

## THE WINE GUY

# Cotes du Rhone varieties deliver lots of personality for their low-end price

Looking for good, everyday wine at a fair price? Who isn't?

There are a lot of wines from all over the world in the \$8-to-\$15 price range, with tasty fruit and an easy drinking style. But if you want more, if you want a wine some character, maybe even a hint of terroir, it gets a lot tougher.

Here's where I suggest that you look to wines from the Rhone Valley, an area in France that has grown grapes for about 2,000 years. The region straddles the Rhone River from Avignon to Vienne in southeastern France and is home to some of the world's greatest wines — such as Hermitage, Cote-Rotie and Chateauf-du-Pape — but also some of its best values.

Specifically, I recommend that you try Cotes du Rhone, the basic level of quality wine from the Rhone Valley. While Cotes du Rhone doesn't reach the heights often achieved by its more famous siblings, it actually makes up nearly 80 percent of all Rhone Valley production and provides consumers a superior quality-to-price ratio.

Although 21 varieties are allowed to be grown in the Rhone Valley, in reality, a relative few varieties dominate. Also, keep in mind that Cotes du Rhone wines are blends. To my palate, they are prime examples of how blending different grapes results in a more complete wine.

There are four primary grapes used in red Cotes du Rhone. Grenache, the most important grape in Chateauf-du-Pape, is also the dominant variety in Cotes du Rhone. Syrah, the grape used for Hermitage and Cote-Rotie, is also blended in significant amounts. Small portions of mourvedre, cinsault and occasionally carignan and counoise also may be



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added.

The typical red Cotes du Rhone flavor profile is characterized by bold, dark fruits (black cherry, currant, plum) with spicy or peppery seasoning. Grenache yields round, forward fruit and a soft texture, while syrah adds structure and tannin. The wines are very dry, with fresh acidity and often mineral, herb and smoky notes.

Similarly, among all of the allowable grapes, white Cotes du Rhone is usually made using some combination of roussane, viognier and marsanne, although dollops of clairette, grenache blanc and bourboulenc are used.

White Cotes du Rhone wines, also quite dry, tend to display distinctive floral aromas and occasionally an intriguing stony character. Flavors of peach, honeysuckle and citrus are delivered in a rich, yet elegant frame with a soft, creamy texture.

The wines of the Cotes du Rhone are classic food wines. The reds beg for just about any meat, but also tomato-based vegetable dishes such as ratatouille and casseroles, as well as paté and aged cheese. The whites are perfect for fish, white meats, Asian dishes and fresh cheeses.

Cotes du Rhone is a wine meant to be enjoyed young, while your Hermitage, Cote-Rotie and Chateauf-du-Pape rest in the cellar. Fortunately, the available 2003 and 2004 vintages produced many

fine wines.

Quality, as with any wine, can vary. So don't hesitate to seek advice from your local wine merchant. There are many good ones to choose from, but the wines below are recommended from my recent tastings.

They are listed roughly in order of preference, but all are good and should serve you well.

## Rouge

- 2003 E. Guigal (\$14)
- 2004 Saint Cosme "Les DeuxAlbion" (\$14)
- 2004 Domaine de la Janasse (\$13)
- 2004 Domaine Lafond "Roc-Epine" (\$9)
- 2004 Domaine de la Solitude (\$10)
- 2003 Jean-Luc Colombo "Les Forots" (\$19)
- 2001 J. Vidal-Fleury (note the different vintage, \$10)
- 2003 Delas Freres "Saint Esprit" (\$14)
- 2003 Perrin Reserve (\$11)
- 2003 Paul Jaboulet Aîné "Parallèle 45" (\$10)
- 2003 M. Chapoutier "Belleruche" (\$12)
- 2003 Jean-Luc Colombo "Les Abeilles" (\$11)
- 2004 Saint Cosme (\$14)
- 2003 Caves Des Papes Héritage "Aged in oak casks for 12 months" (\$11)
- 2003 Barton & Guestier (\$9)

## Blanc

- 2003 Jean-Luc Colombo "Les Figuières" (\$16)
- 2004 J. Vidal-Fleury (\$11)
- 2003 Jean-Luc Colombo "Les Abeilles" (\$11)
- 2003 M. Chapoutier "Belleruche" (\$12)

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