



WINES FROM THE SOUTHERN RHÔNE

Jancis Robinson, the doyenne of wine writers, describes the Southern Rhône as “the region of France’s most user-friendly wines”. It has also long been one of my own favourite wine-and-holiday regions, with its picturesque villages and vineyards in the foothills of Mont Ventoux (famed more for its cycling challenges than its wine). Yet, I realise that in recent years I have tended not to buy or drink as many wines from the Côtes du Rhône as I used to. This month’s column tries to make amends by encouraging us all to explore once again the rich diversity of these flavour-packed, accessible wines.

The AOC Côtes du Rhône includes both the Northern Rhône wines of appellations such as Hermitage, Condrieu and Saint Joseph (where the reds are dominated by Syrah and the whites by Viognier and Marsanne), and the Southern Rhône, which is the focus of this month’s column, where the reds are mainly made from Grenache Noir with Mourvedre and Syrah, as well as Carignan and Cinsault, and the whites from Grenache



Blanc, Clairette, Marsanne, Roussan and Viognier. The diversity of the grape varieties and the terroirs, influenced by the Mediterranean and the Mistral winds, mean that these wines vary considerably depending on both place and producer. To generalise, the reds tend to be high in alcohol, rich in soft fruit, and slightly spicy, and the less common whites are generally dry, well structured and often offer very good value for money. Rosés are also widely made, and fortified sweeter vin doux naturel are produced in Beaumes de Venise (white from Muscat grapes) and Rasteau (red from mainly Grenache Noir) – these are definitely worth getting to know!

Understanding the appellation (AOC) system is helpful for appreciating the quality and the likely price of these wines. The AOC Côtes du Rhône is used for generic, good value basic wines and covers all 172 communes of the Rhône, although most of these wines are produced in the south. A step up is the AOC Côtes du Rhône Villages which is produced in a subset of 95 communes, and has to satisfy tighter requirements; 17 of these can also add their own names on the label, as with two of my favourites from Séguret and Sablet. Above these are the nine crus, best known of which is Châteauneuf-du-Pape, but among which I particularly enjoy those from Gigondas and Vacqueyras.

Châteauneuf-du-Pape, gained its name from the new castle established there by the Avignon-based Popes in the early 14th century, and was the first place in France to implement strict

appellation rules in 1923, largely to combat fraud. Today, 18 grape varieties are permitted, with most of them being red. The resultant wines are elegant, quite powerful, and often have red and black fruit flavours (plum, raspberry and blackberry) with distinctive peppery and mineral notes. Some of the best wines, with prices to match, are those from Château de Beaucastel (owned by the Perrin family), Domaine du Pégau, and Henri Boneau & Fils. Less well known are the mainly red wines from Gigondas and Vacqueyras, but these have increased greatly in both reputation and price in recent years. At their best, they have rich and complex fruit flavours, are full-bodied, high in alcohol and can age well. Many producers here now make their wines organically, and Montirius (located in Sarrians) in particular was a very early adopter of the biodynamic wine-growing approach in 1999. They produce intense wines, full of character and elegance, and if you are in the region it is well worth visiting them to learn more about their holistic approach to wine.

As we head into summer, enjoy these white and rosé wines cooled on a warm evening, and then follow up with the reds which go particularly well with food from the BBQ!

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(please drink responsibly)

LOCAL FAVOURITES

🍷 **La Vieille Ferme Rosé (Famille Perrin, Orange) 2025, 12.5%.** Classic example of a well-made fresh and delicate Southern Rhône rosé made from Cinsault, Grenache and Syrah, with a floral rose bouquet and notes of ripe strawberries (Londis, Trumps Green, £9.99).

🍷 **Sainsbury’s Côtes du Rhône AOC White Wine, Taste the Difference (Caveau Gabriel Meffre, Gigondas) 2024, 12.5%.** Made from Viognier and Grenache Blanc grapes,

this medium bodied refreshing wine has white flower and peach aromas and flavours, with a touch of vanilla (Sainsbury’s, £9.75).

🍷 **Tradition, Séguret Côte du Rhône Villages AOC (Domaine de Mourchon, Séguret) 2023, 14%.** A Grenache-based blend produced biodynamically from organically grown fruit and aged in concrete, this is a deliciously complex, fruit-led and full bodied wine that is long on the finish (Laithwaites, £17.99, **reduced to £16.99 if you bring a copy of this magazine**).

SLIGHTLY FURTHER AFIELD

🍷 **Rasteau Cru des Côtes du Rhône, AOC Edition Limitée (Terroir Daronton) 2022, 14%.** Notes of ripe black fruits blend with aromas from the garrigue scrubland characterise this deep but elegant red wine (Waitrose, £13.50).

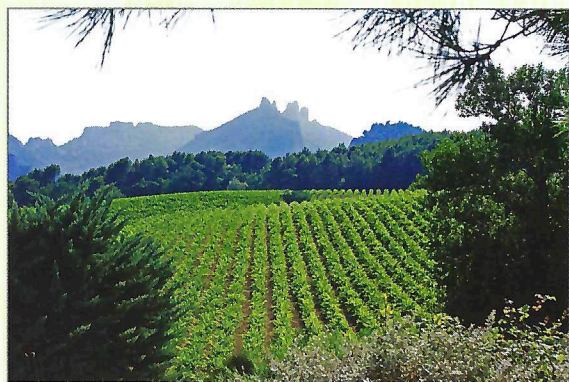
🍷 **Léon Perdigal, Châteauneuf-du-Pape AOC (Caves des Papes, Châteauneuf-du-Pape) 2023, 15%.** This good value rounded wine is lighter than many from the appellation but still an excellent introduction to its style with flavours of red fruit and spices, fine tannins, and some complexity (Majestic £21 mixed six, **reduced to £20 if you bring a copy of this magazine**).

WORTH GOING FURTHER FOR

🍷 **Gigondas Terre des Aînés (Montirius, Gigondas) 2018, 14.5%.** This elegant and complex wine made biodynamically from 80% Grenache and 20% Mourvèdre is one of my favourites. It is characterised by rich plum and black fruits, with warm pepper and spices, a good balance, and fresh elegance from the acidity despite its high levels of alcohol (SipWines, £38.50).

(Wine prices and availability correct at going to press, but are subject to change at short notice)

🍷 **Next issue:** Women in Wine



VINEYARDS BENEATH THE DENTELLES DE MONTMIRAIL