

Vintage report

Southern Rhône 2017



Drought and poor fruit set mean 2017 isn't a year to compare to the exceptional 2016 or 2015 vintages, but there are some real highlights – particularly if you're after structured, ageworthy reds and rich whites. Matt Walls reports from the region

WHEN I ASKED Pascal Lafond at Domaine Lafond Roc-Epine in Lirac what the key factors were in shaping the southern Rhône's 2017 vintage, there was no hesitation: 'The dryness,' he said. 'And coulure in the Grenache.' Both affected yields, which are sharply down in 2017, but they also impacted the wines' style.

The coulure (failure of fruit to form after flowering) was caused by a sudden snap of cold, wet weather in April and early May, after an early start to the season following a warm February. 'The berries were more like blackcurrants. Beautiful bunches, but so small,' says Laurence Ferraud at Domaine de Pegau in Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

Photograph: Mick Rock/Cephas

One result is that some winemakers have had to recalibrate their blends to include higher proportions of other grape varieties. Another consequence has been that several producers, such as Clos du Mont-Olivet in Châteauneuf-du-Pape and Domaine La Collière in Rasteau, didn't manage to make as many different cuvées as usual, meaning top-quality fruit destined for prestige cuvées has ended up supercharging their classic blends.

The summer was marginally warmer than usual, and the grapes ripened quickly in healthy conditions. Spring had seen less rain than usual, and the summer was ➤

Vintage verdict

A hot, very dry year in the southern Rhône has resulted in a very good to excellent vintage of powerful, structured reds, though sometimes overripe or with leathery tannins. Whites tend towards richness over freshness.

An old bush-vine Grenache vineyard above the village of Rasteau

exceptionally dry. Thankfully, there was little water stress since crops were so light.

It was an early harvest, with fine weather throughout September allowing producers to pick each parcel at optimum maturity. Anaïs Vallot of biodynamic Domaine Vallot in Vinsobres said: 'The quality was great, nothing rotten, a really healthy vintage.' Conditions were also beneficial for lignified, woody stems which, when used judiciously, have added complexity, texture and lift to the wines.

Winemakers brought in small bunches with tiny grapes – thick skins, making for plentiful tannins and phenolic compounds, but little juice. Fred Férigoule at Domaine Le Sang de Cailloux in Vacqueyras refers to it as 'a bonsai vintage'. Good news if you want tannic reds, less welcome if you're aiming for juicy whites.

Fermentations were broadly swift and without widespread issues. The wines are similar in style to the 2015 vintage, but less homogenous in quality and a little less sunny – less obvious alcohol, darker fruit and firmer tannins. 2017 doesn't have the effortless balance and joie-de-vivre of the 2016s, but will be enjoyed by those looking for structured, tannic, ageworthy wines.

Of the various southern Rhône crus, the best wines (and some of the worst) were made in Châteauneuf-du-Pape. Rasteau has outdone itself and produced some fabulous wines this year, while Lirac benefitted from its natural freshness, as did Gigondas and Vinsobres.

Yields may be low in the south this year, but Rhône lovers take note – they will be lower still in 2018.

AROUND THE REGIONS

Vinsobres, Rasteau & Cairanne

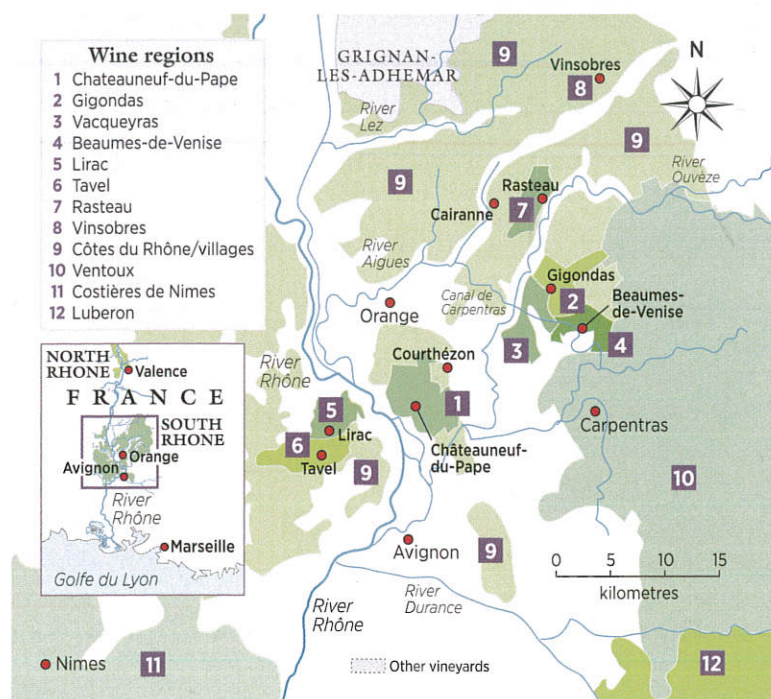
The 2017 vintage was particularly successful in Rasteau, which has produced a clutch of juicy, pure and intense wines, some for drinking now and some that will blossom in a few years. No doubt the water-retaining clay and marl soils helped the wines keep their sense of juiciness and soft yet generous tannins. Don't miss out.

The Cairannes don't hit the mark quite so regularly, occasionally showing overripeness and drying tannins, but the best have a winning combination of freshness, vibrancy and intensity of fruit. Domaine Alary's whites and reds are particularly fine this year.

Vinsobres' yields weren't hit as hard as its neighbours', and it's another high-quality vintage. Its northern location and high-altitude vineyards have helped it to tackle the climatic excesses of the year and produce a



Domaine Beau Mistral in Rasteau, whose La Bastide St-Martin cuvée was Matt Walls' top scorer for the region



number of imposing and attention-grabbing but still refreshing wines.

Best producers: Domaine Alary, Domaine Beau Mistral, Domaine Combe Juliène, Domaine Brusset, Domaine Vallot

Gigondas, Vacqueyras & Beaumes de Venise

It's a solid showing by many of the best estates of Vacqueyras this year, with some imposing, concentrated wines on one hand, and mid-bodied, juicy expressions on the other. But it's

Top: Julien Sabon of Domaine Roger Sabon in Châteauneuf-du-Pape

not a year to buy blind. Many less-successful wines had harsh tannins due to the drought.

Gigondas performed more consistently. It's a forceful year, with many wines showing assertive tannins, acidity, and fruit – which can all be a bit too much if not managed with a light touch. They sometimes lack the charisma of the stellar 2016 vintage, but there are many lovely 2017s to choose from. Céline Chauvet at Domaine du Grapillon d'Or compares 2017 to the 2015 vintage.

Beaumes de Venise is as up-and-down as ever, but if you're looking for imposing reds with robust structures that will age with interest, there are some great value choices.

Best producers: Domaine des Bernardins, Domaine de l'Espigouette, Moulin de la Gardette, Domaine le Sang de Cailloux

Châteauneuf-du-Pape

The Grenache may have taken a hammering this year, but Mourvèdre, when grown on water-retaining soils, performed well.

Vincent Avril at Clos des Papes lost 40% of his crop due to hail, coulure and drought, yielding just 15hl/ha. He made up for the lack of Grenache with extra Mourvèdre, and the result is a deeper, darker, long-lived vintage.

This is also a vintage for old vines with deep roots – the ancient Grenaches of Domaine Le Cailloux's Le Centenaire have yielded a phenomenal wine.

It's a very ripe, robust vintage that can tip over into overripeness, high alcohol and tough tannins – especially where winemakers have been tempted to extract too enthusiastically.

Finding balance and drinkability isn't as easy compared to the previous vintage, especially among the Tradition bottlings. The best wines are among the Cuvées Spéciales, where you can find exceptional, cellarworthy Châteauneufs in all their pomp and glory.

White Châteauneuf performed surprisingly well considering the style of the vintage. Naturally opulent this year, the most successful have dialled down the sweet, silky oak and focused on building tension through acidity, subtle bitterness or a mineral dimension – some to impressive effect.

Best producers: Château Rayas, Domaine Roger Sabon, Le Clos du Caillou.

Lirac & Tavel

It was a remarkably reliable year for the west bank crus, with Lirac making impressive wines in all three colours. The reds were particularly successful, with none of the gruff tannins that affected all the appellations of the east bank to some extent, and very little overripeness. They are neat, precise and very drinkable, if generally lacking the complexity and longevity of Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

For elegant, mid-bodied whites, Lirac is the go-to southern appellation in 2017. For rosé, naturally Tavel is where to look, with several strong, confident, vivid wines that really make an impression. It's a unique style that remains sadly unpopular due the wine's unfashionably deep tint. But if you're more into flavour and texture, you won't be disappointed.

Best producers: Château de Montfaucon, Domaine des Carabiniers, Château St-Roch. ➤

Decanter Southern Rhône vintage ratings

2017



2016



2015



2014



2013



2012



2011



2010



2009



2008



A taste of the top southern Rhône

Wines are listed by commune, from north to south, then by score, then alphabetically by producer. The final alcohols on many wines were not yet determined when tasted in late 2018. Many UK allocations and prices have not been set, so contact specialist merchants for updates.

Vinsobres

Domaine Vallot, Vinsobres 93

£8.33 (ib) **Genesis Wines**

This unoaked cuvée comes from 40-year-old vines and is aged in concrete. Flavours of juniper, rosemary, blueberry and blackberry are framed by serrated tannins and a long, structured finish. Remarkably fresh and defined for a wine of such sinew and strength. **Drink** 2020-2027

① TOP VALUE Domaine Jaume, Altitude 420 90

Lovely intensity and freshness, with piercing acidity and ripe, textural tannins. There's a little dryness on the finish, and the tannins are untamed, but otherwise it's a nicely authentic, classic expression with freshness and bite. Likely to offer good value once merchants set their prices. **Drink** 2019-2022 **Alcohol** 14%

Rasteau

Domaine Beau Mistral, La Bastide St-Martin 94

Destemmed fruit is 85% matured in tank and 15% in large barrels. The deep, enveloping dark fruits are unforced with a long, pure finish. A really authentic expression with great intensity and clarity of fruit, amazing focus and great length. The definition of great Rasteau. The Viellies Vignes is also a top buy, at 93 points. **Drink** 2019-2025 **Alc** 14%

② TOP VALUE Domaine Combe Julièrre, Tradition 93

Hand-picked grapes from limestone-clay soils are destemmed and fermented in vats for over a year. Juicy, fresh blueberry purity with a rosemary kick. Piercing acidity and a long, precise finish with polished but textural tannins. Cuvée Aimé was also 93. **Drink** 2019-2024 **Alc** 14.5%

Domaine Elodie Balme 93

Grenache-Syrah blend fermented with wild yeasts and aged in concrete tanks, except for 10% which is aged in used demi-muids. Gorgeous, lifted, authentic plum and blackberry with a spicy, violet hint. It's full-bodied for sure, the fresh, juicy fruit concentrated and flowing. Well cut from quality cloth. **Drink** 2019-2025 **Alc** 15%

Domaine La Collière, Esprit d'Argile 93

The first wine made in the domaine's new winery. Spicy despite fermentation and ageing in concrete. Precise, with no excess weight or extraction of the pure raspberry and blackberry fruits. The gentle tannins are very fine, and there's lovely freshness. Elegant and drinkable. No Fontaine in 2017 due to low yields. **Drink** 2018-2022

Cairanne

Domaine Alary, L'Estevenas 94

£18.75 **H2Vin**

One of the first blocks of Syrah planted in

the southern Rhône, in 1960, goes into this cuvée. 20% whole bunch used, aged 18 months in concrete (10% in used demi-muids). Vibrant nose of juniper, black olive and liquorice. Concentrated, long, mid-weight palate with fine tannins and juicy blackberry acidity. The L'Estevenas white scored 93. **Drink** 2019-2025 **Alc** 14%

Domaine Brusset, Vieilles Vignes 94

From 80-year-old vines, destemmed with no added yeasts. 60% is fermented in vat and 40% in two-year-old barrels for a year, bottled unfiltered. Peppery herbal lift on the mid-weight palate. Lovely berry acidity and crisp tannins accentuate the freshness and drinkability – it buzzes with energy. **Drink** 2019-2021 **Alc** 13.5%

Domaine les Hautes Cances, Col du Débat 93

POA **Davy's**

From 60-year-old vines. Aged 12 months in demi-muids and used barriques then bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. Resinous scents with juniper and oregano lead to a linear palate with serrated, snappy tannins and a long, mineral finish. Great precision and freshness. **Drink** 2020-2027

③ TOP VALUE Domaine Alary, Tradition 92

£16.25 **H2Vin**

Fermented and aged in concrete. Subtle aromas of raspberry and strawberry lead to a mid-bodied palate with good fruit concentration and no apparent heaviness. The tannins are like fine sand, the acidity like raspberry juice. Pep and persistent berry fruit – so drinkable! **Drink** 2019-2021

Gigondas

④ Moulin de la Gardette, Ventabren 96

Hand-picked, destemmed and fermented with wild yeasts then bottled without filtration or fining after maturation in old foudres. Beautifully natural expression of strawberry and raspberry, with a juicy slick of crushed berries, ending with textural tannins. A perfectly balanced, joyful and drinkable 2017 Gigondas with incredible purity. **Drink** 2020-2027

Domaine des Bosquets, Le Plateau 95

POA **Jeroboams**

A new single-vineyard selection of 1ha of very old vines. Hand-picked and foot-crushed, matured for 18 months in old demi-muids. Unmistakably Mourvèdre in its blueberry, liquorice and violet tones. Round and concentrated – not massive, but makes an impression on your palate with its hefty, ripe tannins. Electric and compelling. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 14.5%

Famille Perrin, L'Argnée 95

£29.17 (ib) - £51.55 **Gauntleys of Nottingham, Laithwaite's**

Pure Grenache from 1ha of pre-phylloxera vines on sandy soil. No new oak used. It's a deep, vinous, intense and spicy wine that's really drinkable, chiselled and intense. A deep acid line runs through the ample, ripe tannins. This will age well. So long and impressive; it's a cuvée that deserves to be better known. **Drink** 2021-2030

Domaine Brusset, Les Secrets de Montmirail 94

Destemmed, 30% aged in new oak, the rest in concrete vats. Attractive, precise blackberry and strawberry fruit with herbal highlights. The palate is medium-bodied with ripe, lush tannins. Intense, long and satisfying but not overly insistent or extracted. **Drink** 2020-2027 **Alc** 14%

TOP VALUE Domaine de Fontavin, Combe Sauvage 92

From organic 60-year-old goblet vines, wild-yeast fermented in concrete then aged 12 months. Dark chocolate, damson and raspberry nose, while the palate is generous and rich in fruit coulis peppered up by vibrant acidity and toothsome tannins. Long finish. **Drink** 2019-2024

Vacqueyras

⑤ Domaine la Monardièrre, Galéjade 93

Gentle lime blossom scents. Deliciously flavoursome and detailed palate showing great energy, leading to a long finish. Full-bodied and full of vibrant fruit. One of the best Vacqueyras whites – and it ages remarkably well. **Drink** 2019-2025

Domaine Le Sang des Cailloux, Un Sang Blanc 93

POA **AB Vintners**

Although it went through malo, it retains piercing acidity. Fresh, open aromas of lime blossom, honeysuckle and quince.

Impressive concentration on the mid-bodied palate, with a gentle oiliness to the texture. Mineral with remarkable concentration. **Drink** 2019-2023 **Alc** 14%

Domaine d'Ouréa 93

From a mix of vines up to 100 years old fermented then aged for 14 months in concrete. Distinct nose of bay and juniper from 30% whole-bunch fruit. This is joined on the palate by full-flowing, cool menthol fruits, firm textural tannins and a saline finish. A sophisticated and self-assured Vacqueyras. **Drink** 2019-2022

TOP VALUE Domaine de l'Espigouette 93

£19.25 **The Good Wine Shop**

Inviting pepper, menthol and star anise aromas. The mid-bodied palate has lovely freshness and no over-extraction. Fine acid balance and a long, precise finish, along with tannic heft and lots of finesse and character. An estate going from strength to strength. **Drink** 2019-2022

Domaine Le Couroulu, Vieilles Vignes 93

The Syrah in this blend comes from 85- to 90-year-old vines. Fresh, lively nose of black cherry and damson. Full-bodied palate of lush, opulent and fleshy black fruits matches the chewy tannins. Lovely texture and damson purity on the finish. Very good. **Drink** 2020-2025

Domaine Le Sang des Cailloux, Lopy 93

POA **AB Vintners**

Old vines give lovely floral lift, with violet and raspberry scents. Great purity and clarity on the palate with an intense mineral undertow. The fine tannins are present on the finish but not problematic. Very fine, very elegant and well balanced. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 14.5%

Beaumes de Venise

⑥ TOP VALUE Domaine des Bernardins 94

Aged for 10 to 12 months in stainless steel, this has intense juniper and rosemary on the round, savoury palate. The tannins are robust but ripe and will need time to settle, and the acidity is fierce. An impressive wine with tremendous focus and energy. Another excellent vintage for one of the best-value wines in the southern Rhône. **Drink** 2022-2028 **Alc** 14%

Domaine la Ligièrre, Les Garennes 93

Plum and damson compote nose leads to

an intensely concentrated but remarkably fresh palate with intense, zippy acidity and a long, tapered, raspberry-tinged finish. An energetic wine with a herbal seam, bringing complexity. A consistently reliable estate. **Drink** 2020-2027

TOP VALUE Domaine des Bernardins, Muscat de Beaumes de Venise 92

£13-£14/37.5cl **Tanners, The Good Wine Shop** Hand-picked fruit is pressed immediately and fermented in tank with no skin contact, then aged in stainless steel for six months after adding the fortifying spirit. Enticing waxy, grapey, satsuma aromas. Very full bodied but has the intensity of fruit, fresh acidity and bitterness to balance. A great-value Beaumes de Venise. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 15%

Châteauneuf-du-Pape

⑦ WHITE WINE OF THE VINTAGE

Château de Beaucastel, Roussanne Vieilles Vignes 96

£85 (ib) - £140 **Farr Vintners, Laithwaite's, Millésima, Montrachet, Tanners**

Roussanne vines more than 100 years old give tiny yields. A kaleidoscope of scents: macadamia, mango, quince and rhubarb. Very full bodied but saved from fatness by a gleaming mineral edge and balancing acidity. Almost too much this year, it tastes nearly sweet but finishes dry, very long and absurdly opulent. It's always an attention-grabbing wine, and some will love it all the more for its excess in 2017; some less. **Drink** 2021-2040

Domaine de Beurenard, Boisrenard 95

Biodynamic. Fermented and aged in foudres and old barriques. It's nutty, with oak-inspired crème brûlée aromas and a hint of banana custard. It's not overdone on the long palate, showing good fruit and a beam of acidity keeping everything fresh. 42% Clairette, 32% Roussanne, 11% Bourboulenc, 10% Grenache Blanc and 5% of other varieties. **Drink** 2020-2023

⑧ RED WINE OF THE VINTAGE

Château Rayas 98

Harvested on 14 November (very late even by Rayas' standards), the three parcels are usually matured separately, but in 2017 half the Coeur parcel was blended into the Couchant parcel, and the other half into the Levant parcel. The Couchant/Coeur is beautifully perfumed with pomegranate, rose and white pepper. Markedly more ➤



tannic than usual, with bright acidity and slightly raised alcohol. The Levant/Coeur is aromatically more subtle and full in fruit rather than tannins, but with the acidity to help balance the high alcohol. The estate's Pignan cuvée and the Rayas white both scored 95. **Drink** 2020-2040

Domaine Les Cailloux, Centenaire 97
First made in 1989 for the estate's 100-year anniversary, this cuvée comes from Les Cailloux's best parcel of Grenache, a small plot of 125-year-old vines in lieu-dit Fauguerol, grown on heavy clay soils. Inviting spice on the nose – plenty of Syrah and Mourvèdre. Full and flowing palate with robust levels of ripe tannins and a very long finish. High alcohol but no heat or sense of imbalance. Will stay the course and give lots of pleasure. **Drink** 2021-2028

⑨ **Domaine Roger Sabon, Le Secret des Sabon** 97

£95.83 (ib) Jeroboams, Laithwaite's
Low-yielding, destemmed, old-vine Grenache is fermented in stainless steel then aged in tronconic wooden vats. Like wading into a dark pool of blackberry, violet and cassis on the mouth-coating palate of ripe, juicy fruit. Remarkable power, energy and purity with a persistent fruit expression. Profound, with enough structure to hold it all together. Just 3,000 bottles made. The Prestige cuvée scored 95. **Drink** 2020-2040 **Alc** 15.2%

Clos des Papes 96
£56 (ib) AB Vintners, Jeroboams, Justerini & Brooks, Laithwaite's
10% less Grenache this year, topped up with extra Mourvèdre which makes itself felt. Lovely depth and concentration of lifted plum and violet. Relatively tannic and structured in this vintage, perhaps sacrificing some elegance for power and potency – not necessarily a bad thing, depending on your taste. One to hide in the depths of your cellar. The Clos des Papes white scored 95. **Drink** 2023-2035

Domaine de Marcoux, Vieilles Vignes 96
From 118-year-old vines in the lieux-dits of Esquières and Charbonnières. Sprightly, spicy and high-toned but fairly closed aromas. Bright red berry and plum fruit with a saline edge and juicy, ripe acidity that contributes to the sense of vivacity. Fine but generous tannins and a long, satisfying finish. **Drink** 2020-2027



Above: the vineyards of Château de Beaucastel in Châteauneuf-du-Pape

Domaine Grand Veneur, Vieilles Vignes 96
£50 (ib)-£77.25 Genesis Wines, Georges Barbier, H2Vin, Jeroboams
Fermented in stainless steel then aged for 16 months in concrete and new barriques. Mourvèdre comes through strongly as deep, ripe dark fruits and violets. Full and dense with soft, lush tannins, held together by firm acidity, finishing long. Lithe, muscular and impressive. Just 5,000 bottles made. **Drink** 2022-2040 **Alc** 15%

⑩ **Le Clos du Caillou, La Réserve** 96
£81.67 (ib)-£129.75 Genesis Wines, H2Vin
Destemmed and fermented in tronconic vats, then matured mostly in demi-muids and 10% in amphora for 14 months. Pure loganberry fruit aromas with a hint of balsamic. Pleasing lightness of touch despite firm, ripe tannins. Great finesse, with a gentle mineral undertow. Intense, elegant and textural. The Les Quarz cuvée scored 95. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 15.3%

Château de Beaucastel 95
£40 (ib)-£68.50 Gauntleys of Nottingham, Jeroboams, Justerini & Brooks, Laithwaite's, Montrachet, Tanners
The Grenache and Cinsault are fermented in cement, while the Syrah and Mourvèdre are in foudre. Finely pixellated fruits of the forest aromas with a full-bodied but fresh

and lively palate. The Mourvèdre element is strong, bringing vibrancy and power. It's firmly savoury, very dry and dramatic. A seriously structured Beaucastel for the long term. **Drink** 2022-2030

Clos du Mont-Olivet 95
No Cuvée du Papet this year as yields were too low, so all that fruit went into this wine. Fermented and aged in concrete. Spice and flower nose, leading into a full-bodied palate packed with juicy, concentrated berry fruits. Vibrant acidity and a mineral sheen bring remarkable freshness and energy to the tight tannic frame. A thrilling wine. Won't be cheap but represents good value nonetheless. **Drink** 2020-2030

Domaine Bois de Boursan, Cuvée des Felix 95
A parcel selection of low-yielding old vines fermented in concrete then matured for two years in used barriques (80%) and demi-muids (20%). Precise aromas of cedar, incense and toasted bread. Full bodied but vibrant and juicy with lengthy intense fruit and a whack of ripe tannins which provide ample structure. Should please Châteauneuf fans. **Drink** 2021-2030

⑪ **Domaine de la Janasse, Vieilles Vignes** 95
Fermented in concrete and matured for 12

months in foudre and demi-muid. Gentle notes of clove and nutmeg oak over mulled damson fruit. It's not as full or heavy as expected, but still powerful and quite extracted. The fine tannins are generous and grippy. Remarkably well balanced for its size. **Drink** 2022-2033

Domaine de la Vieille Julienne, Réserve 95
£289.25 H2Vin
Beautiful notes of violets, strawberries and raspberries, plus high-toned herbal elements. Good concentration of red berry coulis flavours – it's always a deeply lush and opulent cuvée, and the 2017 has generosity but also tension and precision. Fine tannic frame and a mineral undertow provide support for high alcohol. A very good year for this cuvée. **Drink** 2021-2034

Domaine du Banneret 95
Sourced from 4ha of vines with an average age of 60 years. Intense, stemmy white pepper and oregano aromas. The fine but assertive tannins are just a little drying, but add to its rustic charm. Well balanced with integrated acidity. A delicious wine that's already showing complexity and will age with dignity. **Drink** 2019-2031

Domaine La Barroche, Pure 95
£97.49 AG Wines, Four Walls Wine Co, Justerini & Brooks, Lay & Wheeler, Les Caves de Pyrene
Low-yielding 100-year-old Grenache, partly destemmed and fermented in concrete then aged 18 months in foudre. The aroma is pure damson and plum, lifted with some violet. The palate is full-bodied with sweet, juicy plum and raspberry eau-de-vie flavours and good acidity. Some alcohol sweetness but no heat. 3,000 bottles. **Drink** 2020-2027 **Alc** 15%

TOP VALUE Château Beauchêne, Vignobles de la Serrière 93
Aged 70% in old barriques and 30% in stainless steel for 12 months. Aromas of black fruit and savoury dried herbs. The full-bodied palate has firm acidity, tight tannins and inner freshness. Should build complexity as it ages, and will last well. **Drink** 2022-2032 **Alc** 14.5%

TOP VALUE Domaine Croze-Granier 91
£21.99 Vinceremos
Fermented in concrete then matured for 12 months in stainless steel. Vibrant, herbal lift of potpourri and bouquet garni.

It may be full-bodied but there's plenty of energy and a mineral dimension so often obscured in 2017. Structural rather than fruity or deep. **Drink** 2019-2025 **Alc** 14.5%

⑫ **TOP VALUE Clos St Michel** 90
Fermented mostly in stainless steel, then aged in concrete, this has aromas of berry compote and bonfire. It marries smoke and spice to enticing effect, and leads into a very full-bodied, concentrated palate, but with a firm acid line and brisk tannins that keep things fresh. Finds that elusive balance between generous fruit and fresh drinkability. 45,000 bottles produced, but it's done with skill and is likely to be a good value option. **Drink** 2019-2023 **Alc** 14.5%

Lirac

⑬ **Château de Montfaucon, Vin de Madame la Comtesse** 93
From a 0.6ha plot planted before 1870. Aged eight months in old barriques, then 15 months in bottle. Subtle honeysuckle, heather and quince nose and a round, full-bodied palate that is dry and savoury on the long, focused finish. A very specific style that conjures more of a sense of place than flavour. I may regret not marking this higher when it blossoms in a decade. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 13%

Domaine des Carabiniers 92
£17.95 Davy's
One of the best white Liracs in 2017. Flinty and floral, with jasmine-infused quince. The palate has an intense burst of freshness and florality, with a gentle, grainy pear flesh texture and a tapered finish with a hint of marzipan. Highly drinkable and enjoyable. **Drink** 2018-2020

Château St Roch, Confidentielle 91
Fermented in oak barrels and left on lees for six months with regular batonnage. Tightly wound now, it shows notes of lime blossom, macadamia and marzipan. Full bodied, with a silken texture and vinous style, displaying focus and energy despite the lack of aromatic vibrancy at this stage. Could be a winner. **Drink** 2021-2026

Château de Montfaucon, Vin de Monsieur le Baron 93
A blend of 12 varieties co-planted and co-fermented in concrete, then aged for a year each in old barriques and concrete, and two years in bottle. Deep and savoury aromas of herbal bitters, liquorice and blackberry. Intense palate of berries in a firm, crunchy and saline tannic shell. Long finish with intensity, freshness, vibrancy and minerality. **Drink** 2021-2027 **Alc** 15%

⑭ **TOP VALUE Domaine Maby, La Fermade** 91
Yet again, one of the best value Rhônes of the vintage. Destemmed then fermented in stainless steel. Dark, brooding aromas but not without freshness. The silky, linear palate is medium-bodied and full of energy, with a good concentration of juicy damson fruit in a long, precise and tailored style. **Drink** 2019-2022 **Alc** 14.5%

TOP VALUE Domaine Coudouls, Evidence 90
Nine months in cement before release. Deep, spicy damson aromas lead to a generous palate of juicy fruits held together by fine tannins and fresh acidity. Precise but subtle mineral seam with a tailored finish. **Drink** 2019-2021 ➤



Tavel

15 **TOP VALUE** **Domaine des Carabiniers** 93
£15.95 **Davy's**

Harvested at night – rare in the Rhône – and given a 36-hour maceration. Lees stirring adds weight and body, leading to a gorgeous, fresh, weighty but lively wine with a long, juicy, mouthwatering finish. Grabs your attention like few other rosés. Expressive, precise and very drinkable. **Drink** 2018-2021 **Alc** 13%

16 **Château de Manissy, Trinité** 92
From vines averaging 40 years. Spends four months in concrete and stainless steel. It has a deep pink hue, although it's not overly full in the mouth. Firm, dry and savoury yet still intensely fruity with a long finish. A sinewy, powerful style, even for Tavel. **Drink** 2018-2021 **Alc** 13.5%

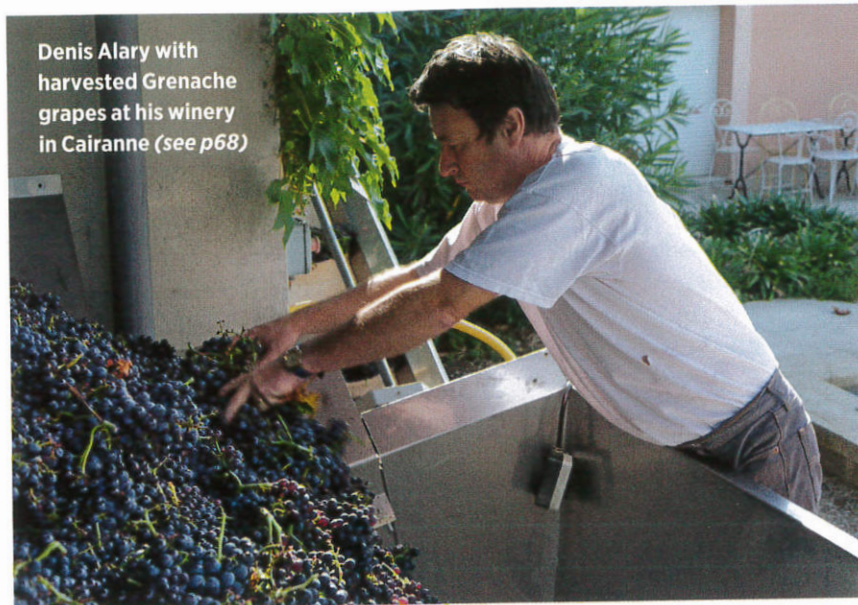
Domaine Terre Davau 92

Owned by Château de Manissy and made the same way from 40-year-old vines. Neon-pink. Expressive raspberry fruit and florals on a concentrated, weighty palate with lovely energy and acidity. Real purity, elegance and length. **Drink** 2018-2021

Other southern Rhône

17 **Domaine Alary, L'Exclus, Côtes du Rhône** 92

From the domaine's oldest block (60 years) of Clairette, fermented and aged in old demi-muids. A distinct lemon verbena scent leads to a weighty palate with a touch of oily richness to the mouthfeel, balanced by bright acidity and a distinctly mineral finish. A powerful wine that needs food. **Drink** 2019-2022 **Alc** 14%



Denis Alary with harvested Grenache grapes at his winery in Cairanne (see p68)

Photograph: Mick Rock/Cephas

Domaine de Gourt de Mautens, Vin de Pays Vaucluse 97

A blend of eight varieties from tiny yields (12hl/ha), aged for 30 months in large oak barrels. Dark, powerful and brooding with intense flavours of damson and black cherry compote. It's very full and rich but retains a sense of freshness, with soft but generous tannins. The alcohol is raised but the wine is nonetheless extraordinary, with a very long finish. **Drink** 2022-2028

18 **Château de Fonsalette, Côtes du Rhône** 96

Owned by Emmanuel Reynaud of Château Rayas. A barrel tasting of the components suggests an exceptional year: the Cinsault is very aromatic; the Grenache is unusually tannic, with dried strawberry and a touch of raspberry eau-de-vie – fresh and

mineral, with fairly high alcohol; the Syrah shows spicy dark fruits, black pepper and fibrous tannins. Impressive. The white scored 93. **Drink** 2020-2028

Definitely Red, Vin de France 94

This deserves your attention! Foot-pressed, old-vine Grenache from Andreas Lenzenwoger, who makes the whites at Domaine de Pegau in Châteauneuf. High-toned, lifted balsamic aromas. The palate is lovely and full, with bright, lush, concentrated raspberry fruit. The tannins are well managed and juicy, and there's good length on the pure, finessed finish. Fun, balanced and joyful. Only 600 bottles made in 2017, but production is set to increase. **Drink** 2019-2023

Matt Walls is Decanter's Rhône correspondent, a contributing editor and the DWWA Regional Chair for Rhône. He is based in the region, and spent several weeks in late 2018 tasting more than 300 wines for this 2017 Rhône report



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