

WINE News

From the Rhône Valley to Provence, the Luberon through the Languedoc and Roussillon, the Midi has options galore to explore and enjoy.



APRIL 7, 2014 FEATURES

- 2 The Rhône Valley: 2011 and 2012 Vintage Reports
- 3 2013 Rosé and Jean-Louis Denois, Star of the Languedoc
- 4 2012 Pre-Arrivals from the Northern and Southern Rhône

The South of France and Beyond

By *Mulan Chan-Randel*

Are you ready for a vinous adventure through the South of France? From the Rhône Valley to Provence, the Luberon through the Languedoc and Roussillon, the Midi has options galore to explore and enjoy. This newsletter guides you through our vast selection of new and noteworthy wines, with insider tips and tales along the way. On the next page, you will find my vintage reports for the 2011-2012 season in the Northern and Southern Rhône, in which I offer insight and advice on collecting and enjoying these wines now and in the future. If 2012 Pre-Arrivals are what you're after, jump to page four, where Wine Club director Alex Pross lists his top picks from our extensive selection of grand wines from the Northern and Southern Rhône currently available for purchase. Before doing that, however, let me take you on a trip through the Midi! Below, I've highlighted five everyday drinking values that speak to the diverse range of styles the Midi has to offer. These are not to be missed! And, on page three, San Francisco's John Majeski waxes poetic on the wines from our favorite Languedoc vigneron, the talented Jean-Louis Denois, while Redwood City's Angie An shares insight and pairing ideas for the season's freshest rosés, just in time for the warm weather and longer days ahead. *Allons-y!*

A TRIP THROUGH THE MIDI *Five Wines to Try Now*



2012 Château Font-Mars Picpoul de Pinet (\$11.99) The go-to wine to accompany shellfish and *fruits de mer* when dining along the Mediterranean, Picpoul literally means "lip stinger," a reference to its high acidity. This rendition is crisp and bright, with subtle floral and mineral notes.

2013 Domaine Begude Sauvignon Blanc Vin de Pays d'Oc* (\$12.99) From high in the foothills of the Pyrenees, this elegant and crisp Sauvi-

gnon Blanc is organically certified and has a fine, mineral-laden nose with fresh citrus on the palate. Reminiscent of Sancerre, it's perfect with grilled fish, oysters or just by itself.

Antech "Emotion" Crémant de Limoux Brut Rosé* (\$14.99) This delightfully crisp and elegant sparkler from the Languedoc is pale pink in hue with a fine bead and delicate hints of cherry and strawberry and white floral notes. It is brilliant served as an *apéritif* or with sashimi, Chinese or Thai cuisine.

2011 Les Clos Perdus "Le Rouge" Vin de Pays des Côtes Catalanes* (\$13.99) Paul Old and Hugo Stewart have produced this hearty and

flavorful red from off-the-beaten-path vineyards not far from the Franco-Spanish border. It is composed of 65% Mourvèdre and 35% Grenache and is certified organic. *Delish!*

2011 Montirius "La Muse Papilles" Côtes du Rhône* (\$13.99) A certified biodynamic Côtes du Rhône bottling from 25-year-old vines made by a noted fifth-generation producer of Gigondas and Vacqueyras, this blend of 80% Grenache and 20% Syrah is fruit-forward and invigorating. It sees no oak, but the wine is aged in cement vats, allowing for a lively profile of cherry, raspberry, and earth.

—*Mulan Chan-Randel*

The Rhône Valley: 2011 and 2012 Vintage Reports

By *Mulan Chan-Randel*

2011 Southern Rhône Vintage Report

Freshness and accessibility are the key traits of many wines from the 2011 vintage in the Southern Rhône.

A very warm and dry spring contributed to a healthy fruit set all around. Thankfully, *coulure*—the condition of grapes failing to develop after flowering, which greatly affected Grenache in 2010—was not a problem in 2011. The region experienced rainfall during the month of July, but the *Mistral* wind helped alleviate any potential issues concerning excessive moisture or rot. The situation changed towards the end of August, as temperatures began to climb throughout the region. Consequently, more precocious varieties like Syrah and Cinsault were prone to uneven ripening; the extreme heat contributed to vines “shutting down” or failing to ripen evenly in many cases. Late-ripening varieties like Mourvèdre and Counoise fared better in this regard, with Grenache falling in the middle.

In general, the 2011 vintage is one to be enjoyed in the short and mid-term, rather than for long-term cellaring. The wines are lighter in body, and bright and charming fruit is a common theme for the vintage. Though less intense than 2009 or 2010, the 2011s are accessible, balanced and undeniably fun to drink. I plan to enjoy them now and over the next several years while I wait for my 2007s and 2010s to age in the cellar.

2011 Northern Rhône Vintage Report

Classicism and varietal correctness are the hallmark traits of the 2011 vintage in the Northern Rhône. Enthusiasts looking for elegant and mineral-driven Syrah-based wines need look no further!

A very warm spring in the Northern Rhône facilitated flowering that put the season ahead of schedule by approximately 10 days. When June and July rolled around, however, cooler and wetter weather ensued and the growing season returned to a more normal pattern. Temperatures again warmed up in August, promoting ripening, but rains in early September led to some dilution and, in some cases, rot. Careful *triage* was therefore necessary to ensure clean, quality fruit.

Northern Rhône whites made from fruit harvested before the September rains—and after the warm temperatures of August—are, for the most part, big and rich. The reds are pretty and bright, without the brawn of the 2009s nor the intensity and precision of the 2010s. Like the Southern Rhône, the 2011s are perfect candidates to enjoy in the near to mid-term while you wait for the two preceding vintages to come of age.

2012 Southern Rhône Vintage Report

The 2012 vintage marks a return to form for the Southern Rhône, with wines displaying admirable intensity, balance and structure.

The year started off with a very cold and dry winter followed by significant frost in February. Unseasonably cool and rainy weather through spring led to late and uneven flowering throughout the region. Fortunately, the summer months were essentially dry and sunny with no major rainstorms or meteorological incidents



The famous stone-laden vineyards of Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

reported. However, in many instances the vines were not able to fully catch up from their initial late start. Different varieties ripened at wildly different times and fruit on the same vine showed dramatic variation in ripeness. Multiple passes through the vineyard and careful sorting were therefore necessary, making 2012 a very labor-intensive vintage.

The quality of 2012 is best evidenced in the finished wines of those vigneronns who put in the time and effort at harvest. However, in terms of overall quality, it might be helpful to think of 2012 as a little brother to the grand 2010 vintage. The wines are a notch less intense, yet show admirable balance, acidity and fine tannic structure. It should be noted that while the Southern Rhône is overwhelmingly red wine country, 2012 was an outstanding year for the whites. Most 2012s can be enjoyed young; however, more special bottlings certainly have the potential to age well, too.

The 2012 vintage marks a return to form for the Southern Rhône, with wines displaying admirable intensity, balance and structure.

2012 Northern Rhône Vintage Report

The Northern Rhône experienced a very cold winter in 2012, followed by a wet and atypically cool spring. Similar to its neighbor to the south, a poor and late fruit set contributed to a reduction in overall yields for the vintage. The summer months were consistently warm and relatively dry, up through harvest time. While the second half of the growing season proved favorable, a late start in growth due to the cool, wet spring translated to vines that did not experience the optimum growing season in which to mature to their potential.

Overall, the 2012s are fresh, bright and clean wines, with more forward fruit charm than the regal 2010s (albeit with less intensity and focus) and greater intensity than the 2011s. For the most part, mid-term aging is recommended. These are ideal candidates for consumption while you wait for the 2010s or 2009s to come of age.

IT'S ROSÉ SEASON! *Your Perfect Warm Weather Friend*

The reputation of rosé in the United States has come a long way since the cheap and cheesy “blush” wines of decades past. Europeans have relished rosés for centuries, but we are just finally catching on stateside. More imported and domestically produced rosés are available than ever before, and many are taking center stage in leading restaurants, wine bars and wine shops. Why? One word: *versatility*.

Style options and pairing possibilities for rosé are virtually endless. Served chilled, rosés promise the refreshment and aromatics associated with many white wines, but display the complexity and palate weight similar to many light reds. They can also serve as a bridge between the two. As a former sommelier in an Asian Fusion fine dining restaurant, I know that rosé can save the day when pairing wines with exotic dishes. Consider the nuanced flavors and textures of a Kobe beef salad or fresh Hamachi sashimi with spicy and savory ponzu notes. Rosé is your answer! However, what really makes rosé wines so versatile is that most can just be enjoyed just as easily on their own. If you're overwhelmed by the choices, or slightly skeptical and don't know where to start, come on down to K&L and let us help you pick out the perfect rosé to kick off your spring.

Here are two of my shining star recommendations that are in stock and available now.

2013 Domaine Begude Pinot Noir Vin de Pays d'Oc Rosé* (\$12.99)

Nothing gets me into “vacation mode” faster than a sip of this. Light, crisp and refreshing, this 100% Pinot Noir rosé leads with aromas of tangy cherry, wild rose and raspberry, followed by chalky mineral

notes. It is clean and focused on the palate, with a zippy finish. Fun and easy to drink, it's perfect on a warm summer day with grilled fish or a light sandwich.

2013 Domaine Fontaine “Gris de Gris” Corbières Rosé (\$14.99)

When I describe a wine, I like to personalize it. This wine reminds me of a beautiful young woman that is at once delicate and poised. An elegant nose welcomes with aromas of strawberry, pink tulip, lily and soft, sweet cherry. The palate is juicy, with candied flavors that are kept in perfect balance by fresh acidity. So pretty!

This is just the beginning of a great rosé season, with many more arriving soon, including:

2013 Domaine Dragon Côtes de Provence Rosé* (\$13.99)

Strawberry and peach—quintessential Provence.

2013 Abbaye Saint Hilaire Coteaux Varois en Provence Rosé (\$13.99)

2013 Domaine de la Bastide Blanche Bandol Rosé (\$22.99)

2013 Château Grande Cassagne Costières de Nîmes Rosé (\$10.99)

2013 Cuvée de Peñya Vin de Pays des Côtes Catalanes Rosé (\$9.99)

2013 Cave de Tavel “Lauzeraies” Tavel (\$13.99)

Visit KLWines.com to shop our complete rosé selection.



—Angie An

JEAN-LOUIS DENOIS *The Winds of Wine*

Everyone has heard the legend: gazing too long at the full moon can produce strange behavior, turning those afflicted into misbegotten, half-mad beasts with excess body hair who threaten grazing cattle, skittish sheep and small, quivering house pets, happy to prey upon the weak and innocent. But in the vast and picturesque Languedoc wine region, it isn't the moon that many find maddening, but the (shiver me timbers) wind. Or, rather, winds, from the brutal, cold *Tramontane* to the sultry *Cers*. It is in this windiest, sunniest part of southern France that one of our favorite winemakers, Jean-Louis Denois, sought out the very highest, coolest sites in the upper Aude Valley over three decades ago to plant his vines. Meticulous to a degree rarely found in a region long known for vast quantities of quaffable *vin de table*, Denois invoked from the beginning an unwavering, sustainable sensibility in his estate vineyards, which have been certified organic since 2009 (with a move towards full biodynamic underway since 2012). He farms in three separate sites, each with specific soils, altitudes and exposures conducive to the variety and style of wine sought. Recently, Denois has begun producing his traditional sparkling whites, rosés, and elegant reds without the use of added sulfites.

The glories of Champagne aside, did you know that the first sparkling wines originated in the Limoux region in the 15th century? To honor that tradition we currently carry three wonderful sparkling

wines from Denois, all incredible values. The **Jean-Louis Denois Brut “Tradition”*** (\$14.99), made from 50% Pinot Noir and 50% Chardonnay, engages the palate with classic toasty notes of brioche, apple and citrus, ballasted by a beautiful, creamy mousse and a clean finish. Its complement, the **Jean-Louis Denois Crémant de Limoux*** (\$14.99), is an irresistibly refreshing yet sophisticated sparkler in a low-dosage style that offers an enticing and satisfying array of quince, apple and pear, touched with lovely acidity. Finally, the **Jean-Louis Denois Pinot Noir Brut Rosé*** (\$14.99), is a festive, dry pink for all your parties that delivers generous and juicy flavors of strawberries, watermelon and spice, with a lingering mousse to delight the eye.

Moving to the red spectrum, the **2010 Jean-Louis Denois “Grand Cuvée” Limoux*** (\$14.99) is Denois' flagship wine. Crafted entirely from organic fruit, this Bordeaux blend conveys expressive aromas of blackberry, black plum and mocha, with hints of violet and lavender on the palate, rounded out by suave tannins. How he gets away with this much wine at this price is beyond me! Lastly, the **2010 Jean-Louis Denois “Chloe” Limoux*** (\$19.99) pays subtle homage to St-Émilion, with mountain-cultivated Merlot dominating the blend in a medium-bodied wine of elegance, texture and charm. Black cherry, plum and fruitcake flavors meld into graceful, layered tannins that hold the promise of time.

—John Majeski

2012 Rhône Valley: Greatness Again!

By Alex Pross

The Rhône Valley has been blessed by more great vintages in recent history than any other classic region of France. The 2012 vintage is no exception. It resembles 2010, but with a bit less tannin and a tad more fruit and focus. This is a vintage worth owning and we have numerous 2012s available at unbelievable prices on a Pre-Arrival (PA) basis.

Five Values Under \$35

Here are five great bargains from two top-notch producers in Gigondas and Rasteau—not to be missed!

2012 Domaine Grand Nicolet “Vieilles Vignes” Rasteau (PA \$19.99) 91-93 points RP.

2012 Domaine Grand Nicolet “Les Esqueyrons” Rasteau (PA \$29.99) 93-95 points RP.

2012 Domaine St. Damien “Vieilles Vignes” Gigondas (PA \$29.99) 92-94 points RP and 90-92 points ST.

2012 Domaine St. Damien “La Louisiane” Gigondas (PA \$34.99) 93-95 points RP and 91-93 points ST.

2012 Domaine St. Damien “Les Souteyrades” Gigondas (PA \$34.99) 92-94 points RP and 92-94 points ST.

2012 Châteauneuf-du-Pape: 10 Must-Buy Wines

While prices soar for top-tier wines in other classic regions of France, you can still acquire wines from leading producers in Châteauneuf-du-Pape for around \$100 or less.

2012 Olivier Hillaire Châteauneuf-du-Pape (PA \$39.99) 93-95 points RP: “Fruit-loaded and a hedonistic dream...Count me a fan.”

2012 Le Vieux Donjon Châteauneuf-du-Pape (PA \$49.99) 91-94 points RP and 92-94 points ST.

2012 Bosquet des Papes “Chante le Merle Vieilles Vignes” Châteauneuf-du-Pape (PA \$59.99) 94-96 points RP and 91-93 points ST.

2012 Château de Beaucastel Châteauneuf-du-Pape (PA \$79.99) 94-96 points RP and 92-94 points ST.

2012 Domaine de la Janasse “Chapuin” Châteauneuf-du-Pape (PA \$79.99) 94-96 points RP and 92-94 points ST.

2012 Domaine du Pégau “Cuvée Réserve” Châteauneuf-du-Pape (PA \$79.99) 94-96 points RP and 92-94 points ST.

2012 Domaine du Vieux Télégraphe “La Crau” Châteauneuf-du-Pape (PA \$79.99) 93-95 points RP and 92-94 points ST.

2012 Olivier Hillaire “Les Petits Pieds d’Armand” Châteauneuf-du-Pape (PA \$79.99) 95-98 points RP.

2012 Clos du Mont Olivet “Cuvée des Papet” Châteauneuf-du-Pape (PA \$89.99) 92-95 points RP and 94-96 points ST.

2012 Clos des Papes Châteauneuf-du-Pape (PA \$109.99) 95-98 points RP and 93-95 points ST.

2012 M. Chapoutier: King of the Northern Rhône

It is rare that all the major wine critics agree on the superiority of a single producer in a given appellation, but critics all regard Michel Chapoutier as a reference point for classic examples of the Northern Rhône. His innovation and commitment to quality form the cornerstones of his continuing success. These 2012s are worth a serious look.

2012 “Les Granits” St-Joseph Blanc (PA \$49.99) 95 points RP.

2012 “De l’Orée” Ermitage Blanc (PA \$139.99) 99 points RP.

2012 “Le Méal” Ermitage Blanc (PA \$139.99) 98 points RP.

2012 “L’Ermitage” Ermitage Blanc (PA \$369.99) 100 points RP and 93-95 points ST.

2012 “Les Varonniers” Crozes-Hermitage Rouge (PA \$39.99) 91-93 points ST.

2012 “Les Granits” St-Joseph Rouge (PA \$44.99) 92-94 points RP.

2012 “Les Clos” St. Joseph Rouge (PA \$79.99) 92-94 points RP.

2012 “La Mordorée” Côte-Rôtie (PA \$99.99) 93-95 points RP.

2012 “Les Greffieux V. V.” Ermitage (PA \$99.99) 95-97 points RP.

2012 “Le Méal” Ermitage Rouge (PA \$139.99) 97-99 points RP.

2012 “Le Pavillon” Ermitage Rouge (PA \$229.99) 98-100 points RP and 94-96 points ST.

2012 “L’Ermitage” Ermitage Rouge (PA \$249.99) 97-100 points RP and 94-96 points ST.

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3005 El Camino Real, Redwood City, CA 94061
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