

# RHONE VALLEY WINES

Red River Valley American Wine Society  
Wine Tasting - 12 November 2011



## Aire d'Appellation des Côtes du Rhône

Produits sur 171 communes dans 6 départements  
171 villages in total for the Côtes du Rhône production area

## Les 17 Côtes du Rhône Villages avec nom géographique

95 communes de production pour les Côtes du Rhône Villages avec ou sans nom géographique.  
The 17 Côtes du Rhône Villages bearing a geographical name  
95 Villages in total for the Côtes du Rhône Villages appellation, with and without a geographical name.

## Les 16 Crus des Côtes du Rhône

The 16 Crus of the Rhône Valley

## Les 2 VDN Vins Doux Naturels

2 VDN Vins Doux Naturels (Sweet Wines)

## Les autres appellations de la Vallée du Rhône

The other appellations of the Rhône Valley  
Clairette de Bellegarde, Costières de Nîmes, Côtes du Vivarais  
Grignan-les-Adhémar, Luberon, Ventoux

# RHONE WINES

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The Rhône wine region in Southern France is situated in the Rhône river valley and produces numerous wines under various Appellation d'origine contrôlée (AOC) designations. The region's major appellation in production volume is Côtes du Rhône AOC.

The Rhône is generally divided into two sub-regions with distinct viticultural traditions, the Northern Rhône (referred to in French as Rhône septentrional) and the Southern Rhône (in French Rhône méridional). The northern sub-region produces red wines from the Syrah grape, sometimes blended with white wine grapes, and white wines from Viognier grapes. The southern sub-region produces an array of red, white and rosé wines, often blends of several grapes such as in Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

## History

The first cultivated vines in the region were probably planted around 600 BC. The origins of the two most important grape varieties in the northern Rhone (Syrah and Viognier) are subject to speculation. Some say the Greeks were responsible for bringing the Syrah grape from the Persian city of Shiraz. Others say the grape came 50 years later when Greeks fled from the Persian king Cyrus I. Yet others say the grape came from the Sicilian city of Syracuse, whence circa 280 AD the Romans brought it and the Viognier grape. Meanwhile extensive DNA typing and viticultural research has led scientists to conclude that Syrah originated in the Rhône region itself.

Regardless of origin, when the Romans disappeared so too did interest in the wine of the region.] Rhône reappeared in the 13th century when the Pope moved to Avignon, at which time the production of wine expanded greatly. The wines were traded to such a degree that the Duke of Burgundy banned import and export of non-Burgundian wines. In 1446 the city of Dijon forbade all wines from Lyon, Tournon and Vienne, arguing that they were "très petit et pauvres vins" - very small and miserable wines. The name Côtes du Rhône comes from public administration in the 16th century and was a name of a district in the Gard departement. In 1650, to guard against forgeries a set of rules was passed in an attempt to guarantee the origin of the wine. In 1737 the King decreed that all casks destined for resale should be branded C.D.R. Those were the wines from the area around Tavel, Roquemure, Lirac and Chusclan. Just over 100 years later, wines from other parts of the region were added to the C.D.R definition.].

## Production

The various AOC wines of the Rhône Valley region are produced by over 6,000 wine growing properties including 1,837 private wineries and 103 cooperatives. Those vineyard owners which do not vinify their wines themselves deliver their grapes in bulk either to a winemaking cooperative, of which there are 103 in the region, or sell them to one of the 51 négociants (wine producers and merchants) who blend, distribute, and export on an industrial scale.

## Northern Rhône

The steep hill on which the Hermitage AOC grapes are produced, to the right, stands above the Rhône, on this northward view from the heights of Tournon-sur-Rhône.

The northern Rhône is characterised by a continental climate with harsh winters but warm summers. Its climate is influenced by the mistral wind, which brings colder air from the Massif Central. Northern Rhône is therefore cooler than southern Rhône, which means that the mix of planted grape varieties and wine styles are slightly different. Syrah is the only red grape variety permitted in red AOC wines from this sub-region. The grape, which is believed to have originated in or close to the Rhône region, is also widely known as Shiraz, its name in Australia and much of the English-speaking world, and has recently become very popular with consumers around the world. For wines bearing the Cornas AOC designation, Syrah must be used exclusively, whereas other reds from the northern Rhône sub-region may be blended with white wine grapes, either Viognier or Marsanne and Roussanne, depending on the appellation. However, while this is allowed by the AOC rules, blending with white grapes is widely practiced only for Côte-Rôtie.

Viognier by itself is used for white wines from Condrieu and Château-Grillet. Marsanne and Roussanne are in turn used for the whites from Crozes-Hermitage, Hermitage, Saint Joseph, and Saint Péray.

### **Southern Rhône**

The southern Rhône sub-region has a more Mediterranean climate with milder winters and hot summers. Drought can be a problem in the area, but limited irrigation is permitted. The differing terroirs, together with the rugged landscape which partly protects the valleys from the Mistral, produce microclimates which give rise to a wide diversity of wines. A feature of the cultivation of the region is the use of large pebbles around the bases of the vines to absorb the heat of the sun during the day to keep the vines warm at night when, due to the cloudless skies, there is often a significant drop in temperature.

The southern Rhône's most famous red wine is Châteauneuf-du-Pape, a blend containing up to 13 varieties of wine grapes (eight red and five white) as permitted by the Châteauneuf-du-Pape AOC rules.[5] Other nearby AOC regions including Coteaux du Tricastin AOC, Côtes du Ventoux AOC, Côtes du Vivarais AOC, Lirac AOC, Tavel AOC and Vacqueyras AOC may contain even more varieties in the blend. Gigondas AOC, on the other hand, is predominantly made from Grenache Noir has a more restricted set of permitted grapes. Depending on the specific AOC rules, grapes blended into southern Rhône reds may include Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre, Carignan and Cinsault. The reds from the left bank are full bodied, rich in tannins while young, and are characterized by their aromas of prune, undergrowth, chocolate and ripe black fruit. The right bank reds are slightly lighter and fruitier.

White wines from the southern Rhône sub-region, such as in Châteauneuf-du-Pape whites, are also typically blends of several wine grapes. These may include Ugni Blanc, Roussanne, Bourboulenc, Picpoul, and Clairette. Since about 1998 Viognier is increasingly being used and is also appearing as a single varietal.

Tavel AOC, produced in the special microclimate of the sillon rhodanien (the furrow of the Rhône) by some thirty producers including Château d'Aqueria, Domaine Maby, Domaine de la Mordorée, Domaine Pelaquier, is an elite rosé only, which has been referred to as 'the wine of kings'.

Fortified wines (vin doux naturel) are made in the Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise AOC and Rasteau AOCs.

## **Côtes du Rhône**

Côtes du Rhône AOC is an AOC that covers both the northern and southern sub-regions of Rhône. Typically it is only used if the wine does not qualify for an appellation that can command a higher price. Therefore, almost all Côtes du Rhône AOC is produced in southern Rhône, since the northern sub-region is covered by well-known appellations and also is much smaller in terms of total vineyard surface. This AOC is also used by the commercial blenders (négociants) who buy grapes in bulk from various parts of the region to bottle, distribute, and export on an industrial scale. This nevertheless makes it the most commonly known, produced, and distributed appellation of the region. Produce from vineyards surrounding certain villages including Cairanne, Rasteau and others may be labeled Côtes du Rhône-Villages AOC. Red Côtes du Rhône is usually dominated by Grenache.

## **Other appellations**

Other appellations falling outside the main Rhône area in terms of wine styles but administratively within it are Clairette de Die AOC, Crémant de Die AOC, Coteaux de Tricastin AOC, Côtes du Ventoux AOC, Côtes du Vivarais AOC, Côtes du Luberon AOC. These are more similar to Provence wines. In 2004 ten new appellations were officially added to the Rhône region, 9 in the Gard and one in the Vaucluse, which largely parallel the wines of Southern Rhône proper, while two appellations were discontinued for reasons of reforestation and urban encroachment.

In 2004, Costières de Nîmes AOC, which previously had been counted as part of eastern Languedoc, was also attached to the Rhône wine region. In that year, INAO moved the responsibility for oversight of this appellation's wine to the regional committee of the Rhône valley.[7] Local producers of Côtes du Rhône-styled wines made from Syrah and Grenache lobbied for this change since the local winemaking traditions did not coincide with administrative borders, and presumably due to the greater prestige of Rhône wines in the marketplace. Such changes of borders between wine regions are very rare.

## **Other wines**

Many private wineries also produce wines of their own creation from the available varieties including sparkling and fortified wines, single varietals - particularly from the Syrah grape - and even brandies. These wines however are not usually covered by the rules of a VDQS or AOC, but are nevertheless of excellent quality. They are usually only sold on the premises.

Several wineries produce wines from organically cultivated vines that, provided they comply with the rules for varieties, plant spacing, pruning and maximum yield, are admitted in the AOC.

The excess production of many domains and cooperatives is released as Vin de Pays which are marketed as Vin de Pays du Gard, Vin de Pays de Vaucluse, etc., or are sold to blenders of Wine from the European Union, and mass food distribution for sale as own brands. Excess wines of the lowest quality, Vin de Table, occasionally become part of the wine lake and are reprocessed into industrial alcohol.

## **Classification**

Rhône does not have an official classification using "Grand cru" or similar terms, in difference to Bordeaux or Burgundy. There is however a difference between the Rhône AOCs as to the geographical delineation and naming practices of the various AOCs, which provide a classification into four categories of AOCs:

Côtes du Rhône only displays the region, and may be used in the entire wine region, in 171 communes. For some communes, this is the only allowed AOC. It is therefore the lowest classification for Rhône AOC wine.

Côtes du Rhône-Villages is an AOC allowed for 95 communes, with a higher minimum requirement for grape maturity than basic Côtes du Rhône. It is therefore a higher classification. In general, the appellation does not allow the village name to be displayed.

Côtes du Rhône-Villages together with village name is allowed for 19 communes.

Cru are the 15 named appellations which display only the name of the cru, and not Côtes du Rhône. These include the most famous Rhône wines, such as Hermitage, Côte-Rôtie and Châteauneuf-du-Pape. There is no official classification differentiating between different crus, but the market prices some AOCs much higher than others. Sometimes, individual vineyard names (such as La Landonne within the Côte-Rôtie appellation) are displayed on the labels. Most producers will only do this for top wines, but vineyard-labelled wines enjoy no different official status from other cru wines.

## THE WINES

### **2008 Villard Collines Rhodaniennes Contours Deponcins Viognier**

\$26.98 - Winelibrary.com

90 Points - Wine Spectator

"Superfresh, with mouthwatering green plum, green almond and anise notes laced with an invigorating star fruit edge. The finish is vibrant. Drink now. 765 cases made."

### **2009 Rasteau Cotes du Rhone Villages La Domeliere**

\$17.99 Happy Harry's

90 Points - Wine Spectator

Ripe and well-focused, delivering a dark beam of plum, fig sauce and graphite, laced with hints of lavender and pastis. Very solid, with nice buried acidity holding the finish together. Drink now through 2011. 6,000 cases made. 70% Grenache, 20% Syrah, 10% Mourvedre.

### **2009 Calendal Cotes Du Rhone Rouge Plan de Dieu**

\$25.98 - Winelibrary.com

92 Points - Robert Parker (Wine Advocate)

"One of my favorite value choices over recent vintages, the 2009 Plan de Dieu Cotes du Rhone-Villages looks to be sensational, perhaps even eclipsing the 2007 in terms of intensity, richness, and power. A blend of equal parts Grenache and Mourvedre from very old, organically farmed vines, the wine is aged in neutral wood prior to being bottled unfiltered. Its dense ruby/purple color is followed by aromas of boysenberries, pepper, incense, and fruit. Full-

bodied with a lush, opulent texture, superb purity and depth, and abundant power and richness, it is a big (15+% alcohol) as well as rich, pure, elegant red that should be consumed over the next 2-4 years."

### **2007 Vignerons De Caractere Vacqueyras Chemin Des Rouviere**

\$21.99 Happy Harry's

90 Points - Wine Spectator

"Dark and winey, with a pure beam of dark fig and blackberry fruit laced with cocoa powder, Black Forest cake and espresso notes. Stays pure and driven through the solid, well-structured finish. Grenache, Syrah and Mourvèdre. Best from 2010 through 2015. 10,000 cases made."

"Bright red. Strikingly complex nose displays vivid red berries, garrigue and dried flowers. Sweet but tightly wound redcurrant and strawberry flavors are complemented by candied lavender and rose, with silky tannins lending support. Leaves a zesty note of white pepper behind on the briskly refreshing, persistent finish. The blend here is 70% grenache, 20% syrah and 10% mourvedre." -90 points- Josh Raynolds- International Wine Cellar

### **2009 Chateau Pesque Quintessence**

\$21.98 - Winelibrary.com

93 Points - Robert Parker (Wine Advocate)

"The 2010 Terrasses actually eclipses their top cuvee, the 2009 Quintessence, which has just been released. This is a serious wine on its own, and certainly capable of lasting a decade or more, but the vintage quality of 2010 has produced remarkable fruit, with the best concentration and purity of fruit that I have seen in the southern Rhone since 2007, which remains the single greatest vintage I have ever tasted from that region. This blend of 80% Syrah and 20% Grenache, aged in barrels for 12 months (40% new and 60% two years old) and bottled unfinned and unfiltered, has a dense purple color and deep licorice, graphite, black currant and black cherry notes with hints of earth and spice as well as some pepper and meat juice in a dense, medium to full-bodied, slightly more tannic style than the 2010 Terrasses. To reiterate, it should last for at least a decade." 93 points Robert Parker

#### **WINE:**

"Paul and Edith Chaudière chose the name 'Quintessence' to highlight the superiority, concentration, and careful selection of both the oldest vines (Grenache over 50) and the best vintages of production. The grapes are selected, crushed, and destemmed. They obtain optimal color extraction after a twenty-one day maceration with traditional air pumpover. In 2000, initial experiments with malolactic winemaking in oak barrels yielded encouraging results. This technique was put into general use in 2001. This particular wine is aged twelve months in new oak barrels: 40% of which are new and 60% of which have been used one or two times previously. Bottled at the Chateau." -Winery

#### **WINERY:**

"In 1985, Paul and Edith Chaudiere left their jobs in private industry (she was a voice therapist and he was a physical therapist) to study wine at one of France's top wine universities at Suze la Rousse. 1989 marked the creation of the property in Mormoiron, one of the tiny villages dotting the beautiful countryside under the Mont Ventoux. Since then,

they have been pushing the quality envelope in the zone, forcing other growers to raise quality as well. The name 'Pesquie' comes from old Provencal (which by the way is still spoken by a few people in the area) and means a 'water basin' (the property is built on the site of an old pond.) The wines from Pesquie are some of the best values in the EC portfolio and would be double the price if grown just 20 minutes away in more 'known' appellations." -Winery

**2010 Château Pesquie Les Terrasses**

\$13.99 - Winelibrary.com

94 Points - Robert Parker (Wine Advocate)

"The 2010 from Pesquie Terrasses, one of my all-time favorite producers in France, is a phenomenal bargain. This wine is absolutely stunning, and the best one they have made to date, and is a brilliant showcase for what looks to be another great vintage in the southern Rhone. A blend of 70% Grenache and 30% Syrah, with 65% aged in tank and the rest in old barrels and foudres, it is bottled unfinned and unfiltered for the American market. It's just terrific, and the good news is that there are 7,000 cases, which is a rarity in this business – finding something spectacular in quality, low in price, with excellent availability. Its stunning dense bluish/purple color offers up notes of sweet blueberries, black cherry liqueur, licorice, incense, and a hint of hot rocks (almost gravelly, in the Bordeaux sense), but the wine hits the palate with amazing texture, succulence, fabulous fruit intensity, vivid purity and a vigorous, long, fresh finish that goes on past 30 seconds. Amazing for a \$15 wine, it can probably be found discounted at \$12-13. Drink it over the next 3-4 years."

**2005 Saint Jean Du Barroux L'oligocene**

\$21.98 - Winelibrary.com

91 Points - Robert Parker (Wine Advocate)

"The 2005 Cotes de Ventoux is a gorgeous blend of 75% Grenache, 15% Syrah, and the rest Carignan and Cinsault. The wine's bouquet is reminiscent of a great Cote Rotie even though the Syrah component is small and no Viognier is utilized. Exotic floral aromas intermixed with blackberry and cherry fruit jump from the glass. In the mouth, the wine is soft, velvety, medium to full-bodied, pure, elegant, and exotic. Drink this beauty over the next 4-5 years. Former pharmacist Philippe Gimel uses a combination of organic and biodynamic farming methods in this vineyard."

**2007 Patrick Lesec Les Galets Blonds Chateauneuf Du Pape**

\$49.98 - Winelibrary.com

94 Points - Robert Parker (Wine Advocate)

"The 2007 Chateauneuf du Pape Les Galets Blonds includes 90% Grenache from nearly 100-year-old vines blended with 10% Syrah from the renowned sector in the eastern part of the appellation known as Le Crau. This brilliant offering displays black raspberry, black cherry, floral, forest floor, underbrush, and cassis characteristics along with superb concentration, an opaque purple color, a gorgeously intense, multidimensional mouthfeel, and a sensational finish. I have long been a big fan of this cuvee, having bought and cellared vintages from the late nineties through 2001, and those wines took 3-4 years to develop, and are aging beautifully. The 2007 is potentially one of the best Lesec has yet made. It should drink well for 10-15 years."

### **2007 Bosquet Des Papes Cuvée Chante Le Merle Châteauneuf Du Pape**

\$59.98 - Winelibrary.com

95 Points - Robert Parker (Wine Advocate)

"The 2007 Châteauneuf du Pape Chante Le Merle Vieilles Vignes comes from extremely old vines (90-100 years of age), includes 100% whole clusters, and was aged in both neutral foudres and demi-muids. Exhibiting the deepest color as well as the greatest concentration of this quartet, it appears to be the finest example of this cuvée since the prodigious 1990. Terrific notes of licorice, incense, seaweed wrappers, black raspberries, blackberries, and cherries are present in the incredibly complex aromatic display. Deep and full-bodied with lots of roasted herb and meat juice-like characteristics, this big, extravagantly rich, full-bodied wine possesses silky tannins as well as a finish that lasts nearly 50 seconds. It should drink well for two decades."

### **2007 Vieille Julienne Châteauneuf Du Pape**

\$59.98 - Winelibrary.com

95 Points - Robert Parker (Wine Advocate)

"While the beautiful 2007 Châteauneuf du Pape is already accessible, it will benefit from 2-3 years of cellaring, and should last for two decades or more. It exhibits an inky/ruby/purple color, a great texture, and a gorgeous nose of boysenberries, blueberries, blackberries, acacia flowers, licorice, and incense. There is wonderful freshness and vibrancy (because of the good acids) as well as a terrific finish. Jean-Paul Dauman is one of a handful of Châteauneuf du Pape proprietors who believes his 2005s are better than what he produced in 2007, and I find it difficult to disagree relative to this estate's wines. True lovers of Châteauneuf du Pape will probably want to have both vintages in their cellars."

"I reviewed the 2007 Domaine de la Vieille Julienne Châteauneuf-du-Pape in Issue #1, and this bottle was consistent with that review. One of the top successes in the vintage, this goes from strength to strength with stunning aromatics and a blockbuster palate that delivers full bodied power, yet is light, perfectly balanced and incredibly long. I'm a huge fan and this should be a long lived Châteauneuf." -97 Points - Jeb Dunnuck - The Rhone Report