

Domaine St Préfert Châteauneuf- du- Pape

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Her Dom St Préfert, Collection Charles Giraud 2004 Châteauneuf- du- Pape Rouge performed well in my [2004 Châteauneuf tastings](#) a year ago and then UK importers Richard Walford showed six of her wines, presented by her, at their annual tasting in London last week. Her 2004 reds were still looking extremely good but the real revelation for me was her **Domaine St Préfert 2005 Châteauneuf- du- Pape Blanc**. This was the first time I had tasted her white wine, made from 80% very old Clairette and 20% old Roussanne vines, and I thought it was stunning. The texture is sumptuous, the flavours reminiscent of spring herbs, the build impressive and on the verge of overwhelming but there is just enough acidity to get this giant off the ground. Alas, using wineseacher.com I can find it only in Switzerland and the US but I urge those of you able to buy there to investigate.

One of several glaring mistakes in *Vines, Grapes & Wines*, the book I wrote 20 years ago on vine varieties, was to describe Clairette as producing wines low in acidity. This was based on my experience of the varietal Clairettes then being made in the Languedoc, but I realise now that these old- fashioned ferments owed their flab to unsophisticated winemaking rather than to the variety itself. (In the early 1980s refrigeration was still a novelty in many Languedoc cellars.)

Now that I am much older and slightly wiser, I realise that Clairette is a variety with great character and fine acidity which can produce veru long- lasting wines, particularly if the Clairette vines are old (as so many are). When I was discussing this with Isabel Ferrando last week she told me that she had invited the famous Châteauneuf old hand Henri Bonneau to lunch and he brought along his last bottled of a 1934 varietal Clairette which had been so fresh and scintillating that he had cried.

So, if you want to chance your arm with a wine to make you cry, you might think of buying some of her **Domaine St Préfert 2006 Châteauneuf- du- Pape Blanc**. This is now available from A&B Vintners for £195 a case (bottles and magnums) in bond and will doubtless make its way to the US (where Ferrando's wines seem particularly well distributed) and elsewhere eventually. It is still extremely youthful and tight- knit on the palate although it is already finely, herbily scented and is obviously very full bodied. Having been reasonably unenthusiastic about white Rhones for much of my life, I am now very excited about the best- made of them, and the new array of flavours that they can offer those looking for alternatives to white burgundy as substantial white wines to serve with food. I intend to start serving this wine from the end of this year - although perhaps like the 1934 it will last until the 2070s?

Ferrando is very enthusiastic about the 2004 and 2006 vintages in Châteauneuf and feels they have been wrongly overshadowed by 2005 which is more obviously massive and alcoholic. She is a big fan of the expressiveness of the 2004s, which have such energy, and reports that the 2006s generally have more 'gras', more flesh and polish, than the drought- affected 2005s.

Among her reds, I have not tasted her table wine, **Les Six Reines** (just £65 a case in bond from A&B), and have yet to taste her 2005 reds (currently offered by A&B Vintners at £195 and £250 a case in bond) but I can heartily recommend the **Reserve Auguste Favier 2004** (£195 a case in bond from A&B) which may owe its fragrance and freshness to its 15% Cinsault lifting the Grenache. **Collection Charles Giraud 2004** (just £175 a case in bond from A&B) – although you have to spend at least £500 in total) is given a strong animal note by its 40% Mouvèdre in addition to the old Grenache. This is sweet, full of garrigue scents and enormously rich. **Colombis 2004** is all Grenache and comes from a separate parcel of vines on clay not far from Ch Rayas. It manages to be extremely powerful yet exhibits great freshness and is exceptionally long. *Brava!*

Other UK stockists of small quantities of St Préfert wines include Gauntleys of Nottingham, Montrachet, Uncorked and The Wine Society (although they have yet to list it or include it in any offer I have seen).

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I had the great pleasure last week of re- tasting the wines of Isabel Ferrando who in 2002 gave up her career as a banker to acquire Domaine St Préfert in Châteauneuf, in the south of the region near Chante Perdrix. She has breathed exciting new life into its old vines. I first came across her extremely well made reds a couple of years ago and reported on her 2003s in [The good news – Châteauneuf 2003s and 2001s](#).