

WINE News

Our Rhône and French Regional team covers a lot of territory—from Savoie to Roussillon—to find the hidden gems.



APRIL 27, 2015 FEATURES

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Down the Rhône River and Beyond

By Keith Mabry

I have had the good fortune to visit France twice this year. Tasting wine, meeting great people, eating great food—I know, tough life, right? No complaints here, and remember that there is a goal in mind, to find interesting and delicious wines for our dedicated clients and enthusiasts. We do all the vetting so you don't have to. And yet I did. I attended an organic wine fair and tasted hundreds of wines. And I found some great new producers, many of which will be here later this year. On my second visit, I wanted to reconnect with many of our existing producers. Since this was my first visit with them, I wanted to see why my predecessors

fell in love. And fall in love I did. But as with all things wine, there is a process. Many wines will, once again, be coming a little later this year. I will not leave you wanting though, as some wines are here and ready to go. This month we visit the Savoie, one of the most underrated and interesting wine regions in all of France; we take a look at the singular vision of a man from the Roussillon; we look at some early rosé arrivals from Provence; and finally, we have some top staff picks from the Rhône/French Regional team. To get started, here are three Rhône's not to miss this month.

2012 Château de Montfaucon "Baron Louis" Lirac*

(\$18.99) The new vintage just arrived and it is terrific. The vintage is classically structured, showing a subtle perfume of blackberries, figs and dried rose petals. The wine has fine tannins and is beautifully balanced. 90 points RP.



2013 La Cabotte "Colline" Côtes du Rhône (\$10.99)

Loaded with red fruits like cherry and pomegranate, this also displays a hint of crushed herbs like thyme and bay leaf. Polished tannins on the finish make for a zesty, well-priced wine that suits any budget. And it's Demeter certified Biodynamic®.



2013 David Givaudan "La Bete" Côtes du Rhône (\$13.99)

Plenty of fresh cherry and strawberry fruit aromas, with dried blueberries and thyme. On the palate it unfolds with layers of white pepper, tobacco and a touch of saffras. This is a friendly, medium-bodied wine with old-school restraint; one of my favorite Rhône's right now.



Key: * Direct Buy Imports PA Pre-Arrival RP Robert Parker's Wine Advocate

Summer is Coming *Rosé Picks from Provence*

By John Majeski

As an avid watcher of *Game of Thrones* can tell you, it's not uncommon to find some beleaguered greybeard utter the doom and gloom words, "Winter is coming!" Well, don't panic, you can all shed your Night's Watch feathers, down vests and thermals, because in ever-thirsty, drought-stricken California, the common catchphrase is "Summer is coming!" And what better way to face the rays than by embracing a shimmering glass of rosé straight from the heart of Provence, home to perhaps the most elegant and sophisticated pinks on the planet.

From vineyard regions first planted and harvested almost eight centuries ago by dedicated Templar Knights, to slake the thirst of weary Crusaders en route to the Holy Land, come two favorite rosés of note: The **2014 Commanderie de la Bargemone Coteaux d'Aix en Provence Rosé (\$14.99)**, a



sustainably-grown, light salmon-colored blend of Grenache, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah and Cinsault, with inviting strawberry, red currant and floral aromas and characterized by a bone-dry palate of red fruits and delicate chalk and herbal notes, complemented by brisk acidity and a lovely thirst-quenching finish; and the **2014 Château de Peyrassol "Commanderie" Côtes de Provence Rosé (\$19.99)**, made from organically cultivated Syrah, Grenache and Cinsault vines grown on low-yielding rocky terrain, and directly pressed after undergoing a cold maceration to reveal beautiful dimensions of watermelon, strawberry, carnation and lilac on the nose, with a replenishing, lively palate of mouth-watering fruits and spice. With infinite charm, freshness and finesse, these two delicious rosés will pair well with most Mediterranean cuisine and grilled seafood.



Clot de l'Origine *A Study in Minimalism*

By Keith Mabry

In February I had the distinct pleasure of meeting Marc Barriot and tasting at his humble winery, Clot de l'Origine. Marc, originally from Bagnol, began studying wine about 10 years ago. He trained in Beaujolais as well as studied in Australia and the Americas. One thing he learned along the way was that he didn't want to make conventional wines. He settled in Maury, a village in the appellation of Roussillon. Because of the weather there he could make dry wine in a non-interventionist style. He is certified organic, farms biodynamically and is regarded as a top natural wine producer in the region. He uses no additives or stabilizers in his wines, minimal sulfur only at bottling, and does not fine or filter his wines.

Marc makes some terrific whites. He believes that ultimately the region will produce its best wines from white grape varieties, but that story is still being written. The first is the **2013 Clot de l'Origine Macabeu "P'tit Barriot Blanc" (\$18.99)**. The P'tit Barriot is named in honor of Marc's infant daughter and represents the freshness and brightness the region has to offer. The Blanc is 100% Macabeu aged in used oak barrels. It has notes of persimmon, quince and dried papaya. There is a clear saline quality, with a rich and mineral-driven finish. His **2012 Clot de l'Origine Macabeu "l'Original" Blanc (\$21.99)** is an "orange wine" version of the same Macabeu. It spends about two weeks on the skins, giving it added weight and lovely dimension. It has notes of mandarin orange peel, tangerine and quince.

The **2013 Clot de l'Origine "Le P'tit Barriot" Côtes du Roussillon Rouge (\$18.99)** is a revelation. It is Syrah with pure notes of crushed strawberries, pomegranate and Szechuan pepper. It has a briary, spicy quality that emulates our expectation of Syrah from the northern

Rhône, something a lot of Roussillon Syrah is lacking. Here you get finesse, fine tannins, a touch of smoked meat, fresh fruit and hints of potpourri; my highest recommendation for fans of cool climate, quality Rhône-styled reds. Another great red is the **2012 Clot de l'Origine "Soif de Plaisir" Côtes du Roussillon (\$21.99)**, a blend of

60% Carignan and 40% Syrah. Carignan vines really hit their stride when they pass the 50 year mark and here the vines are approaching 60 years of age. It has a sexy palate weight with perfumed fruit and a truffley finish.

The village of Maury was most famous for producing rich dessert wines made in a fortified wine style similar to port.



The humble cellar of Clot de l'Origine.

Generally one of the warmest regions in France, it is ideally suited for producing said dessert wines. Marc originally wasn't interested in producing sweet wine but his wife said, "if you live in Maury you need to make a Maury." What a treat! The **2012 Clot de l'Origine Maury (500ml \$29.99)** is plush and full-bodied, with rich dark berry fruit and mineral spice. The average Maury comes in around 120 grams per liter of residual sugar; Marc's hits 72 g/L. Not cloying, this is a beautifully balanced wine that goes toe to toe with top ports.



Panoramic view of Château Ripaille.

A Vision of Savoie

By Keith Mabry

On my recent trip to France, I had the chance to meet many producers in the region of Savoie. On the eastern border of France, neighboring Switzerland, the region is primarily influenced by the surrounding mountains, the elevation and the soils. Officially recognized as an appellation in 1973, it is divided into several village level crus. Each cru tends to focus on specific grape varieties that are best suited to their terroir. We are just starting to see some of these wines make an impact here in the United States and we feel fortunate to introduce some of the best ones to you.

2013 Château de Ripaille Vin de Savoie Ripaille (\$11.99) Ripaille is a village located on the French side of Lac Léman (Lake Geneva). The Château de Ripaille is an historic castle dating back to the 14th century. Today it has 21 hectares of vines on a gentle plain sloping toward the lake. It was formed primarily by glacial activity in the last ice age, and the limestone soils with glacial deposits are very rocky indeed, like an old riverbed. The harvest is done manually and the primary wine is Chasselas, known in nearby Switzerland as Fendant. The vineyard and castle have the air of sophistication and a bygone era; the wine itself is steely and nervy, and it has the elements I look for in a Savoie white. It seems as though the winds from the surrounding Alps pour out of the glass: aromas of lime blossom, pear and fresh fallen snow waft from the glass. A great aperitif!

2013 Le Cellier du Palais Vin de Savoie Apremont (\$12.99) Le Cellier du Palais is run by Béatrice Bernard, who recently took over from her father René. The estate was founded by René's father in 1974. The family grows three types of grapes on seven hectares in Apremont: Chardonnay, Jacquère and Altesse. Their basic Apremont is 100% Jacquère, one of the local varieties that encapsulates the freshness of the region. Fresh Anjou pear, peach pit, wet rocks and a hint of hay lend an engaging nose to the fresh, mineral-driven palate. It's like you're careening down the mountain surrounded by the forests and the snow.

2013 JP & JF Quenard "Au Pied des Tours" Chignin Bergeron (\$24.99) The village of Chignin has some of the best soil in the region. It is made



up of limestone scree (fractured rocks on the slopes). The appellation of Chignin Bergeron overlays the region of Chignin, but these south-facing slopes on some of the rockiest soils, planted exclusively to Roussanne, provide the best aspect for ripening this grape. Jean Francois Quenard took over the duties of the winery from his father Jean-Pierre in 1987. The winery produces excellent Chignin, Chignin Bergeron and Roussette de Savoie. The "Au Pied des Tours," which translates to "at the foot of the tower," is one of their best vineyards. It is appropriately named since it is planted next to the Tour Villard, the remains of a tower that was part of the ruins of the Château de Chignin. The Au Pied is plump with tree fruit qualities of peach and nectarine. It has a much fresher quality than the Roussanne you find in the Rhône Valley, with similar weight but more freshness and acidity.

2013 Edmund Jacquin "Marestel" Roussette de Savoie (\$19.99) Roussette de Savoie can be made in many of the villages but the most special comes from the hill of Marestel. The hill has a 45-degree slope that provides a little bit of vertigo when standing at the top. The soil is scree (that fractured limestone). The grape is Altesse and it has a honeyed texture with vibrant acidity that often reminds one of Chenin Blanc. The hill of Marestel is regarded as one of the best (grand cru) sites for growing this grape. The Jacquin is classic Roussette, with vibrant acidity and a weighty texture that Jacquere and Chasselas don't quite have. For more full-bodied wines with this intensity, this is where you need to be. Luscious and succulent, it has intense lime zest and yellow apple qualities with notes of honey and quince. The finish is long, with tons of minerality.

2013 Charles Trosset Mondeuse "Harmonie" Vin de Savoie Arbin (\$21.99) Arbin, our last village, is an exclusively red producing region. That red variety is called Mondeuse. The grape generally produces medium-bodied, spicy reds that are reminiscent of a northern Rhône Syrah crossed with a Cru Beaujolais. The Trosset brothers, Louis and Joseph, are part of a tradition that spans at least four generations of winegrowers before them. Mondeuse is their livelihood and they make a number of different cuvées. The "Harmonie" is spectacular, showing notes of briary spice, black pepper, pipe tobacco, red cherry and strawberry. It is expressive and harmonious and an extraordinary food wine. It even comes in at a lower alcohol level—only 12.5%—lending to the freshness and brightness of its fruit.

Regional Favorites

The **2009 Domaine Bunan “Moulin Des Costes” Bandol** (\$27.99) is a force to be reckoned with. Coming in at 14.5% ABV, this Mourvèdre, Grenache and Syrah blend delivers on more than one front. It shines in the glass with a dark blood red hue. Rich cloves and dark fruit characterize the inviting, intriguing and intricate nose. This wine’s ripe and generous fruit are immediate, yet an iron-like chalkiness and hint of dark spices flows through the finish. The tannins are bold, maintaining elegant grip all the way through. This big and delicious wine will age another 10 years with ease.

—Dave Genevro



Saturday Tastings: Rhône and French Regional

May 2 in all three stores: noon to 3pm in San Francisco; 1pm to 4pm in Redwood City; and 3pm to 5:30pm in Hollywood.

2010 Château de Gourgazaud Cuvée Tradition Minervois (\$10.99) This delightfully classic Minervois is a blend of 80% Syrah and 20% Mourvèdre. It has aromas of blackberry, currants, black olives and notes of lilacs and garrigue. There is an underlying *sauvage* character that says, “I am old school and not afraid.” Tremendous buy for under \$12.

2012 Domaine Courtois “La Grange” Vinsobres* (\$14.99) Courtois is a property acquired by the Jaume family in 2003. The winery itself had fallen into disrepair but the vineyards were in remarkable condition. What distinguishes Vinsobres is its elevation, with vineyards sitting at 350 to 450 meters, and the latitude being the northernmost of the Côtes du Rhône crus. The wines show more northern Rhône characteristics—think cooler Grenache flavors of fresh (not jammy) fruit intermingled with spicy Syrah notes. The “La Grange,” a blend of 60% Grenache and 40% Syrah, is elegant and refined, with a perfume of wild berries and spices. On the palate there is white pepper, crushed raspberries and blackberry fruit. With lovely balance and fine tannins, “La Grange” is lively and buoyant for a southern Rhône red. One of my new favorites!

—Keith Mabry

Chapoutier Goes to the Roussillon

One of the tell-tale signs that an appellation has potential is when great winemakers and properties make their move there. Northern Rhône producer Michel Chapoutier is known for fashioning some of the greatest Syrah-based wines in the world, so it was a natural move for him to go to the Roussillon and begin to craft Syrah-based wines from this exciting region. Thanks to inexpensive land and an easy growing season, the quality-to-price-ratio in Roussillon is one of the best in the world. Chapoutier’s Domaine de Bila Haut property has taken advantage of all the potential and value in the Roussillon and produced three wines that merit the attention of the passionate wine buyer.

One of the best values we currently have in inventory is the **2013 Domaine de Bila Haut “Les Vignes de Bila Haut” Côtes du Roussillon Villages** (\$11.99). This baby has 90-92

points RP, and just oozes with bright berry fruit, hints of black licorice, dried herbs and a touch of spice. It’s a versatile wine that can be enjoyed on its own or paired with charcuterie or grilled meats. Going up the price ladder a bit and the quality ladder a ton, we have the **2012 Domaine de Bila Haut “Occultum Lapidem” Côtes du Roussillon Villages** (\$26.99), 94 points RP. This wine is a full-throttle offering packed with blackberry, mineral and licorice flavors as well as a slightly exotic mix of spice notes. Rich and full, this is a great wine and is a serious threat to more expensive offerings from the Rhône Valley. Lastly, if you have a bit of patience, on pre-arrival we have the **2013 Domaine de Bila Haut “Occultum Lapidem” Côtes du Roussillon Villages** (\$29.99 PA), 94-97 points RP.

— Alex Pross



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