

WINE News

Riches of the Rhône Valley.



AUGUST 31, 2020 FEATURES

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Never too Remote: Join Us in the Rhône

By Keith Mabry

As we approach the fall, many of us have started to adapt to our new abnormal. Our work routines, family lives, and even how we engage socially have all undergone a disruptive paradigm shift. Many of our K&L staff have had to adapt along the way. We have been deployed and redeployed in new and transformative ways. Some of us work from home. Some of us have shifted to warehouse fulfillment. Some of us are running orders out to your cars. As we each adapt, one of the most exciting things that we did was to open our curbside service. It gave us a chance to see so many partially covered yet familiar faces. Often, brief but kind words have been shared in these limited engagements.

Since we don't get to share as much of our experience and knowledge on a daily basis, the one thing that still unites us across distances is that shared wine experience. (I must admit, though, that I still haven't participated in a Zoom cocktail hour.) So, what to share with you all, now that I have your attention? Rhône wines have been a primary focus, because we are still immersed in one of the longest strings of great vintages ever recorded. And, based on overall sales in the Rhône category since the shutdowns, it seems most of you are just as eager to hear more about these wines. Beginning in 2015 and now through

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2018 Domaine de la Ganse Vacqueyras

(\$19.99) Coralie Onde departed from her family property to start her own independent and organic project almost a decade ago. She took along some family estate vines, while procuring some additional old-vine fruit planted in great, gravelly terroir surrounded by garrigue (the local forests). This is all part of the terroir that informs the flavor profile of her wine. With beautiful black raspberry fruit, savory spices, a wisp of violets, and that lovely garrigue character, you have a truly compelling Vacqueyras here.



2017 Domaine des Remizières "Cuvée Christophe" Crozes-Hermitage

(\$29.99) One of my favorite producers in the northern Rhône is Remizières. The Desmeures family, proprietors of this third-generation estate, is making finely crafted and luscious reds. Made from 100% Syrah, the Christophe is saturated with black fruit. With flavors of blackberries, black cherries, cardamom, and leather, this is an expansive and full-throttle wine. No wonder wine critic Jeb Dunnuck calls them, "Unquestionably one of my favorite estates in Crozes-Hermitage." **93 JD, 92 RP, 92 JS**



2019 Comte Louis de Clermont-Tonnerre "Cuvée Raphael" Ventoux Syrah

(\$11.99) Long-standing K&L partner Alain Corcia provides some of the best value Rhône and Burgundies in our portfolio. Last year, Alain showed us something new, this almost 100% Syrah from the Ventoux region. It rapidly became a staff favorite and then a customer favorite. And the new vintage is even sexier and more open than the 2018. Rich and decadent flavors of mulberry, tobacco, and saffrafr erupt from the glass. This could be twice the price if we weren't getting the friend deal.



Getting Crabby? Ventoux to the Rescue

By John Majeski

Recently, I lamented the reality that because of the shutdown, almost six months had passed since I'd tasted one of my favorite San Francisco dishes: a rich, steaming bowl of crab cioppino. Fortunately, Sotto Mare, my go-to cioppino and seafood spot in North Beach, just reopened. Without delay I placed an order for curbside pickup, drove home with the effusively perfumed *fruits de mer* enveloping my little Honda Fit, and soon dove right in. But not before opening the perfect bottle of wine to complement this colorful maritime feast. The **2019 Domaine de Fondrèche Ventoux Rosé (\$16.99)** is a brilliant rendition of Grenache and Cinsault that flaunts delightfully crisp red fruits and has a wonderful mineral, saline expression on the pure, crystal-clean finish. Hard to believe, but the cioppino had finally met its match!



We're fortunate that during this critical pandemic so many soulful, distinctive wines continue to reach our shelves from France, Italy, Spain, and the world over. Today's focus? The Ventoux AOC lies just to the east of Châteauneuf-du-Pape, where winegrape quality is favorably affected by the looming presence of Mont Ventoux, which generates cooler nights that contribute to a longer growing season. Composed of organically grown Grenache, Syrah, and Mourvèdre, the **2018 Domaine de Fondrèche Ventoux Rouge (\$17.99)**



testifies to the caring treatment given each parcel during fermentation and aging. With its refined and supple aromas, and round notes of raspberry, black plum, licorice, violets, and wild thyme, this polished Ventoux red would happily share a table with a platter of tangy braised short ribs. **92 JD**

Countless patrons over the years have fallen for the attractive Château Pesquié "Terrasses" red, so tasting this producer's top tier of single vineyard, biodynamic wines proved a revelation. The **2017 Château Pesquié "Cuvée Artemia" Ventoux (\$34.99)** is a silky blend of Syrah and Grenache grown on limestone gravels that lend notes of elegance and freshness reminiscent of wines from the northern Rhône—again, probably due to the cooling influence of Mont Ventoux. There's a gentle nod toward Cornas in its velvety melange of black fruits, with hints of pepper, wildflowers, and a whiff of bacon on the long finish. Oh, it might be worth adding that "Artemia" translates as "good health." **94 JD, 93 DC**



Even more beguiling, the **2017 Château Pesquié "Silica" Ventoux (\$34.99)** is, as its name suggests, a pure, terroir-driven wine cultivated from a single elevated site on sandy soils. One rarely encounters a Grenache-based wine with this suave interplay of lithe, delicate red fruits, harmonious restraint, and underlying structure—an ode to both the careful hand in the vineyard, and the skilled winemaker's art. Stay well, my friends! **95 JD**

Châteauneuf-du-Pape: An Embarrassment of Riches!

By Alex Pross

If you had to name one region in the world that continues to churn out world-class wines on a consistent basis, but that are priced with comparative affordability, you'd do well to pick Châteauneuf-du-Pape. Here, you can reliably purchase the region's top producers for less than \$100, and often less than \$50. And, with a string of great-to-greater vintages from 2015 through 2018, there has never been a more opportune time to drink Châteauneuf.

If you're looking to get an early read on the quality of the 2018 vintage, then you should pick up a bottle of the **2018 Coudoulet de Beaucastel Côtes-du-Rhône (\$27.99)**. While technically a Côtes-du-Rhône, this "baby Beaucastel" comes from a vineyard adjacent to Beaucastel, just across the A7 highway, with an identical soil makeup. The Coudoulet bursts out of the gate with white pepper, ripe tomato, garrigue, and raspberry flavors. With great depth, but approachable now, this is one of my favorite wines year in and year out. **93 DC, 91-93 RP**

Another stunner from the incoming 2018 vintage is the **2018 Le Vieux Donjon (\$49.99)**. A richly textured, fruit-driven offering that has fantastic structure and layer after layer of complexity, this is one of the top domaines in Châteauneuf-du-Pape and is consistently viewed as one of the best values out there. **93-95 JD**

Under \$50 as well, the **2015 Domaine du Vieux Télégraphe "Piedlong" Châteauneuf-du-Pape (\$49.99)** comes from the extremely hot 2015 vintage, which gives this wine an abundance of opulent fruit notes nicely buffered against spice and dried herbs. **95 JS, 93 JD, 92 RP, 92 WS**

From a less hot vintage comes the **2017 Domaine Beurenard Châteauneuf-du-Pape (\$49.99)**. With its more refined and elegant palate, this wine feels almost Burgundian, boasting pretty red fruits, bright aromas, zesty acidity, and subtle spice and earth notes. It's a pretty and restrained red that is still definitely a Rhône—just dialed back a bit. **95 JD, 93 RP, 92 WS, 92 VN, 92 JS**



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King of the North: J-L Chave Reigns in Northern Rhône Value

By Lauren Seward

Jean-Louis Chave represents 16 generations of winemaking since the family's inaugural planting in the northern Rhône in the late 15th century. He produces some of the greatest Syrah, Roussanne, and Marsanne on the planet, and is a known expert in the art of blending. In fact, to date he has never produced a single-vineyard or cru bottling.

His négociant line, J.L. Chave Sélection, sources grapes and offers consumers an affordable way to try wines from some of the highest-quality grapes in the northern Rhône. We offer a range of wines from Sélection, and are particularly enamored with his "Silène" Crozes-Hermitage, "Offerus" Saint-Joseph, and "Circa" Saint-Joseph Blanc.

2018 J.L. Chave Sélection "Silène" Crozes-Hermitage (\$24.99) There can be a tricky line to walk in Crozes-Hermitage when it comes to Syrah grown on hillside granite. The goal is to balance the Syrah's fruit without giving up the grippiness and structure of the granite. The Silène is the perfect example of this. Half estate-grown Syrah and half purchased Syrah, it is aged for 15 to 18 months in barriques, and shows a dark and rich character. With notes of plum, tobacco, and black pepper playing key roles in its aroma, the Silène is perfectly suited for pairing with hearty meals. **93 VN**



2017 J.L. Chave Sélection "Offerus" Saint-Joseph (\$29.99)

This 100% Syrah is a thirst-quenching red that's easy to like now, but is also "serious" enough to reward a little cellaring. Composed of Syrah from both the northern and southern ends of Saint-Joseph, this wine brims with aromas of blueberry cobbler, pluot, eucalyptus, accented by wet rock notes. It's warm and luscious, while still maintaining that classic Saint-Joseph elegance. Bold, dark florals (lavender and violet) and tart plum mingle in this medium-bodied wine, with medium acidity, which concludes with a relaxed but lengthy finish. Don't be afraid to let this age for another few years. **93 VN**

2018 J.L. Chave Sélection "Circa" Saint-Joseph Blanc (\$29.99)

This is 60% Roussanne and 40% Marsanne, grown on hillsides in Mauves, where the granite soil provides a minerality that is perfect for food. A generous 14 months élevage in French oak imbues the wine with aromas of coconut and vanilla, detailed with hints of apricot candy and orange preserve. While the wine is intense in its bouquet, more subtle flavors of pear and honey pair with the faintest of acidities (common for both these varieties), making it more of a food-friendly wine than a casual sipper. **92 VN**



The Beauty that is Condrieu

By Keith Mabry

Though iconic for its profound Viognier wines, Condrieu often gets short shrift in the spectrum of world-class whites. It can be a bit intimidating, as the cost of entry may scare casual observers away.

Though a gorgeous region, it does not garner as much attention as its neighbor, Côte-Rôtie, to the north. There are great values coming from top producers in the region, often from declassified vines on hilltops or parcels that were not included in the original drawing of the appellation. Those value wines are for another day, though. What distinguishes Condrieu from all other Viognier are the terraced hillsides carved into the granitic slopes of the region. The aspect and the soil produce wines of depth and richness that will often cellar beautifully for a decade plus. Here, you'll find two producers' wines that can easily reside next to the greats of Burgundy and Alsace.

The first producer that immediately springs to mind when talking about Condrieu is Yves Cuilleron. Yves is a precision winemaker. He makes several great cuvées from St-Joseph, St-Peray, and even Côte-Rôtie — just a couple of villages away. But



his home appellation is Condrieu. The **2018 Yves Cuilleron "La Petite Côte" Condrieu (\$49.99)** is the flagship of the estate. Exotic, with its expressive tones of Anjou pear, citrus rind, honeysuckle, and minerals, this is no entry-level wine, but is a tremendous introduction to the category. **94 VN**

The second is Georges Vernay. The estate, overseen by Vernay's daughter, produces some of the most sought-after wines from Condrieu. The **2017 Georges Vernay "Les Chaillées de l'Enfer" Condrieu (\$80.00)** is the beating heart of their production. From the original center of the appellation, these 50-plus-year-old vines produce some of the most exotic and perfumed (as well as long-lived) wines in their stable. Gorgeous aromas of dried pear, jasmine, peaches, and Meyer lemon introduce a wine with incredible weight and structure. The price we have on this hasn't been seen in over a decade, as this bottling usually floats well above the \$100 mark, so it's truly special treat!

96 JD, 95 WS, 93 RP, 93 JS





Harvest in Visan, near Châteauneuf-du-Pape. (Photo: Vins-Rhone.com © Christophe Grilhé)

Join Us in the Rhône (Continued from page 1)

2019, we have not seen such a diverse yet fantastic streak of vintages in both the northern and southern Rhône. I assembled our team of Rhône specialists (albeit from remote workspaces) to share with you some of their highlights and what is still exciting and new for us. In the coming days and weeks, you may see some of us setting your wine next to your vehicle, or you may talk to us on the phone or via email, but know that we are still happy to provide you with our favorite picks, even if it's not face-to-face. So, let's raise a collective glass to the new abnormal, a shared wine experience—if not on Zoom, then perhaps on Instagram?

Châteauneuf (Continued from page 2)

Some of the most famous producers in the Rhône Valley are still making affordable flagship offerings. To introduce a quartet of such wines, let's start with the **2017 Domaine Pierre Usseglio "Cuvée Mon Aïeul" Châteauneuf-du-Pape (\$69.99)**, a wine that is all about power, with dark black fruits, sexy spice, and grilled meat notes. This layered, complex wine unfurls to reveal ample body and structure. **97 JD, 94-94 VN, 94 RP**

From one of the greats of the northern Rhône whose southern Rhône project is gaining almost as much acclaim, the **2017 M. Chapoutier "Croix de Bois" Châteauneuf-du-Pape (\$69.99)** is all about dried herbs, notes of crushed rock, and pure, red fruits. This 100% Grenache is a



beautiful wine that seamlessly mixes fruit and spice in an utterly seductive package. **96 JD, 94-95 VN, 94 RP**

We finish with two regal offerings from estates that seemingly never have a misfire. The **2016 Domaine du Pegau "Cuvée Réserve" Châteauneuf-du-Pape (\$74.99)** is quite possibly the greatest CdP Réserve they have ever made. This wine is a great example of what Pegau is striving to achieve: pure black fruit, notes of volcanic rock, Asian spice, cigar box, clove, orange rind, and the tiniest hint of Brett make this a wine you need to own. A triumphant effort, this is the perfect hypothetical blend of Old and New World. **98 JD, 97 WE, 96 WS, 95 RP, 94 VN**

We finish at a high point with the **2017 Château de Beaucastel Châteauneuf-du-Pape (\$74.99)**, a more traditionally styled Châteauneuf that gives a powerful sense of place with its blend of all 13 distinct grape varieties of the region. The two main grapes are near equal amounts of Grenache and Mourvèdre (which is rare, as Grenache dominates almost all blends in CdP). This beguiling offering sings with red fruits, red licorice, cinnamon, dried herbs, white pepper, and a touch of fresh tomatoes. Both Beaucastel and Pegau show you what the best of Châteauneuf-du-Pape have to offer. **95 JD, 95 DC, 95 WS, 93-95 RP, 93-94 VN**



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