



STONE, VINE & SUN

WINE MERCHANTS

The Rhône

A visit to the Rhône in mid September reminded me of one reason why the wines here can be so consistently good: the sun shone unceasingly all week whilst the harvest was in full swing. Achieving ripeness is rarely a problem in the northern Rhône, and never in the south. The last two vintages have been really excellent all over the region, and both have produced concentrated wines from low yields: in 2009 heat and lack of rain reduced the crop; in 2010 changeable spring weather led to poor flowering and setting of the fruit.

Simon Taylor - October 2011

Mixed Cases All cases include two bottles of each of six wines, with a discount of at least 7.5%

RH111 Southern Reds of Reason £96.00

Six reds from the south

- 2010 Les Vignerons d'Estézargues, Côtes du Rhône, Cuvée des Galets (p.2)
- 2010 Montagnette, Côtes du Rhône Villages, Signargues (p.2)
- 2009 Amadiou, Côtes du Rhône Villages (p.2)
- 2010 Pigeade, Ventoux Classique (p.3)
- 2009 Cassan, Ventoux, Les Esclausels (p.4)
- 2010 Domaine Roger Perrin, Côtes du Rhône (p.5)

RH211 Grenache and Syrah £120.00

Four reds from the south, two from the north

- 2010 Les Vignerons d'Estézargues, Côtes du Rhône, Terra Vitis (p.2)
- 2010 Pierredon, Côtes du Rhône Villages, Signargues (p.2)
- 2009 Espiers, Côtes du Rhône (p.3)
- 2009 Domaine Roger Perrin, Côtes du Rhône, Vieilles Vignes (p.5)
- 2009 Stéphane Pichat, Syrah, Vin de Pays des Collines Rhodaniennes (p.7)
- 2006 Le Prieuré d'Arras, Saint Joseph (p.7)

RH311 Terroir Trios £165.50

Two whites and four reds, three wines from the south and three from the north

- 2009 Le Couroulu, Vacqueyras Blanc, Cuvée Laura (p.4)
- 2010 Monier-Perreol, Viognier, Vin de Pays des Collines Rhodaniennes (p.8)
- 2007 Amadiou, Côtes du Rhône Villages, Cairanne, Vieilles Vignes (p.2)
- 2007 Le Couroulu, Vacqueyras, Classique (p.4)
- 2007 Monier, Saint Joseph Rouge (p.8)
- 2007 Yann Chave, Crozes-Hermitage (p.8)

RH411 Stellars for the Cellar £259.00

Six Reds, three from the south and three from the north

- 2007 Cassan, Gigondas (p.4)
- 2007 Le Couroulu, Vacqueyras, Vieilles Vignes (p.4)
- 2006 Barroche, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Signature (p.6)
- 2009 Stéphane Pichat, Côte Rôtie, Champons (p.7)
- 2007 Yann Chave, Crozes-Hermitage, Le Rouvre (p.8)
- 2006 Balthazar, Cornas, Chaillot (p.8)

Southern Rhône

The valley of the Rhône broadens out in a broad arc east of Orange, offering a huge hot, dry, windswept (by the infamous Mistral) area perfect for the vine. The flat plain produces largely Côtes du Rhône, whilst the better named villages (e.g. Cairanne and Sablet) or appellations - Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Vacqueyras, Gigondas, and Beaumes-de-Venise - lie all, or in part, on the hills, notably in an arc around the Dentelles de Montmirail. As a rule, we look in the more outlying areas such as in the Gard (where Estézargues is sited) or the Ventoux (previously Côtes du Ventoux: see the examples from Pigeade and Cassan below) for value.

Southern Rhône reds are usually based on at least two-thirds Grenache, blended with any combination of Syrah, Mourvèdre, Cinsaut, Carignan and others. For reds the 2007, 2009 and indeed 2010 vintages are memorable.

It's hard to pick favourites here but:

- The wines from Estézargues (p.2) are hard to beat for value
- Do look out for our remaining 2007s from the south. Here is the last of our reservations from Amadiou (see p.2), Espiers (p.3), Cassan (p.4) and Couroulu (p.4): these offer a lovely combination of sumptuous fruit and incipient maturity
- A deliciously light Ventoux from Pigeade (p.3)
- A number of magnums in this list, from Côtes du Rhône upwards: these make excellent presents.
- A splendid return to form by Marine Roussel at Joncier, after a difficult 2008 vintage (p.5)
- Fantastic Châteauneuf-du-Pape from all three of our estates (pp.5-6)

Côtes du Rhône and Côtes du Rhône Villages

Les Vignerons d'Estézargues

This small co-operative, in a small village in the Gard, just west of Avignon, is now getting more attention here because oenologist Denis Deschamps makes "natural" wines, i.e. without adding any sulphur (or anything else) during winemaking. We find this mildly amusing: we have been quietly shipping decent volumes of these delicious, forward-fruited wines for years, and it's clear you have been enjoying the satisfying density and mouthfeel of these pure and unfiltered wines. Wines from Estézargues are also hugely admired within France and we count ourselves fortunate to offer the widest range of their wines in the UK market.

Just ten *vignerons* participate in this co-op, sharing grapes to make some wines such as the first two listed below, and also bottling wines from their own land under their own estate names.

Les Galets, one of our benchmark wines, is a cheerful blend of Grenache, Cinsaut and Syrah, an honest daily drinking wine. The Terra Vitis Côtes du Rhône, from grapes farmed within a sustainable, minimal intervention discipline, half way to organic viticulture, practiced by five members of the co-operative, always has a bit more black fruit and stuffing from its blend incorporating some Carignan and Mourvèdre too.

The last two wines are both from the newly delimited Côtes du Rhône Villages zone of Signargues, where the vineyards lie across raised alluvial terraces of rolled stones, the famous *galets* of the region. Both are unusual for the southern Rhône in that they are not based mainly on Grenache: La Montagnette is a blend of 50% Syrah, 35% Grenache and about 15% of Mourvèdre; Pierredon is from halves of Mourvèdre and Grenache.

2010 Les Vignerons d'Estézargues, Côtes du Rhône, Cuvée des Galets, 14.5°

Bottle £7.50 Case £85.50 Code ESZ110

The 2010 vintage seems to have a little more concentration and guts than usual. Scent of crushed raspberries. So fresh and fruity, all ripe red berries. Minimal, very supple tannins. Peck of spice. *"Any of you looking for a delicious, crimson purple, crunchy, violet-scented rhône will have met their match with this one. Swig this hearty red from the Estézargues co-operative in the southern Rhône's gard département with barbecued sausages or grilled meat"*, Jane MacQuitty, 50 Best Red Wines for Summer, **The Times**, 2nd July 2011. Now-2013

2010 Les Vignerons d'Estézargues, Côtes du Rhône, Terra Vitis, 14.5°

Bottle £7.95 Case £90.63 Code ESZ210

Deep tone. Ripe scents. Black-fruited character, ripe and juicy, with a hint of liquorice. Shows genuine depth and surprising length for the money. Now-2013

2010 Domaine La Montagnette, Côtes du Rhône Villages, Signargues, 15°

Bottle £9.25 Case £105.45 Code ESZ510

Syrah character dominates. Deep, vibrant purple. Deliciously ripe, well-textured and black-fruited, with an appealing dash of spice and black pepper. Now-2013

2010 Domaine de Pierredon, Côtes du Rhône Villages, Signargues, 15°

Bottle £9.50 Case £108.30 Code ESZ610

Half Mourvèdre, from 30-40 year old vines, the last of the varieties to be harvested, and superbly ripe in this vintage. Glossy purple. Muted nose - sandalwood? Fat and textured, with velvety tannins, and a fascinating core of sour black cherries, black plums and damson which builds on the palate. Vanilla aromatics. Smooth and ready - but the Mourvèdre in the blend means it will keep very well too. Now-2015

Domaine des Amadiou, Cairanne

Yves-Jean Houser, with a background as an agronomist, has proved to be a worthy heir to the Achiarys here. Like so many of our *vignerons* in the south, he has adopted organic viticulture.

The Côtes du Rhône Villages is from a small patch of vines towards Sérignan, and is based on about 70% Grenache. We have managed (by astute reserving ahead) to have secured more of their splendid 2007 Cairanne. From arguably the top village in the whole Côtes du Rhône Villages appellation, this old vine cuvée is from about 50% Grenache, 20% each of Syrah and Mourvèdre, and 10% Carignan, largely from vines over 50 years old. About a quarter of this goes into old barrels, just to round it out.

(Note that this small domaine of only 7 hectares is not to be confused with the huge Gigondas-based *negociant*, Pierre Amadiou!).

2009 Amadiou, Côtes du Rhône Villages, 14°

Bottle £8.75 Case £99.75 Code AMB109

Lively, brambly scent. Raspberry and cherry core, with just the lightest tannin/acid support. Gutsy, vibrant and honest Grenache which is now drinking really well. Now-2012.

2007 Amadiou, Côtes du Rhône Villages, Cairanne, Vieilles Vignes, 14°

Bottle £12.50 Case £142.50 Code AMB307
Magnum £25.50 Case (6 x 150cl.) £145.35 Code AMB907

Retains a good deep colour. Attractive Kirsch aromas. Concentrated, old-viney fruit, redolent of red berries and mulberries, lightly spiced. This is an impressive wine (it would put many a Châteauneuf to shame) at a lovely stage; still with plenty of primary fruit but so mellow and warming. Now-2013

Around Les Dentelles de Montmirail

Les Dentelles de Montmirail (named after lace, not teeth!) are the comb-topped limestone mountains to the east of Orange which dominate the entire southern Rhône plain. To the south lies the village of Beaumes-de-Venise, which now has its own appellation for its red wines to add to the previous well-known appellation for the fortified white Muscat. To the east looms the much higher peak of Mont Ventoux. Ventoux (formerly Côtes du Ventoux) can offer distinctive, and good value, red wine, both light and spicy.

On the western slopes of the Dentelles lie the pretty village of Sablet, and, more importantly, Gigondas and Vacqueyras, the second and third-rated appellations (after Châteauneuf) in the southern Rhône. These are both famous names for wine, but, as in Burgundy, actually tiny villages where most of the local population is employed in the wine industry in some way or other. The wines of Gigondas may not be able to reach quite the heights of Châteauneuf but they are a lot more consistent, with nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of the wine bottled by individual growers, and with most of the appellation lying on well-drained vineyards running up to almost 600m, on classic limestone and clay soils. Vacqueyras, which became an appellation in its own right in 1990, is less homogenous in quality, but again the best wines, from either the slopes near the village or the plateau marked by *galets*, can be excellent.

Domaine de la Pigeade, Beaumes-de-Venise

Young perfectionist Thierry Vaute is now recognised as crafting one of the best Muscats de Beaumes-de-Venise. (Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise is probably the best-known of those delectable Vins Doux Naturels which are found across the south of France. Made by stopping the fermentation of ripe grapes, half way through its course, by the addition of pure grape alcohol - thereby killing the yeasts - this leaves a sweet wine with lots of natural grapey flavour and sugar). The secret to Thierry's Muscat is the extra care he takes at every stage of harvesting and vinification: the picked bunches of Muscat are brought into the cellar in small boxes, and are then laid out on a *table de trie* for selection. The bunches are then destemmed and chilled right down for a twelve hour maceration before fermentation, also at controlled temperature: all to preserve the enticing aromatics.

We have listed Thierry's red Ventoux Classique (from Grenache, Carignan and Syrah) before, but he has moved it onto a different level with the latest vintage. Grown on sandier soils, this exemplifies our ideal of Ventoux: different to Côtes du Rhône in its freshness and grace - and note the lower alcohol level too.

2010 Pigeade, Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise, 15°

Bottle £15.50 Case £176.70 Code PIG110
Half bottle £8.25 Case (12 x 37.5cl.) £94.05 Code PIG910

A heady scent of orange blossom and lilies, and a gorgeously exotic palate of caramelised oranges. So light and aromatic for a fortified wine, all freshness, perfume and finesse. This vintage seems even more floral than usual, so even with 110 grams of residual sugar don't serve this with sweet puddings, as it's better with fruit, cheese or, as the French would drink it, as an apéritif. Now-2013

2010 Pigeade, Ventoux Classique, 13°

Bottle £8.25 Case £94.05 Code PIG610

Mid purple. Open, pretty scent of fresh berries. This is ripe and fruity but also light and supple - the tannins are silky. Showing raspberries and red cherries, it's prettily perfumed, and, by Southern Rhône standards, light and refined - a bottle could vanish very fast indeed. Now-2013



Domaine des Espiers, Vacqueyras

Philippe Cartoux - such a likeable, intelligent young man - continues to go from strength to strength at the winery he shares with his wife's family at the Domaine de Montvac on the outskirts of Vacqueyras.

The Côtes du Rhône, from densely planted, low yielding vines around Vacqueyras and Gigondas, is a blend of 70% Grenache, 20% Mourvèdre, and 10% Syrah. This is a very dense and gutsy wine in the dry, low-yielding 2009 vintage. We then move up to the Sablet, from Philippe's vineyards on the slopes above the village, Grenache dominated but with Syrah. The top vineyard holding is 3 hectares of Gigondas. The Tradition is about 2/3 Grenache and 1/3 Syrah, all raised for 6 months in old oak barriques. The Cuvée des Blaches (only 2000 bottles of this) incorporates more Syrah and takes the oak further (though only 15% new barrels) to create a sumptuous and showy bottle.

2009 Espiers, Côtes du Rhône, 14°

Bottle £9.75 Case £111.15 Code ESP109
Magnum £19.95 Case (6 x 150cl.) £113.72 Code ESP809

Deep, vibrant purple. Terrific, blackberry and cherry-liqueur flavoured red with depth and structure. Expensive for a straight Côtes du Rhône but worth every penny: superb this vintage. Now-2013

2008 Espiers, Côtes du Rhône Villages, Sablet, 14.5°

Bottle Was £11.50 Now £9.25
Case (no further case discount) £111.00 Code ESP408

2008 was very low-yielding, so this has decent concentration. Ripe berried scent. Medium-bodied, showing red plums and redcurrants with a touch of white pepper. Powerful, with some tannins there for support. Long, spicy finish. Now-2013

2009 Espiers, Côtes du Rhône Villages, Sablet, 14.5°

Bottle £11.95 Case £136.23 Code ESP409

A very concentrated vintage, due to lack of rain here. Enticing aromas of cooked fruit with a gamey hint. Plush blackberry and cooked plum core, which opens out and flowers on the palate. So much flesh and glycerol. Well-covered tannins. Impressive, right up there with Philippe's much enjoyed 2007 vintage. Now-2015

2007 Espiers, Gigondas, Tradition, 14.5°

Bottle £16.25 Case £185.25 Code ESP307

Always seductively fleshy, this exhibits aromas of cooked plums, damson, and touches of cassia and nutmeg. Lovely warm black and red fruits with floral undertones. Great acidity gives vitality. Concentrated, yet balanced, and with lively spice and red fruit on the finish. Now-2015

2006 Espiers, Gigondas, Cuvée des Blaches, 14.5°

Bottle £20.50 Case £233.70 Code ESP206

Liqueur-like scent. Luxurious cherry fruit, almost Turkish-delight like in its sweetness and perfume, is overlaid by chocolatey oak notes and black pepper. So expansive and seductive. A show-stopper, if not for traditionalists! Now-2013



Domaine de Cassan, Lafare

This is the most beautifully sited of all the domaines we buy from, with a Provençale farmhouse and cellar set amidst sloping vineyards, glowing green in summer, girdled by the white limestone crests of the Dentelles. The estate's vines straddle the boundary between the recently created red wine appellation of Beaumes-de-Venise and Gigondas.

The Ventoux, from about 70% Grenache and 30% Cinsaut, always offers vitality, bright fruit and spice. Cassan's Gigondas, from vineyards on the north slopes of the southern ridge of the Dentelles, is always at least 3/4 Grenache, with Syrah and some Mourvèdre. The 2007 vintage we offer below was included in the summer of 2010 in an unofficial event held by all the *vignerons* in Gigondas, at which 57 wines were tasted blind, and scored between 2 and 8 points. Cassan's scored an average of 7.65 and was placed 7th overall. Given that many wines from this appellation are much more expensive, this was a terrific and deserved result.

2009 Cassan, Ventoux, Les Esclausels, 14°

Bottle £8.25 Case £94.05 Code CAS509

Scents of crushed red fruits with a liquorice twist. Lively red fruit - juicy red cherries - with just the right bit of grip. White pepper on a long finish. Authentic, honest, bright country wine. Now-2012

2007 Cassan, Gigondas, 14°

Bottle £15.95 Case £181.83 Code CAS307

Magnum £32.95 Case (6 x 150cl.) £187.82 Code CAS407

This wine is still in a gorgeously open primary fruit stage. Bright purple. Aromas of cherries and juicy black fruits (blackberries); but the palate reveals lovely fresh raspberries and even strawberries. Really velvety: the tannins are there but, as so often with the 2007s, covered by the sumptuous fruit. Interesting herbal *garrigue* notes. Very pure finish, with ripe fruit returning. So winning. Now-2017



Domaine Le Couroulu, Vacqueyras

Guy Ricard, short, chubby, and with a mat of curly grey hair, has become one of our favourite suppliers, and it is clear by our rising sales that you appreciate his wines too. His shoulder-shrugging modesty, disarming smile and dishevelled clothing make him almost a caricature of the middle aged French *vigneron*. He makes reds in a thoroughly old-fashioned style, using long macerations, turning out gutsy, rustic wines which even in youth show complex nuances of flavour yet keep superbly too. Prices, despite the fact that this is one of Robert Parker's long-term favourites in the southern Rhône, remain very fair. We have shipped more of his superb 2007 reds; both essential drinking this winter.



The Classique is the domaine's chief wine, a blend of about 60% Grenache, 25% Syrah and 15% Mourvèdre, kept all in *bétons*, large concrete tanks. We also always list his top red, from *foudres*, huge and ancient oak vats; about 80% Grenache and 20% Syrah, made from old vine parcels planted on the plateau amidst the *garrigue* by his grandparents. This is a terrific, profound wine: the 2007 still very much on the way up. The white (a rarity, as so little white Vacqueyras is made, and Guy only produces 2,000 bottles) is also splendid. From Viognier and Roussanne in old oak and Grenache Blanc and Clairette kept closed in tank, this is drinking superbly, and is akin to a white Châteauneuf at a friendlier price.

2009 Le Couroulu, Vacqueyras Blanc, Cuvée Laura, 13°

Bottle £14.50 Case £165.30 Code COW609

Such an open, enticing perfume, all hothouse flowers, white peach, honey and fennel. That stone fruit is to the fore, honeyed but dry. Light in the mouth and refined for a southern Rhône white. A great match for Mediterranean fish cuisine, such as bouillabaisse. Now-2012

2007 Le Couroulu, Vacqueyras, Classique, 14.5°

Bottle £14.95 Case £170.43 Code COW107

The aromas are rich and almost gamey already, followed by a very concentrated coulis of red and black fruit, with attractive meatiness. Such fat and glycerol (Guy admits the alcohol might be slightly higher than on the label). Such a long finish, showing black pepper. "*Kirsch liqueur, roasted Provençal herbs, spice box, licorice, and lavender soar from the glass of this full-bodied, richly fruity wine, which has superb depth, density, and a 30+ second finish. This is an impressively endowed, round, voluptuous style of Vacqueyras, but don't make the mistake of drinking it all in its exuberant youthfulness, as it will keep for 6-7 years. It is a blend of 65% Grenache, 20% Syrah and 15% Mourvedre aged in foudres. 90+/100*", Robert Parker, **Wine Advocate**, October 2009. Now-2014

2007 Le Couroulu, Vacqueyras, Vieilles Vignes, 14.5°

Bottle £17.75 Case £202.35 Code COW307

Aromas of dried fruits - figs. Svelte and supple texture, with the tannins so well-covered. Appealing attack of sweet black cherries with spice and a gravy note. By comparison with the Classique this is more black-fruited. "*An absolute whopper of a Vacqueyras is the 2007 Vacqueyras Vieilles Vignes, which comes from their oldest vines and is a blend of 70% Grenache and 30% Syrah. Licorice, charcoal, blackberry and cassis notes, along with hints of lavender and pepper, jump from the glass of this inky/purple-colored wine. Layered and multi-dimensional, with superb purity, fleshy, concentrated fruit, and perfect balance, this wine has an uncanny ability to be substantial in size but remains surprisingly elegant, with admirable purity. This is a super Vacqueyras to drink over the next 7-8 years. 93/100*", Robert Parker, **Wine Advocate**, October 2009. Now-2017

Lirac

Domaine du Joncier, Tavel

Marine Roussel adopted organic practice a few years ago, after being near-organic for years. From the 2008 vintage the wines have been certified by ECOCERT, and she has now progressed to adopting bio-dynamic practice. She is sure the wines are getting better as a result!

Joncier is a local name for the yellow-flowering broom which dots the landscape.

We usually ship all her three reds: Le Gourmand, about 3/4 Grenache with Syrah, Carignan and Cinsaut, is usually red-fruited, lighter than the Classique. The latter is from Grenache, Syrah and Mourvèdre, with a little Cinsaut and Carignan. Les Muses is based on 75% Mourvèdre, with 15% Cinsaut, plus a little Syrah and Grenache, which makes for a powerful, deep-hued wine with staying power.

Note: the second and third wines will not arrive until mid October.

2008 Joncier, Lirac, Le Gourmand, 14°

Bottle Was £9.95 Now £8.75

Case (no further case discount) £105.00 Code JON508

Red-fruited, mid-weight, a little chunkier than usual. Now-2012

Châteauneuf-du-Pape

We have said it before: the appearance of knobbly papal keys or a mitre on a bottle is certainly no guarantee of fine wine in this huge appellation: Châteauneuf-du-Pape, at 3,300 hectares, is one of the largest in France. There's a great history here, as this was the first *Appellation d'Origine* in France, and the rules first framed here in 1923 - regarding classified geographical boundaries based on soil types and vineyard suitability, limited yields and approved grape varieties and pruning - formed the basis for the whole *Appellation Controlée* system. The blend is all in Châteauneuf, white or red, as no less than 13 grape varieties are permitted. Regarding the latter Vincent Avril of Clos des Papes (see below) points out that the latitude and climate of the region is perfectly poised: at the southernmost point to raise Syrah with finesse; and the northernmost to ripen Mourvèdre successfully.

Domaine Roger Perrin, Châteauneuf-du-Pape

Our search for someone making authentic but fairly priced Châteauneuf drew us to Domaine Roger Perrin, situated between Orange and Châteauneuf (and, *en passant*, no relation to the more famous Perrins of Beaucastel). We much enjoyed tasting the domaine's excellent 2008s, but sadly, as we were planning to visit last September, we heard that Luc Perrin, who had run the estate since 1986, had died of cancer. Robert Parker, who counted him a friend, lamented the loss of one of the appellations's "young, dynamic leaders". Now the estate is being managed by his capable sister, Véronique Perrin-Rolin, herself an oenologist in Tain.

The average age of the vines is very high indeed, with some of the numerous plots in their 15.6 hectares of Châteauneuf planted a century ago, and the average being about 60 years old. Their principal Châteauneuf is a traditional blend of about 70% Grenache, plus, in descending order, Syrah, Mourvèdre, Cinsaut, Clairette, Counoise and Vaccarese. Grapes are partially destemmed, and aged in a mix of stainless steel, old *foudres*, and a few new barrels.

2010 Domaine Roger Perrin, Côtes du Rhône, 13°

Bottle £9.50 Case £108.30 Code PES110

The back label calls this "*Rouge fruité*"; and it's exactly as described, offering a classic Grenache nose of crushed cherries, and then a deliciously forward, supple and juicy gulp of raspberries, with the merest smudge of tannin and a lovely perfumed finish. Now-2013

2009 Domaine Roger Perrin, Côtes du Rhône, Vieilles Vignes, 14°

Bottle £11.50 Case £131.10 Code PES209

A selection of very old vines in the best of the estate's plots just outside the limits of Châteauneuf. Cassis aroma. Lots of texture and glycerol - very rich and rounded. Spicy plums. Powerful but silky, a mini Châteauneuf indeed. Now-2013

2010 Joncier, Lirac, Le Gourmand, 14°

Bottle £11.25 Case £128.25 Code JON510

Scent of crushed, sun-warmed strawberries. Pure, ripe red fruit - cranberries and raspberries - and appealingly juicy too. Tangy finish. Marine says her 2010s are "*intense and elegant at the same time*", and you can see what she means here. Now-2013 [Arriving mid October]

2009 Joncier, Lirac, Le Classique, 14°

Bottle £12.50 Case £142.50 Code JON109

Deep ruby and opaque to the rim. Notes of cinnamon and kirsch dance on the scent of warm red fruits. This is very concentrated in the dry 2009 vintage, and splendidly full-bodied and warming. As on the nose, there's an attractive liqueur element to the fruit. Lots of stuffing. Perfect accompaniment to *daube* or game. Now-2015 [Arriving mid October]

2006 Joncier, Lirac, Les Muses, 14.5°

Bottle £15.50 Case £176.70 Code JON306

Smells just so enticing - rich black cherries. Excitingly open mouthful of sloes and damsons in a rich, liqueur-like idiom. Fine grained tannins giving a firm grip. Hint of tobacco (this often shows on Mourvèdre). So aromatic. Big framed wine, developing well. Now-2014 Limited stock

2009 Domaine Roger Perrin, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, 14.5°

Bottle £20.75 Case £236.55 Code PES409

Deep robe. Warming but not jammy aromas. This shows that attractive balance of intense red and black fruits that is the essence of good Châteauneuf. Hints of cooked damson and mulberry, plus spice, leather and tar. Attractively smooth and refined, so already approachable. Just a hint of meatiness underneath the lush fruit. "*The Domaine Roger Perrin's potentially outstanding, dark ruby/purpletinged 2009 Chateauneuf du Pape exhibits beautiful aromas of black raspberries, black currants and pepper as well as attractive elegance, power, purity and depth. A precocious component suggests it should drink well for a decade or more. (89-91)/100*", Robert Parker, *Wine Advocate*, No 191, October 2010. Now-2016





Domaine La Barroche, Châteauneuf-du-Pape

Young winemaker Julien Barrot joined his father in 2002 when he was barely 21, but has guided this estate's transformation from selling grapes to the *négoçiants* to creating a remarkable array of top wines. Barroche (probably named for the rocks under the cellar - "bas roche") is not yet a well-known name, as the Barrot family only ceased selling their grapes (after 300 years of viticulture!) to begin bottling their own wine in 2003.

About a third of the estate's 12 hectares is planted to 100 year old Grenache vines. Most of the vines lie in the north and north east of the appellation, on the plateau near to Rayas and Beaucastel, on very meagre, sandy and pebbly soils: the Barrots think the sand gives more finesse to their wines.

2006 Barroche, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Signature, 15°

Bottle £31.50 Case £359.10 Code BAS206

Signature, the estate's principal wine, is dominated by about 60% Grenache, with Mourvèdre and Cinsaut (the Cinsaut, from old vines, is wonderful in this cellar) and is a concentrated wine for ageing. Dark fruit - cooked damsons. Great depth of ripe tannins. Polished, well balanced. Plums and cassis: red fruit spice, very fresh fruit and lovely balance. Great mass: decant well in advance and treat yourself. "An intensely bright, creamy-fruited nose that's ripe and firm. Delicious moreish fruit, if still a little restrained, meaty depth and a tingle of spice dances nicely over the richness of the wine. Still plenty to come from this plummy, handsome wine. 93/100", www.thewinegang.com, January 2011. Best 2012-2018

2007 Barroche, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Signature, 15°

Bottle £31.50 Case £359.10 Code BAS207

Very closed when tasted last year. Textured, and layers of black fruit, to be sure, but tight and lacking aromatics. Best 2012-2018

Clos des Papes, Châteauneuf-du-Pape

Clos des Papes is an estate steeped in history: Avril ancestors have been growers in Châteauneuf since about 1600; were the town treasurers in the second half of the 18th century; and prime movers in the creation of the Appellation between 1911 and 1923. They are the owners of the now terraced vineyard which surrounds the ruined papal castle, formerly enclosed by a wall, hence the name Clos; and began selling wine under the Clos des Papes label as far back as 1896.

Under the leadership of Vincent Avril this estate has steadily ascended the hierarchy in the Appellation, and now makes what is rightly famed as one of the top wines, despite just making one red wine, not numerous special bottlings. From about 65% Grenache, 20% Mourvèdre, 10% Syrah and 5% of Counoise, Vaccarèse and Muscardin, it's always highly refined - Vincent, trained in Beaune, seeks a Burgundian "finesse" - and approachable quite young, although the relatively high percentage of Mourvèdre adds longevity. The 2008 listed below was from a particularly strict selection - yields of only 17 hl./ha., and this wine is arguably as good as 2007 and 2009 *chez M. Avril*.

Clos des Papes have also long made a speciality of their white wine. It is unusual in its blend, being approximately a sixth each of Roussanne, Grenache Blanc, Bourbolenc, Picpoul, Clairette and the little known Picardan. Vincent states that the first two bring fruit and weight, the second two acidity and freshness, and the last two finesse. As with much white Châteauneuf, this can be drunk young or left for many years, becoming straw-coloured, complex and mineral.

2007 Clos des Papes, Châteauneuf-du-Pape Blanc, 15°

Bottle £34.50 Case £393.30 Code CDP307

Not tasted recently, but likely to be subdued, in its closed down stage. Probably best 2013-2017. Limited stock

2009 Clos des Papes, Châteauneuf-du-Pape Blanc, 15°

Bottle £42.50 Case £484.50 Code CDP309

The 2009 white is sensational, so open and enticing to the nose and on the palate. Scents of pineapple and fennel, followed by a delicious palate comprising white peach, floral and mineral elements. Exotic yet has an almond spine too. Don't just take our word for it: here is Robert Parker's review from *The Wine Advocate*, October 2010. "The 2009 Chateauneuf du Pape blanc may be the finest white wine I have ever tasted from Clos des Papes. An equal part blend of every authorized varietal in Chateauneuf du Pape (six different grapes), it exhibits terrific fruit intensity, lots of quince, anise, nectarine and white peach notes, a full-bodied mouthfeel, terrific purity, a hint of honeysuckle and a layered, long finish. This stunning white Chateauneuf du Pape should drink nicely for 3-4 years, possibly longer. The malolactic is always blocked in this cuvee, and the wines have an uncanny ability to age for ten or more years in many vintages. 94/100". For drinking window see note above: now-end 2012 or perhaps 2017-2020 Very limited stock

2008 Clos des Papes, Châteauneuf-du-Pape Rouge, 14.5°

Bottle £43.50 Case £495.90 Code CDP108

Open, seductive scents of crushed red fruit. Deliciously lush primary fruit, vibrant strawberries and raspberries, with a liquorice accent from the Syrah. So smooth and refined, with suave tannins, that you could drink and hugely enjoy this now, but perhaps best 2012-2017.



Northern Rhône

The narrow valley of the Rhône south of Lyon is the spiritual home of Syrah. Here the vineyards crawl up the steep slopes, largely on the west side of the river. As Côte-Rôtie, Hermitage and Cornas become steadily more expensive, we continue to champion the cause of Saint Joseph, which shares similarly sparse soils derived from decayed granite. We also list three wines under the name of the local Vin de Pays (IGP): the rather delightful Collines Rhodaniennes. These can be from vineyards just outside appellation boundaries, from the wrong grape variety for the appellation (i.e. M. Monier's Viognier) or, as in Stéphane Pichat's case, a declassified wine from his young vines.

Whites from this region - Condrieu from Viognier, other whites from Marsanne, Viognier and Roussanne - are rare and not cheap, but unusual and fascinating. Condrieu is one of the great aperitif wines of the world (though great with crustacea too) and the others exceptionally food-friendly and characterful.

Look out for:

- Three precisely refined wines from Stéphane Pichat (see below)
- M. Monier's remarkable whites (p.8)
- Yann Chave's 2007s, drinking superbly (p.8)

The appellations below are broadly listed from north to south.

Côte Rôtie & Condrieu

Stéphane Pichat, Vérenay

A recent visit confirmed our confidence in young Stéphane Pichat, who began in 2000 with tiny quantities of fruit, has stuck a crowded cellar on to his house in Vérenay, and has only around 10,000 bottles a year to sell. Unusually he has invested in a new basket-press, which he feels suits Syrah well.

His Condrieu, from one south-facing parcel which gives him just three barrels (one new each vintage), is just the style we really like, with the stone fruit balanced by sinewy minerality. His Vin de Pays Syrah is actually from his young vines within the Côte Rôtie appellation, a really pure and juicy example. From his three bottlings of Côte Rôtie we have chosen his principal wine, Champons, 85% from the vineyard of that name in the northern, schistous sector of the appellation, with the rest from Plomb and Cognet (this is really getting anoraky). Stéphane says his vines are 30-50 years old. There's about 2% Viognier in this wine.

2009 Stéphane Pichat, Condrieu, La Caille, 13.5°

Bottle £35.00 Case £399.00 Code PID609

Hint of green. Citrus blossom on the nose. Mid-weight, this flowers on the palate, showing pure fresh apricots and white peach, with a honeyed nuance and an undertone of irony minerality. The finish just goes on and on, even hinting at pineapple. Now-2012 Limited stock - the 2010 vintage follows at £36.00.

2009 Stéphane Pichat, Syrah, Vin de Pays des Collines Rhodaniennes, 13°

Bottle £12.50 Case £142.50 Code PID109

Fresh, perfumed Syrah, just lightly oaked for roundness. Bright, fairly clear purple. Pure, smooth, gently crunchy style, evincing redcurrants and fresh berries. Ripe and understated tannins. Juicy and enjoyable, a splendid lunch wine. "A right bargain at £12.50 or £142.50 the case from Stone Vine", John Livingstone-Learmonth, www.drinkrhone.com. The 2010 vintage follows at £13.25. Now-2013

2009 Stéphane Pichat, Côte Rôtie, Champons, 13.5°

Bottle £32.50 Case £370.50 Code PID309

85% from the vineyard of that name in the northern, schistous sector of the appellation, and including about 2% Viognier. Mocha notes from the oak on the nose. Rich and rounded entry, showing delectable, silky red fruit, with an attractive mineral sprinkle of white pepper. Long finish, with a return of those coffee and chocolate hints. Very refined, so one won't have to wait forever to enjoy this. 2012-2018



Saint Joseph

We continue to trumpet the potential of Saint Joseph, and its significance in the northern Rhône. With almost every square metre of Côte-Rôtie, Hermitage and Cornas planted (and the wines subsequently subject to continual upward price pressure) the only appellation left with decayed granitic soils and plenty of steep east and south facing soils (i.e. the classic terroir for Rhône Syrah) is Saint Joseph.

Le Prieuré d'Arras, Arras

Etienne Becheras worked as oenologue at the co-operative at Sarras before establishing his own 2½ hectares of vines (he has apricots and cherries too) around his house on the slopes above the church in Arras. His first vintage was 1999, and we began working with him from the 2003 vintage. Soils here are markedly granitic - it's not that far north of Cornas. His red is a traditionally styled northern Rhône Syrah, fragrant and medium-bodied, all from old barrels of 400 litres or larger, and a mix of oak (there's even a bit of American oak). This benefits from a bit of time in bottle but offers excellent value.

2006 Le Prieuré d'Arras, Saint Joseph Rouge, 12.5°

Bottle £13.95 Case £159.03 Code BEC306

Pale, but still youthful purple. Scent of raspberries and blackberries with a vanilla nuance; and the palate equally combines red and black fruit. Silkily textured, perfumed in the mouth, and offering a satisfying and lightly savoury finish. The sort of fresh and light bodied wine which can slip down all too easily, this is drinking beautifully now. Now-2013

Domaine Monier-Perreol, St. Desirat

Jean-Pierre Monier is a bio-dynamic producer, having farmed organically since the early 1980s, and converted to bio-dynamism in 1997 - no latecomer adopting the latest fashion! He first bottled his own wines in 2001. He used to own a mere 5 hectares of south to south-east facing vines just north of St. Desirat on very steep, granitic vineyards, but this has been supplemented by taking on Philippe Perreol's land too, hence the new name of the domaine.

M. Monier crops very low (25-30 hectolitres a hectare) and picks late: he likes, as he says "*une légère surmaturité*". Both reds are 100% Syrah, destemmed after 12 hours fermentation, given a temperature controlled fermentation and both spend one year in *barrique*, about 1/3 new, the rest two to three years old, before being bottled without any filtration at all. The standard Saint Joseph comes from five plots, all close to the domaine. The low-yielding production of Terre Blanche (about 30% new oak) derives from limestone/clay parcels on the steeply pitched vineyards near the cellar.

Jean-Pierre thinks his reds are typified by cassis, *myrtille* & cherry and are very "*confits*", charmingly ripe. His wines are truly harmonious (is this the biodynamics?) and the fact that M. Monier sells them to no less than three triple Michelin-starred Parisian restaurants speaks volumes both for their class, and the supple suavity which makes them hugely enjoyable soon after the vintage.

This year we have shipped some of his Vin de Pays Marsanne, a really fascinating barrel-aged wine which belies its humble status: and at last we have a decent allocation of his wonderful Viognier. If you used to buy Condrieu but can't bring yourself to spend that much then buy this instead: barrel-fermented in 3-4 year old 300 litre barrels, it's wonderfully opulent and exotic.

Crozes-Hermitage

Crozes-Hermitage is the entry-level appellation for the northern Rhône - a shame therefore that so much of the wine produced here is desperately unexciting. It's particularly important to choose your grower carefully here - we showcase one of the very best in Yann Chave.

Yann Chave, Mercuroil

We have been buying from Yann Chave (or technically his father at first) since the 1998 vintage, and have seen this highly competitive and very bright young man rise to the top of the tree in Tain l'Hermitage (his cellar is just over the autoroute which by-passes this sleepy wine town on the Rhône). Yann's superbly ripe and concentrated wines are about as far away from supermarket Crozes-Hermitage as Grange Hermitage is from Oxford Landing Shiraz.

Yann treats his two cuvées of Crozes-Hermitage differently. The standard Crozes receives micro-oxygenation in tank which makes for a forward wine which can be drunk quite early, without sacrificing any of the beguiling density of fruit which Yann achieves. On the other hand his Crozes Le Rouvre, named after a type of sessile oak, is aged in *demi-muids*, and is one of the best wines of the appellation. This comes each vintage from the same parcels of old vines on the very stony fields at Les Chassis, and is a very serious, mineral wine for ageing.

Cornas

Cornas used to be a well-kept secret; a tiny appellation of less than 100 hectares engendering splendidly long-lived Syrah at a reasonable price. However rising demand for Côte Rôtie and Hermitage has brought Cornas into the limelight too. It's a splendid terroir, with gritty, friable granitic soils on slopes almost as vertiginous as at Côte Rôtie.

Cave Balthazar, Cornas

Little changes here - the wine is still somehow made in the miniscule cellar near the church in Cornas by the neat and modest Franck Balthazar, from very low yields, off three tiny parcels of vines, 42 and 93 years old, totalling 2 hectares, on well-sited, granitic land in Les Chaillots. The grapes are not destemmed, and the wine goes into old 600 litre demi-muids before being bottled without fining or filtration. This is a traditional Cornas, but always more approachable than the black-strap wines of legend.

2010 Monier-Perreol, Marsanne, Vin de Pays des Collines Rhodaniennes, 14°

Bottle £12.75 Case £145.35 Code MOP710

Gentle scents of yellow plums and apricots. Immediate impression is of generous fruit - ripe pears and stone fruit. So surprisingly fat and creamy, it finishes with a splendid dry mineral edge. Now-2013

2010 Monier-Perreol, Viognier, Vin de Pays des Collines Rhodaniennes, 15°

Bottle £16.50 Case £188.10 Code MOP610

Very bright pale gold. Seductively open aromas of orange blossom honey, jasmine and wax. Gorgeous tropical fruit, with subtly integrated oak. M. Monier thinks this is the best Viognier he has ever made. Best decanted now, to open it out. Now-2013.

2007 Monier, Saint Joseph Rouge, 12°

Bottle £15.75 Case £179.55 Code MOP507

Deep purple black. On the nose, black fruits, blackcurrants and bilberry, touch of olive. Harmonious and polished - lovely oak/fruit balance. Polished. Exhilarating bilberry and blackcurrant fruit. Juicy and exciting. Now-2014

2008 Monier-Perreol, Saint Joseph Rouge, Terre Blanche, 12.5°

Bottle £18.50 Case £210.90 Code MOP108

Vivid deep purple. Intense aromas of blackberries, vanilla, black pepper and cloves. Refined, showing dense black fruit and spice, supported by ripe tannins. Definitely an extra dimension compared to the straight St. Joseph. Well balanced with a long, smooth finish. Now-2016

2007 Yann Chave, Crozes-Hermitage, 13.5°

Bottle £15.50 Case £176.70 Code CHA107

Vibrant ruby/purple. Scent of ripe plum and blackberries with a hint of herbs. Classic herby, spicy blackberryish Crozes palate, with a touch of black olive and smoke. Notes of *pain grillé* & coffee - from the ripeness and maturity of the fruit rather than oak. Very long red and black fruit finish. Now-2013

2007 Yann Chave, Crozes-Hermitage, Le Rouvre, 13.5°

Bottle £19.50 Case £222.30 Code CHA207

Elegant and well balanced, with very supple tannins, showing intense cherry, mulberry and blackberry fruit with spice and herbs plus a touch of black pepper on the very long finish. Enticing. "*Meaty, sausages, smoke, peppercorns, black fruit jam, good persistence and line, fantastic length. Expressive, noble, elegant, delicious. 17/20*", www.jancisrobinson.com, 22nd November 2010. Now-2016

2006 Balthazar, Cornas, Chaillot, 13°

Bottle £22.95 Case £261.63 Code BAL106

Franck's 2006 wasn't a blockbuster, but delightfully red-fruited, almost summer-pudding, with light tannins, showing a raspberry liqueur-like sweetness and density, plus a hint of liquorice. Now-2016

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