



The Guigal Chateau d'Ampuis

PHOTO: COURTESY OF E. GUIGAL CHATEAU D'AMPUIS

Lyon and Northern Rhône, Part 1

ON JUNE 24, 2015 we left our hotel by bus and went to the Gare de Lyon. We boarded the Très Grande Vitesse (TGV) midmorning and had an enjoyable two-plus-hour trip to Lyon traversing the bucolic countryside. The undulating hills and valleys were dotted regularly with small herds of cows. Arriving in Lyon, we transferred to our hotel, Cour des Loges, and were on our own for lunch. My wife, Pat, and I joined Denice and Milton Johnson at Daniel & Denise for one of France's greatest gourmet treats—Poulet de Bresse. These chickens are very rare, expensive, and much admired by gourmards, especially in France, and have the reputation of being the best quality table chicken in the world, after having been awarded an “Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée” (AOC) in 1957. These chickens are produced only from white birds of the Bresse breed in an area 25 by 60 miles in size just north of Lyon, and represent only .1 percent of total chicken production in France.

We started with the ‘obligatory’ foie gras which was well-matched by the sweetness of a bottle of 2012 Baumard Domaine des Coteaux de Lyon

Carte d'Or. The Poulet de Bresse was served with a rich “supreme” sauce loaded with morels, which was perfectly accompanied by two bottles of 2013 Savigny-lès-Beaune (Red Burgundy) by Dubois Bernard et Fils. We finished with coffee and a creme caramel dessert.

After a short walk back to the hotel, some went for a walking tour of old Lyon, while others rested. Dinner that night was at the hotel in a private dining room. We started with Champagne from Billecart-Salmon. Our appetizers were fruits and vegetables served both raw and cooked, along with fresh cheese with honey and olive oil. This, as well as the next course, was served with a 2014 Saint-Joseph Blanc from Domaine Boissonnet. The wine was unctuous, medium-rich, and paired well with this course, as well as the Arctic char which was lightly smoked with rosemary accompanied by a wild garlic coulis.

Our duck foie gras was accompanied by sliced onions and roots cooked in an orange sauce. The accompanying wine was from the small appellation in the Loire called Savennières and was the medium-sweet version from 2011 Domaine aux

Moines, which was perfect with the foie gras.

The main course was a filet of veal served with crunchy bread with mushrooms and spicy fruits. The wine of choice with the veal was a medium-bodied Burgundy from the Marsannay appellation produced by Charlopin-Parizot. We enjoyed the 2009 and 2010 vintages. Both vintages showed well with the superior 2010 showing longer potential life. The 2009 was already smooth and resolved with overtones of light cherry.

The cheese course also paired well with the



Pat and Jim Bryant at Daniel & Denise in Lyon.

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Marsannays. The next course was seasonal fruit paired with a superb 2013 Austrian Gewürztraminer produced by Landauer Weingutshof. This was less aggressive than most Gewürztraminers. Its subdued sweetness and nose resulted in a very balanced wine which proved perfect with the fruit.

We finished with a “Grand Cru Chocolate Variation.” The assorted chocolates were paired with a liqueur wine named Commandaria. This exotic wine from Cyprus is produced from the Xynisteri (white) and Mavro (red) wine grapes. It is an amber-colored sweet dessert wine and went well with the chocolates. After this four-hour memorable meal and wines of plenty, we retired to prepare for the impending Rhône adventure.

On Thursday morning, we had an hour and a half bus ride to Guigal in the town of Ampuis. During this scenic ride spent along the Rhône

River, we started our collective affair with our guide, Laurence Minard-Amalou. Although she met us at the train in Lyon and joined us for dinner, on the drive we had more time to fall under her spell! We were so lucky to be able to spend four days and evenings with her.

Our first stop at Guigal was an extra special treat in that it is, as of January 2015, off limits to all but wine professionals. We were welcomed in part as several of our guests had previously been invited to visit, and also in part from the well-received article I wrote in *Quintessential Barrington* in March/April of 2014. We had an extensive tour of both the old and new cellars with time to admire the caches of the famous La La’s—La Landonne, La Turque, and La Mouline, which are among the world’s rarest and greatest wines. Our degustation involved multiple wines, but a few words here about the three of them should suffice to describe this splendid experience.

We started with a rare white wine, the 2013 Guigal Condrieu La Doriane, first made in 1994. This wine is made from 100 percent Viognier grapes, and along with two other producers’ top wines, represent the pinnacle of Viognier. It is redolent of white flowers, peaches, and tangerines, and has great depth and richness. It shows greater acidity than in previous years, which hopefully will allow longer aging.

The reds were many, but the 2010 Côte-Rôtie Brune et Blonde represents the best value of the



A tasting table at Guigal.

appellation in most years. Côte-Rôtie translates as ‘roasted slope’ in English. Made from the Syrah grape, it is a powerful wine with bacon fat and smoke overtones. In addition, the wine aromas and flavors include Asian spices, black pepper, anise, and wild game attributes. It is enjoyable now after decanting, but will age for two decades easily. The wine I loved most was the 2009 Côte-Rôtie Château d’Ampuis. This wine locally retails for \$120-150, or double the Côte Rôtie Brune et Blonde, but at a small fraction of the La La’s (\$500-800) depending on the vintage at release. It is everything that the little brother is, but bigger. The powerful wine is tannic yet racy, and shows smoothness from the long oak aging which however is not intrusive. It is redolent of black fruits, is a marvel to sip, and will be a world-class wine particularly with appropriate foods such as prime rib, steak au poivre, or rack of lamb for decades to come. Kudos to Guigal for such a memorable experience. A Votre Santé! 🍷



The wines enjoyed during a dinner at Cour des Loges in Lyon, France.



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

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