

Paul Boutinot Signature Côtes du Rhône 2001

6 Oct 2003 by JR

I don't know where you are but here in Britain, the weather is extremely Rhôneish: cool, blustery, the air heady with leaves turning to mulch. This is just the time of year when a wine drinker's thoughts turn to the warm, spicy comfort of the southern Rhône Valley and its blends of Grenache with Syrah, Mourvèdre, and sometimes a bit more besides.

Paul Boutinot is one of Britain's more active wine merchants. Brought up near Manchester in his parents' restaurant La Bonne Auberge, he dove straight into wine and has been swimming strongly ever since. He's still based in Greater Manchester, which is probably why many a southerner has never heard of him, but he has been much more proactive than most, not just trading in wine but making it too.

His Loire whites, under the name Domaine de Cray, have been exceptional renditions of the Chenin Blanc grape, and here comes his first Rhône red, and delightfully underpriced it is too. I initially tasted it under the impression its price was £8.49 and I was impressed. I have since been told this was a mistake and the real price is £6.49. Caramba!

Amazing - Sainsbury's have just told me this wine is on special offer until 23 oct at just £4.99. They must be mad. Go and buy it in quantity.

Alas it is so far available only in Britain, and there mainly at Sainsbury's supermarkets, but I urge British visitors to jancisrobinson.com to buy a few bottles of this rich, smooth and characterful essence. Boutinot seems to have selected some distinctly superior parcels of wine for this blend - indeed he claims that it contains some barrel-aged Cairanne, Rasteau and Vinsobres - all vinified using ambient yeasts and very low sulphur additions. The wines were given an extended *cuvaison* of 26 days and left for 13 months in barrel plus a further four months after the final blend was made before being bottled unfiltered.

It may not be from a single domaine but is a very good package offering lots of pleasure both present (with chewy foods) and future (over the next two or possibly even three years). Spicy rich yet remarkably smooth, Boutinot's Signature Côtes du Rhône has lift, spice and sweetness but nothing in excess such as alcohol or tannin (common traits in southern Rhône reds). Very well judged wine selection and when you taste it you are delightfully unaware of its 14 per cent alcohol.

Just the job for cooler nights.

See also my earlier story in [wine news](#) for more particularly successful 2001 southern Rhône's. Don't believe every vintage chart about this vintage; there are many delicious bottles.