



Château de Rochegude in France.

More Rhône Adventures

FOLLOWING THE DEGUSTATION at Guigal and at Chapoutier, with the ensuing lunch we went to a memorable Rhône wine tasting at Compagnie de l'Hermitage. (The first article in the Rhône series can be found online at www.qbarrington.com in the Jan/Feb 2016 issue.)

The list of wines below represent some of the very greatest Rhône wines.

Compagnie de l'Hermitage

Grands Cuvées de l'Hermitage

Ermitage, Domaine Laurent Habrard-blanc (2012)

L'Hermitage, Domaine Jean Louis Chave-blanc (2012)

L'Hermitage, Domaine Jean Louis Chave-rouge (2011)

Hermitage, Domaine du Colombier-rouge (2009)

Hermitage, "Le Gréal", Domaine Marc Sorrel-rouge (2001)

Ermitage, "Le Pavillon", M. Chapoutier-rouge (1999)

Hermitage, "La Chapelle", Paul Jaboulet Ainé-rouge (1988)

Grand Cuvées de la Vallée du Rhône

Condrieu, "Coteaux du Vernon", Georges Vernay-blanc (2013)

Châteauneuf du Pape, "Hommage à Jacques Perrin",

Château de Beaucastel (2005)

Châteauneuf du Pape, Château Rayas-rouge (2003)

Cornas, Auguste Clape-rouge (2009)

L'Hermitage, Domaine Jean Louis Chave-rouge (2011)

Ermitage, L'Ermite, M. Chapoutier-rouge (1999)

Côte Rôtie, "Château d'Ampuis", Maison E. Guigal-rouge (1996)

In the interest of brevity, I will review only the highlights of highlights. L'Hermitage, Domaine Jean Louis Chave-blanc (2012) is made from 80 percent Marsanne and 20 percent Roussane. It is almost overwhelming when tasted young. It has great precision and definition with notes of beeswax, honeysuckle, pear, citrus, orange, and minerality. Very full-bodied, it is almost decadently rich and fruit forward. While enjoyable now, it will improve for two to three decades.

The L'Hermitage Jean Louis Chave-rouge (2011) is one of the greatest expressions of Syrah. It is very dense, highly-perfumed, and concentrated. A benchmark for Syrah, this is a wine which must be tasted by any serious wine aficionado. The nose of cassis and black pepper is laced with spices and shows great minerality. It will improve over the next decade and last for several more.

The Ermitage, L'Ermite, M. Chapoutier-rouge (1999) provided a good contrast to the previous wine due to the 12 years of additional age. Also from one of the greatest Rhône producers, the wine was almost black in color with overtones of black fruit and spices. The tannins, although much in evidence, were somewhat mellowed by time but will ensure further five to six decades of age.

We were extremely fortunate to taste the Cornas, Auguste Clape-rouge (1999). Many believe that Cornas is the most masculine wine in the world and Auguste Clape is its best producer. This vintage is also thought to be among his best efforts. These 100 percent Syrah wines age seemingly forever, but are interesting to taste young if properly decanted. The wine is dark with black and red fruits and austere, firm tannins—a textbook reference for Cornas.

Châteauneuf du Pape, Hommage à Jacques Perrin, Chateau de Beaucastel (2005) is a classic example of one of the greatest Châteauneuf du Papes ever made. It is produced only in exceptional years in honor of the current owners' father, Jacques Perrin. It differs from the traditional cuvée mainly in the high percentage of Mourvèdre (usually 60 percent or more). It is dark black-ruby in color, extremely concentrated, and complex with a great nose of gaminess, leather, cassis, spices, and herbs. This was a life event to taste such a wine and it will keep

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Wines tasted at Côteaux & Fourchettes restaurant later, at dinner.

for decades.

For a contrast, we tasted the **Châteauneuf du Pape**, **Château Rayas-rouge** (2003). This wine is very rare also and is made from 100 percent Grenache. As a result, it is not as complex as the former wine, but is often described as more Burgundian in style. It has a luxurious mouth feel and a very perfumed nose. It likewise is capable of long-term aging. My only comment is that after liberal pours of 12 of the greatest Northern Rhône and two of the greatest Southern Rhône, we boarded the bus for our 12th century renovated castle, Rochegude near Orange. The two-hour trip was a somnolent affair for most, but a few hearty souls drank the remaining wines from the last tasting. Given the estimated average price of \$250 per bottle for the seven half-full bottles, some named it the most expensive wine road trip ever.

When we arrived, the bus slowly snaked its way to the château. Little did we realize that due to the difficulty in threading the small streets, it was the last time until the departure in three days that the bus would make the trip. Oh well—with all the food and wine on this trip, more exercise was better than less. Thankfully given the day's excess food and wine to this point, we had arranged to have dinner at the château.

Dinner was a relatively somber affair as a result

of our tiredness. The soup was zucchini vichyssoise, flavored with Chantilly cream with shellfish and saffron. This was served with the Côtes du Rhône Grignan les Adhémer, Le Rosé de Grange Neuve 2013. The appetizer was pan-fried large shrimp with mashed avocado and vinaigrette sauce accompanied by a Châteauneuf du Pape



A dinner was held outside at Château de Rochegude.

Blanc, **Domaine Tour Saint Michel** 2013. The main course was a supreme of guinea fowl with morels and green asparagus paired with a Châteauneuf-du-Pape Rouge from Château La Gardine 2012. After the dessert of coconut and mango, it was off to rest up for the next day.

After breakfast at the château, we walked through the small village to board the bus and then went to Orange to see the ancient Roman gate and amphitheater. From there our next stop was at **Domaine du Pegäü**, one of my favorite Châteauneuf-du-Pape producers. The visit brought back fond memories of a previous visit when Paul Féraud introduced us via a barrel sample to the 2000 Pegäü de Capo, the estate's top wine. This previous visit proved especially fruitful, as I was able to obtain both a 750 ml and a 1.5 L of the first year's (1998) production of this wine, which has always been rated as perfect by critics.

After a short tour of the production facilities and cellar, we started the Château Pegäü degustation with the Côtes du Rhône 2014 Cuvée, which is produced from a recently acquired property. It was fresh, vibrant, and served well as the first wine of the day. It was followed by the more serious Châteauneuf-du-Pape Blanc Cuvée. This wine had heft and promised more sophistication with bottle age. Next came the YSIG Pink 2014 which was fairly typical of French rosés, plenty of fresh

red berry fruit made in a bone dry fashion. After serving two special red 2012 Côtes-du-Rhône, the Cuvée Maclura and the Villages Rouge Cuvée Sétier, both of which were excellent examples of Côtes-du-Rhône, we finished with the main estate wine, the Châteauneuf-du-Pape Rouge 2012 Cuvée Reservée. This wine is produced every year and the estate does a superb job, usually producing one of the region's best wines. It is a sophisticated blend of 75 percent Grenache, 20 percent Syrah, and 5 percent of the other varieties permitted in Châteauneuf-du-Pape. The 2012 is generally thought to be one of the best Châteauneuf-du-Papes of this very good vintage. A medium- to full-body wine, it's nose finds black pepper, dark fruits, smoke, and Provencal herbs with sufficient minerality to ensure longevity for 10-20 years. Father Paul and daughter Laurence Féraud are a formidable team, tending the 42 acres of red A.O.C. and 2.5 acres of white A.O.C. (appellation d'origine contrôlée). (More than a third of all French wine and all of its best wine is AOC. For each appellation, strict regulations control the area included, which grape varieties may be planted, how they should be pruned, maximum yields, when the harvest may begin, minimum grape ripeness levels and/or alcoholic strength, and even how the wine should be made.) Although both Paul and Lawrence are accomplished wine makers, Laurence takes the lead and together they produce about 5,500 cases of wine annually. This visit was a great introduction to Châteauneuf-du-Pape. À Votre Santé! 🍷



Barrington resident Jim Bryant is pursuing his passion and love of wine as an international wine consultant. This follows a 30-year career in senior financial and general management positions at two Fortune 100 companies. He is the owner of James R. Bryant L.L.C.; contact him at profwino@comcast.net.



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