from Tavel who are making Lirac. As now we have many growers, and it's a good sign, from Châteauneuf investing in Lirac also.

Janina Doyle 00:08:57 So, tell me about Lirac as a size. Obviously, I think we've already piqued everyone's interest. You've mentioned two very well-known crus for what they're doing, which is giving people an idea of course, how good Lirac can be. What is the size of Lirac in comparison to some of the other crus or the other areas in the Rhône Valley or even anywhere in the world, so people can maybe have an idea?

Rodolphe de Pins 00:09:20 Lirac size is not a huge size. Like, it's about 1,200 hectares. And it's probably the same size of Gigondas or Tavel, roughly. But not all the wines are declared as Lirac. Some are just sold as Côtes du Rhône.

So, at the moment, we are around between 800-900 hectares revindicate, I don't know if I can say this way, as Lirac. In terms of production, it will be around two and a half million bottles a year, around that. Maybe three if we are good to sell, three million. So it's not so big. It's about a third of the size of Châteauneuf. And that's why you can see many more Châteauneuf-du-Pape all over the world than Lirac. You have to look for it.

Janina Doyle 00:10:20 And when did Lirac become a cru. So, before it was a village of Côtes du Rhône and then it became a cru and got recognized. When was that?

Rodolphe de Pins 00:10:32 It was in 1947. It was the 14th October of 1947. And it's one of the earliest cru, just after Châteauneuf. The three in the Rhône were Châteauneuf, Tavel, and also Hermitage. And Côtes du Rhône came in the 30s.

And Lirac was quite early, right after the second World War II, but way before Gigondas, who was in 74, I think, or 72. Cairanne, Rasteau, Vinsobres, but way before that. So, it's quite an old-cru.

Janina Doyle 00:11:10 Okay, so what does Lirac taste like? And I say, what does it taste like? Of course you make red, white and rosé. So, I'm kind of leaving this over to you to describe everything you want to.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:11:24 Yeah. What is important is Lirac was the cru who had the three colours. The first cru in the Rhône who were allowed to produce the three colours, red, white and rosé. Nowadays, red is like 85% of the productions. White is growing. There's a real progression in wine. When I was president, it moved to 8% to 12, 14% now. And rosé is going down. I don't know why.

Janina Doyle 00:11:55 Yeah. That's interesting considering rosé is growing in the world, but okay.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:12:02 It's going down probably because maybe Tavel is next to it. So, there's a lot of producers who prefer make rosé the Tavel and they choose Lirac for making their red and white.

Janina Doyle 00:12:14 One thing I was just going to say is a lot of the rosé from Lirac is often better value. Very similar quality, great fruit, but because it hasn't, again, got the more famous name of Tavel, for anyone trying to find a really good value rosé, dry rosé as well, everyone!

Rodolphe de Pins 00:12:35 With some nice intensity also, it's not a rosé like Provence, usually the juice has a 'time' on skins, so it has a nice intensity. And it's a rosé that I know not many people do that, but that can age, too. It has potential. If you forget it in a cellar, you can drink it one or two years after, and you can still enjoy.

Janina Doyle 00:13:00 Oh, I do love it when you forget about wine and then it just improves perfectly. They're the best moments.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:13:05 Can give you a good surprise. I remember one of my first tasting of rosé when I was starting in 95, there was the Château de Ségriès, Jean-François de Regis, whose father created the appellation, was the founder. I asked him this question, can a rosé age? And he gave me a barrel of 74. So, that was 20 years old rosé at that time. And I still remember the taste. It was just magnificent.

And what I can say about Lirac. Lirac has its own characteristic, I think, because of its location on the west side, and you have a range of mountains on the west, and a lot of forest all around. And also, it sits a lot of sandy soil, calcareous soil. I know it's very trendy to say that, but it has its own freshness.

Janina Doyle 00:14:02 No, yeah, okay, you're allowed to say that.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:14:05 And the wines have a special touch. Very smooth. A lot of finesse. And I like to say that, I always say that, I don't know if it's correct, but that among all the crus, the Rhône Valley Cru, Lirac would be the most Burgundian-style cru.

It has its own intensity, the Rhône intensity, with a lovely touch and balance in the mouth. That's the way I have the character. And I'll bring you a map. Look.

Janina Doyle 00:14:32 Okay.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:14:33 You see this map?

Janina Doyle 00:14:34 Sorry, no one listening, you're going to have to get your own map, but I've got a map right now, so show me.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:14:39 So, you have the Rhône on the north, all the pink are where the vines are, and all the green you see are the range of forest. And Lirac is surrounded with a lot of wood that helps to keep the biodiversity, but also this special freshness.

Janina Doyle 00:15:59 Yeah, because there is like 2500 hectares of woodlands and forest. So not just a little bit of wood, a lot of wood.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:15:10 Yeah, it's a good sign. You know, I usually call Lirac the sleeping beauty, because it has an incredible history and also incredible terroir and you can make fantastic wines. But it has been a bit forgotten, probably because the grower slept a bit for a time. We're not that dynamic to promote their wines.

But because of this, they didn't need to extend their vineyards. So, they keep all the forest and all the wood. And now, it's very important because in other very famous cru, the grower wanted to extend their vineyards to develop because they had the demand where we didn't have. So we keep all that forest, wood and potential of that. And now we realise that it is very important to have all that around us. And it helps to keep the style of the wines.

Janina Doyle 00:16:04 And does this impact the harvest time? I think I was reading a little somewhere whereby having all this woodland, it can influence the harvest?

Rodolphe de Pins 00:16:14 Yes, because then in some vineyards when you have forest nearby or wood, sometimes you have shade earlier, so it postpones the harvest. In Lirac, you also have some valleys, small narrow valleys, you know the one of Sainte Baume, and the vineyards are just in the middle of this narrow valley, so they have less insulation from the sun. And when the sun rises, also less warmer conditions, so that slows down the maturity of the grapes.

Janina Doyle 00:16:47 Right. Yeah, because it's very emblematic, this Sainte Baume, isn't it? So that is giving the added freshness, you think, because of cooling things down, adding the shade. Is that why? Okay. That's super, super interesting.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:17:01 I really recommend if you're in the area to go and visit. To me, it's a very mystic place. It's an old cave. There is an old cave where hermits have been living over 300 years there. It's beautiful to see. It's open three days a year. The Monday of Easter. There's a

pilgrimage for the 15th of August. And in September, you probably heard about in France, we have the day of Patrimoine and they are open. You can visit this cave. There is still some celebrations.

Janina Doyle 00:17:38 Gosh, okay. Super interesting. So, those are the three dates. I mean, if you can't make those dates, although actually I'm really going to note them down and see if I can make that happen. Is this a good place to, in between drinking, hike, climb, just take in nature?

Rodolphe de Pins 00:17:57 If you go to the Syndicat in Lirac, where the in Syndicat, we have a home there, and you ask where to get the key. And the president is very happy to take people and show the area.

If you cannot find him, his name is André Richard and he's a vigneron and he's a lovely guy who is in charge of the associations to take care of that hermitage. There's a nice pathway to climb to arrive at this cave chapel. It's in a rock and it's just beautiful.

Janina Doyle 00:18:29 Gosh, okay. Okay, that's some huge thing.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:18:32 Yeah, and from there you really understand the Lirac vineyards because you can see all the vineyards with all the nature all around and that gives you a good feeling of what Lirac wants to deliver.

Janina Doyle 00:18:44 Okay, so once we've absorbed all of the mystical nature, we've seen the forests, we've seen the caves, we've come to visit some wineries, we've bought some wine, it's in our backpack or whatever, and we're thinking and now we're at home, we've taken it home to try and bring this experience. Are there some traditional foods, traditional recipes? Things that people are drinking with probably most likely the red Lirac, but even white. Are there some things that have to be paired together?

Rodolphe de Pins 00:19:17 Yeah, of course. Well, because of the three colours, I would say Lirac is quite versatile. You can adapt to many foods. But for the reds, I think lamb works perfectly, the local meat, the gigot d'agneau, I don't know how to translate that.

Janina Doyle 00:19:34 We'll go with that. That's fine. It probably doesn't have one.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:20:37 It's delicious also with the cutlet on the barbecue. The Lirac red wines work with also red meat, beef, but also poultry like duck or guinea fowl.

Janina Doyle 00:19:51 Yes, it's fresher, right? It's smoother. Yeah.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:19:57 The Lirac wines can have this finesse that matches well with that. And I really recommend you also taste some of the whites. They really have their own expression mainly with Clairette, Grenache, Roussanne, and Bourboulenc. And because of all the forest, the sand, the location, the Lirac wines, that's a bit technical, but they have a pH that is lower so...

Janina Doyle 00:20:26 Beautiful acidity.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:20:27 Yeah, a little more acid than most of the other wines in the area. And so that gives a special freshness. So they match very well, of course, with the other fish like sea bass or sea bream, but also the cheeses.

Janina Doyle 00:20:44 You say that almost like, yes, it's going with the cheeses.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:20:47 Yeah, the goat cheese, it's perfect. Yeah.

Janina Doyle 00:20:51 Okay. And of course, as well, you know, you've mentioned that these are all going to be blends and actually many of those grape varieties that you've mentioned, they can give some texture, but also lots of freshness and acidity. And so hence why, okay, that's super interesting to know.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:21:04 And you see that freshness in the whites. So, you can parallel that you will find it with the reds. Of course, it depends of the winemaker. When you make wines, you try to put what you like, you infuse in what you like. Some likes very strong, rich reds. They will go in that style of winemaking. But if you respect what the land gives you, you will have naturally this amazing balance, freshness. And I think it's one of the key to Lirac.

Janina Doyle 00:21:36 So, you mentioned for everybody, you've got the River Rhône running through on the western side of this. This is where Lirac is. And literally, on the eastern side is Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

So, that is the major difference. Considering they're very similar, so quality be very similar, but the bigger, bolder style of the Rhône Valley is going to be found in Châteauneuf-du-Pape, whereas the slightly perhaps more elegant, fresher style is Lirac. Is that fair to say?

Rodolphe de Pins 00:22:04 That's a good definition. I think often I like to say in terms of quality, they are the same level, but there are different expressions. Because when you look at it in Châteauneuf and Lirac, we grow the same variety, roughly. Some of the soil are very similar.

Janina Doyle 00:22:21 You have the pudding stones, the little pebbles.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:22:26 The three major soils that you find in Châteauneuf, the sand. And there is sand in Châteauneuf, like, 40% of the soil in Châteauneuf is sand, but we have probably more in Lirac. We have the pebble stone, you know, the big galets in some area in Lirac. And also the calcareous area along the reef and the range of mountains that we have in the west.

But the expression is different because being on the west, we have less sunshine and we have this range of mountains that protect when the sun goes down. And all the influence of the forest gives different expressions.

Janina Doyle 00:23:07 And are you also getting the influence, I'm assuming, of the Mistral wind coming from the north? It's still coming through the vineyards in Lirac, cooling things down significantly, right?

Rodolphe de Pins 00:23:16 That's perfect. That's exactly that.

Janina Doyle 00:23:19 Even more?

Rodolphe de Pins 00:23:19 Yeah, even more. If you look at the picture, the Rhône is making a loop in the north. So, it goes through that and takes that fresh air and puts it all along the vineyards.

Janina Doyle 00:23:32 I see the map, everyone. Listen, anyone who doesn't understand, quickly Google, get yourself a wine map of Lirac or the Rhône and you'll understand. So, you've compared certainly the soils. You've talked about the same varieties and we're now also focusing a bit more on red.

We actually haven't clarified, I assume many people will know the grape varieties of the Rhône Valley, but this is Grenache, this is Syrah, Mourvèdre, maybe a little bit of Cinsault. Have you got a very specific amount, minimum that Grenache has to be in the blend, or is there a little bit more flexibility?

Rodolphe de Pins 00:24:07 That's one of the differences with Châteauneuf. Châteauneuf is very free. You can do whatever you want. Where in Lirac, we have a little bit more rules. In the reds, we have four major grapes that we have to use, which is Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre. And those ones have to be over 60%. And also, we have a rule where Syrah and Mourvèdre has to be at least 25%.

So, that makes some restrictions in our blends. And also Lirac has to be a blend. You need to have at least two grapes. Where in Châteauneuf you can make 100%. They have more freedom, which I like too.

Janina Doyle 00:24:50 So, when you say there has to be at least two grapes, it's most likely if it's just two, it's gonna be Grenache and Syrah or Grenache and Mourvèdre. Is that?

Rodolphe de Pins 00:24:59 Yes.

Janina Doyle 00:24:59 At least.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:25:00 At least, yes.

Janina Doyle 00:25:01 Yes, okay. So, that's super interesting. Now what I want to do is just mention and talk a little bit about what's actually happening out in the vineyards because there seems to be a lot more of a focus on this environmental charter. How does that make this region a little bit more unique, having this environmental charter that the winemakers are signing up to?

Rodolphe de Pins 00:25:24 Yeah, the charter, I've started that charter because the location, we are in the middle of the Rhône Valley where it's a major acts of traffic. There's highways and also it's an area where companies are developing and also there's also people coming to live in the area because the sun of Provence is attractive.

We realised that we needed to protect our terroir because I say there's a lot of aggression from new companies coming, industrial areas. And we decided, and I think that preserving, protecting our terroir is important for the future.

So, we decided to make that charter where we invite people to plant more trees, to keep the trees, the forest, plant, age, and also we try to help them to be into certified organic viticulture. The other prospect of that was to be conscious of our activity as an influence on the water resource. So, the idea to push people to organic farming was to use less pesticides who can pollute the water down below.

And it's very important as we are farmers and we want to keep our landscape beautiful, but we want also to keep the water resource where it belongs to everybody. So, that's two major points of all our work.

Janina Doyle 00:27:01 How many of the winemakers in Lirac have signed this environmental charter? Is it everybody or is it something that's growing and evolving?

Rodolphe de Pins 00:27:07 It's free, but the idea is you want to be part of it, so we push it and we communicate. And nowadays, we know that over 50% people are under organic farming and 15% are on the way, too. It's in conversion.

So, we are nearly around 80% under a green label. So, it has a good influence on the way of doing the farming, the agriculture. And also the customer, they ask it now. They like to drink good wines, but they look a bit further that it also preserved the land and that's very important.

Janina Doyle 00:27:45 For sure. The younger consumer more than ever wants to know the story behind the wine, where it came from, social responsibility, environmental responsibility. Absolutely. So, it's nice to see that Lirac, that you guys together as an appellation have really put that at the forefront.

So, the organic farming is massively on the rise. Biodynamics, is that something that many of the wineries are also embracing or not as much?

Rodolphe de Pins 00:28:14 Yeah, we might consult on that. Biodynamic now is around 34%. It's growing too. So, it's really into the trend. And luckily, it's good numbers, but we have to say that our climate makes it really easy. You know, with the mistral, we have not many, low rainfalls. So, it's not that difficult. I hope that one day it will be 100% and I think it's possible.

Janina Doyle 00:28:45 Love that. Well, also, many of your winemakers in Lirac have HVE Certification as well. So what is this? What's HVE?

Rodolphe de Pins 00:28:58 Yeah, I know the main principle, but I am myself under organic farming. But HVE have some principles. It means Haute Valeur Environnementale. Can you understand that? High value of environment.

Janina Doyle 00:29:15 So, there we go. I prefer the English version.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:29:18 And that's what it says. So, it's a principle where you have three levels – one, two, three, and of course you may want to start with one or two and two, and number three, and you have four pillars. And first will be to take care of biodiversity. So, you may want to plant aged trees, also keep grass in your vineyards. That's good for the soil and also the life under and on the top.

You also have a pillar that you be careful on your spraying. They call it FT and this is the frequency of treatment spraying. So, you have to be careful how many sprays you do. You have another pillar of the amendment. I'm looking for the words of what you put in your soil. And they push you to put more organic than chemicals. What you give to the vineyards to eat, you know.

And then the fourth one is the management of water. If you irrigate, that you will use only low consumption system like dripping. So, that's the four pillars, actually. And of course, in the function of your investment of what you choose, you're going to be number two or number three.

Janina Doyle 00:30:39 But it's amazing that you've got so many winemakers focusing on organics. They've signed the environmental charter. They might have HVEs. So, it's wonderful to see that kind of growth. But I suppose when you're surrounded by the mystical forests, the nature, the beauty, and this is, as well, I suppose we haven't actually mentioned a Mediterranean climate and you've got lots of sunshine as well, you want to take care of nature. It kind of goes probably hand in hand as well. So, it's good to see that that's rising even more.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:31:08 Yeah, it's probably a little bit less restrictive than organic, where in organic, for example, for spraying, you can use only copper and sulphur. So, you may have other products which are allowed.

But what is interesting, it has all these biodiversity recommendations to preserve. So, preserve the age, plant trees, and that's an interesting point of it. And so, people move to that and maybe further move to organic farming. It's a step to go.

Janina Doyle 00:31:41 And what is the future for Lirac? I mean, that's a big question, right?

Rodolphe de Pins 00:31:48 The future... We say the sun shines for everybody. And I hope that the future for Lirac is gonna be better and better, because first we see that a lot of people are investing in Lirac, especially from Châteauneuf because they realised that terroir is extraordinary.

And they come with their dynamic also because they have their own clientele and they're going to promote Lirac. And I really also see that the style of the wine we make on this side of the river is really what people are looking for. A lot of finesse, easy to enjoy with a nice intensity. And also, I must say, some quite attractive prices. I mean, a very good value for money.

Janina Doyle 00:32:36 Money talks. Money does talk.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:32:38 Yeah. It's not a big appellation, but you can find a lot of delicious wine. And if the press and you talk more about Lirac, that's definitely going to help us.

Janina Doyle 00:32:52 Everybody, buy a bottle of Lirac. Go visit Lirac. Talking of visiting Lirac. So, we mentioned Avignon, which I did a quick Google search, apparently in this, well, an hour ago, it would have taken about 22 minutes to drive from Avignon to Lirac. Is that probably the best place to start from, fly into? How do we get to Lirac? What's probably the best way?

Rodolphe de Pins 00:33:22 Yeah, I think the best way to come to Lirac is you have a few options. If you come to spend a week in the area like this, you're in the middle of Provence and there's many, many things to see all around. Stop in Avignon or stay in Avignon if you are more of a city person, it's perfect. And then you can do trips all around or you can also come to that area. There's a lot of gites.

But visiting the area, we are close also to the Pont du Gard, to Avignon. Visit Châteauneuf. If you're interested in wine, there's many cru to visit all around. Spending two, three days in the area would be perfect.

I recommend to go to the syndicat where they have a selection of most of the producers so you can taste. You can taste all the different qualities of the wines, the different producers and make your selection where you want to go and visit and they can give you good recommendations. Also in Lirac there's a few hiking trails, where you can do those too.

Janina Doyle 00:34:22 Yeah, the trails.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:34:23 Yeah. And the surrounding, jump the other side, you're in Châteauneuf. So, definitely a nice region to visit. And I can recommend another date. Each year there is what we call a balade. Do you understand that? A balade, it's a walk into the vineyards. And in Lirac, there's four villages. It's Lirac, Saint-Laurent-des-Arbres, Roquemaure, and Saint-Geniès-de-Comolas. The main vineyards are located on those four village appellations.

Each year, it's around May, and this year is going to be the 25th of May. There's a confreries, a brotherhood, something, who organised a balade, a walk on among the vineyards. But it's a gastronomic balade.

Janina Doyle 00:35:10 Oh, now you're talking.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:35:12 Yeah. It means you walk one kilometre, then you have a stop and you can taste all the whites. And you also have a good lunch made by a star Michelin chef. And you have about four or five stops. So, you start with appetiser, entree, main, cheese. Of course, you can discover all the different wines in situations with good meals, good dishes.

And in the vineyards, you see, they may be going through some very nice areas. It's a good way to discover the appellation. And each year, it moves village to village. So, it's quite nice.

Janina Doyle 00:35:57 Oh, that's amazing. So basically you need to come for four years in a row to make sure you've done every single one. This could possibly be the best walk in the world. Walk, wine, food. What?

Rodolphe de Pins 00:36:10 I hope so!

Janina Doyle 00:36:12 You've sold it! Oh no.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:36:17 One of my importers who is a friend because we did study together in California. And he came one year and now he's going every year. He is flying in to do it. He just loves it. And he's a winemaker, he's a wine importer. He just enjoyed it.

Janina Doyle 00:36:35 Caveat, everyone. It's addictive. Be warned, if you come to Lirac for this walk once, you may never be able to stop. May the 25th, right?

Rodolphe de Pins 00:36:45 Yes.

Janina Doyle 00:36:45 This year.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:36:46 Of course, there are producers and there are people so you can ask questions, they explain it. It's not a big thing, but around 200-300 people. So, you need to reserve. Yeah, it has to be true. So, if you're in the area around that date, definitely something to discover the vineyard.

Janina Doyle 00:37:04 I love that. I will find the link. I'll ask for you to send it to me or someone to send it to me. And I'm going to put that everybody in the show notes and also, any extra things that we think of that people should know and take a link to, I'm going to put in the show notes so everyone can become more acquainted with Lirac.

Rodolphe, thank you so much. Is there anything else that we need to cover that anyone needs to know about or are we good to go?

Rodolphe de Pins 00:37:32 I think we're good, but just thank you for helping to discover this jewel. Lirac to me is a jewel, a sleeping beauty, but it's getting, and thank you for helping us. We must thank you a lot for that.

Janina Doyle 00:37:43 Oh, well, I appreciate your descriptions. I think you've got us all inspired. So right, I'm going to have to go now and get myself a bottle of Lirac. And I'll see you over on your side of the pond very soon, maybe for that walk.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:38:01 I hope so. Definitely be there.

Janina Doyle 00:38:02 Cheers! Speak to you soon.

Rodolphe de Pins 00:38:05 Bye!

Janina Doyle 00:38:05 Take care. Thank you. Bye!

Janina Doyle 00:38:10 I hope on your next wine purchase, you are now going to head out and find yourself some Lirac. So, go and talk to your local independent wine shop or search online. And if you are in the UK, I know you can get a bottle of Biodynamic Lirac from family producer Domaine de Carabiniers from my sponsor of this season, [Wickhams Wine](#), who deserve all the shoutouts possible for their wine selection. And they also have a rosé wine from Domaine Maby.

So, don't forget on your first order, you can get 10% off using the code "EATSLEEP10." But now to finish off with a wine quote from Michelin star chef Paul Bocuse, who was born in Lyon, which is in the Rhône Alpes region of France. And translated, he said something like this:

"The true beauty of wine lies in its authenticity, in the respect for the land where it was born."

So, on that very reflective note, may your wine journey be filled with wine steeped in stories crafted by passionate individuals who prioritise sustainability, mindful of nurturing our lands for future generations to enjoy.

Now sneak peek into next week. I'm talking with Chiltern Firehouses Head Sommelier Beatrice Bessi, also International Wine and Spirit Challenges 2024 Emerging Talent in Wine Hospitality winner and we will virtually be hopping across to the enchanting island of Sicily.

So, make sure you are subscribed to this podcast and press the bell to make sure that you are getting all the notifications and don't miss out on next week. Now share this podcast with your wine loving friends and most importantly, pour yourself that well deserved glass of Lirac wine. Until next week, wine friends, cheers to you.