

## Real Rh□ne excitement from 2003

30 Nov 2004 by JR

The hot, dry summer of 2003 has produced some very exciting wines in the Rhône Valley if these offerings from new London merchant Genesis Wines (already mentioned in wines of the week) are anything to go by. And judging by the fact that they are not tooting their trumpet telling us that they and only they have managed to select those few producers who have done a good job, we can look forward to lots more delicious wine from both the northern and southern Rhône and Languedoc too.

The whites are fat - there is no getting away from it — so they will appeal only to a certain sort of palate and I would not expect them to have a particularly long life. But below are one or two that are truly sumptuous. Reds may be a bit low in acidity but with so little rainfall the grapes were small and tannins relatively concentrated so they have done their bit to counteract the massive sugar and alcohol levels which were built up by that relentless sunshine.

This was a very exciting tasting and my only criticism of a few of the more expensive reds was, as usual, that some just seemed to be trying so hard that they are certainly no fun to drink now and may not ever be so. Prices from this particular merchant look very good indeed to me, even though some producers have raised their ex-cellar prices to take account of the lower-than-average crop levels.

CS – cask sample

Prices given are per dozen bottles in bond.

All wines are red except for the Condrieu (duh) and those with the word Blanc in their name.

#### North Rhône

## **Domaine Colombier, Tain l'Hermitage**

## **Crozes Hermitage CS 2003 Domaine Colombier?**

This cask sample was looking decidedly stinky – one of the few disappointing cask samples, in fact. £78

## Crozes Hermitage, Cuvée Gaby CS 2003 Domaine Colombier 15.5 Drink 2005-08

Very ripe Syrah flavours - not especially typically Crozes - decidedly tarry and, to me, a bit odd. £111

## Hermitage CS 2003 Domaine Colombier 18 Drink 2007-18

Very exciting wine. Florent Viale's name may have been made by Crozes but this Hermitage, made in tiny quantities from a 1.5 ha plot in Beaumes, is fascinating. At the moment a bit pinched and taut with some carbon dioxide and quite a bit of acidity on show at the moment but majesty lurks underneath it all. £312 but virtually sold out

#### Pierre Gaillard, Malleval

## Condrieu 2003 Pierre Gaillard 16 Drink now

Very honeysuckle nose but a bit fat and flabby for me. £199

### St Joseph CS 2003 Pierre Gaillard 15? Drink 2006-08

Very pinched, as though acidified in a panic at falling acid levels – or perhaps just how this sample happened to be showing? Apparently the crop was half normal levels in 2003. £120

## Côte Rôtie, Brune et Blonde CS 2003 Pierre Gaillard 18 Drink 2006-13

Very deep colour and visceral in its appeal. Rich, sleek, full, opulent and dramatic. Good value. £225

### Côte Rôtie, Rose Pourpre CS 2003 Pierre Gaillard 18.5 Drink 2006-16

Extremely deep coloured and wild: thick, tarry, sweet as mashed blackberries – even more dramatic than the Brune et Blonde bottling. Great stuff. £350 and very limited.



### Francois Villard, St Michel

## Condrieu, Les Terrasses du Palat 2003 François Villard 16.5 Drink 2004-05

Real tang and depth on the nose and lots of very ripe flavours. Quite fat and just a little too flabby on the palate for my taste. £204

## Condrieu, Le Grand Vallon 2003 François Villard 17.5 Drink 2005-06

Much more my style with racy acidity and less obvious sweetness on the palate than the Terrasses du Pilat. Having followed Villard for so long (the late Adam Bancroft introduced me, I think) I am delighted to see him go from strength to strength. You can find the Vins de Vienne he makes with Gaillard and Cuilleron from Goedhuis in London. £204

### Vin de Pays Syrah 2003 François Villard 15.5 Drink 2004-05

Light nose and rather aggressive palate. £70

### Vin de Pays, Grue Glacée CS 2003 François Villard 16 Drink 2005-07

Thick and sweet – certainly makes a statement, and one that many palates will find most impressive. Quite deep red. £90 limited

### St Joseph, Les Reflets CS 2003 François Villard 17 Drink 2007-10

This is the polar opposite of the wine above - very cool and introvert with a neat, cool finish. Long term, stylish wine. £204

## Côte Rôtie, Le Gallet Blanc CS 2003 François Villard 18 Drink 2007-14

Extremely seductive. Warm, rich nose. Very youthful but winningly scented. Classic stuff. £240

## René Rostaing, Ampuis

## Côte Rôtie, Classique CS 2003 René Rostaing 16.5?+ Drink 2007-12

Much paler than most of its peers with a strong burnt rubber scent for the moment and a bit of reduction. May fill out. £300

#### Côte Rôtie, La Blonde CS 2003 René Rostaing 17.5?+ Drink 2007-17

Again a bit reduced but sleek and savoury – a rather welcome change from the typical, rather sweet 2003. £440 and very limited \_

## Domaine Fondrèche, Côtes du Ventoux

## Côtes du Ventoux, Fayard CS 2003 Domaine Fondrèche 17 Drink 2004-08

Kerpow! Sweet and very dramatic. Thick and incredibly concentrated for the price. Slightly dry finish but no shortage of impact. Great value. Ventoux certainly is not sleeping. A name to add to Valcombe and Pesquie, previous wines of the week. £54

## Côtes du Ventoux, Nadal CS 2003 Domaine Fondrèche 16.5 Drink 2006-10

I found some rather strange oak on the nose of this which put me off, but I'm sure this is a very personal thing. Another extremely thick wine. £71

## Côtes du Ventoux, Persia CS 2003 Domaine Fondrèche 17.5 Drink 2006-12

Quite remarkable for the appellation. Extremely dark. Full fruit impact on the palate as well as all that ambition. Still slightly gassy, this wine needs time. In this case the word reduction is applicable not as a wine fault but as in a sauce. Exotic, £90

## Domaine d'Antonin, Cotes du Luberon

#### Côtes du Luberon, Pourquoi Pas 2003 Domaine d'Antonin 16 Drink 2005-07

No shortage of fruit certainly but just a bit too much obvious alcohol for me. Guillaume Gros' mentor is apparently Yves Gras of Santa Duc and the wines share the same volume. £68



### Côtes du Luberon, Côte Terroir CS 2003 Domaine d'Antonin?

This sample was oxidised unfortunately. £92

## **Domaine Daniel et Denis Alary, Cairanne**

## Côtes du Rhône CS 2003 Domaine Daniel et Denis Alary 16 Drink 2004-07

Fresh and minty, sweet and round. Very easy appeal yet with some guts. £38

### Côtes du Rhône Villages, Cairanne CS 2003 Domaine Daniel et Denis Alary 17 Drink 2005-08

Very sweet start and then a dry finish. Admirable for the money. £54

Côtes du Rhône Villages, Cairanne, Font D'Estevenas CS 2003 Domaine Daniel et Denis Alary 17.5 Drink 2005-10 Glossy, savoury Syrah with everything in the right place for a juicy medium term life. Peppery and perfumed. Lots of fruit. £78

Côtes du Rhône Villages, Cairanne, Jean de Verde CS 2003 Domaine Daniel et Denis Alary 18 Drink 2007-12 Essence of the wine above in structure, although the old-vine Grenache it is made up of confers great weight of juicy fruit. Rich and neat. £104

### **Domaine Gramenon, Monbrison**

### Côtes du Rhône, Sierra du Sud 2003 Domaine Gramenon 16 Drink 2005-08

Round and lively but in this particular context there are better bargains – though possibly not if you are looking for biodynamic, Syrah-dominated Côtes du Rhône. £90

## Domaine de Marcoux, Châteauneuf du Pape

#### Lirac 2003 Domaine de la Lorentine 16 Drink 2004-06

Loose, soft and fruity. Biodynamic. This is the new addition to Marcoux's portfolio. £84

## Châteauneuf du Pape CS 2003 Domaine de Marcoux

Sample oxidised unfortunately. £192

## Châteauneuf du Pape, Vieilles Vignes CS 2003 Domaine de Marcoux 19 Drink 2007-15

Very exciting wine that has long been in great demand. Amazing vibrancy despite its great weight of ripe, extremely 'bright' vivacious fruit. This somehow manages to have lift despite its heavy charge of ripe tannins and fruit. A conjuring trick of a wine. £595 and very limited

## Domaine Grand Veneur (Alain Jaume), Châteauneuf du Pape

### Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc, Cuvee La Fontaine 2003 Domaine Grand Veneur 16.5 Drink 2004-06

Seductively perfumed - a world away from old style Ch9 Blanc - but very heavy. £180

## Lirac, Clos de Sixte 2003 Alain Jaume 16 Drink 2004-07

The first vintage the Jaumes' new Lirac estate could hardly be more flattering to taste. So round and sweet, it has no edges at all – just slides and slithers across the palate. £68

## Châteauneuf du Pape CS 2003 Domaine Grand Veneur?

Difficult to judge this slightly tired, slightly dried out sample. But see below for what can be achieved by Alain Jaume and his two sons. £108

### Châteauneuf du Pape, Les Origines CS 2003 Domaine Grand Veneur 18 Drink 2007-13

Great value. Sweet, exciting, vibrant – like a baby version of Marcoux's Vieilles Vignes. 'Urgent', a word that seems



fashionable in current tasting notes, seems appropriate here. £168

#### Domaine Clos du Caillou, Châteauneuf du Pape

Cotes du Rhône Blanc, Bouquet des Garrigues CS 2003 (Clos du Caillou) 16 Drink 2004-05

A bit low on scent, this wine from the Clos du Caillou team is fat and honeyed and certainly not expensive. £69

Côtes du Rhône, Bouquet des Garrigues CS 2003 (Clos du Caillou) 16 Drink 2004-06

Big and bold if a little bit brassy. £71

Côtes du Rhône Villages CS 2003 (Clos du Caillou) 17 Drink 2005-08

Extremely fruity – so fruity in fact that there seemed no discernible oak. A very jolly short term drink. £108

Châteauneuf du Pape CS 2003 Domaine Clos du Caillou 18 Drink 2007-14

Thick, sweet and yet exciting. Well balanced. £204

Châteauneuf du Pape, Les Quartz CS 2003 Domaine Clos du Caillou 17.5 Drink 2006-12

I found the sweetness of the oak on this a bit disconcerting – almost coconut-like. Very concentrated and my objections may well be simply personal. £312

### **Domaine Santa Duc, Gigondas**

Vin de Pays de Vaucluse, Les Plans 2003 Domaine Santa Duc 16 Drink 2004-06

Gamey, soft and very easy, from a great name in Gigondas. The finish is a bit pinched at present. £34

Côtes du Rhône, Les Quatre Terres 2003 Domaine Santa Duc 15.5 Drink 2007-09

Hint of cough medicine on the nose. Very tough tannins. Over-ambitious in terms of extraction? £48

Gigondas CS 2003 Domaine Santa Duc 16.5 Drink 2005-09

Round and thick and really quite juicy though certainly not fine. Big and bold. £108

Gigondas, Les Hautes Garrigues CS 2003 Domaine Santa Duc 17 Drink 2006-13

Heady, sweet, gamey – almost animal. No shortage of brawn. For the adventurous huntsman. £171

## Domaine de la Mordorée, Tavel

Lirac Blanc, La Reine des Bois 2003 Domaine de la Mordorée 17.5 Drink 2004-07

A lovely wine. Perfumed, interesting, ripe but not fat fruit. Racier than most southern 2003 Rhône whites £102

Lirac, La Dame Rousse CS 2003 Domaine de la Mordorée 16.5 Drink 2006-08

Juicy and pretty good value. Smooth with lots of garrigue character. Dry finish at present. £69 limited

Lirac, La Reine des Bois CS 2003 Domaine de la Mordorée 17 Drink 2006-10

Fine value, probably the best value from this producer. Excellent balance. £105 limited

Châteauneuf du Pape, La Reine des Bois CS 2003 Domaine de la Mordorée 18? Drink 2009-16

Subtle it ain't. Christophe Delorme believes his 2003s are as good as his 2001s, which received rave reviews, and possibly better. This very rich wine is embryonic now and seems to me to have just a very slight hole on the mid palate. £300 very limited

Domaine Font de Michelle, Châteauneuf du Pape

Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc 2003 Domaine Font de Michelle 16 Drink 2004-06

Heavy, waxy nose and just a bit to much weight on the palate to be thrilling. £141



Côtes du Rhône, Les Promesses, La Font du Vent 2003 Domaine Font de Michelle 16 Drink 2004-06 Loose and lively, Easy and juicy, Good value. £44

# Côtes du Rhône Villages Notre Passion, La Font du Vent 2003 Domaine Font de Michelle 17

Peppery, rich and round. This glamorous wine is easy to drink even now. A crowd pleaser. £55

## Châteauneuf du Pape CS 2003 Domaine Font de Michelle 17.5 Drink 2006-11

Another crowd pleaser, this wine is big, brassy and fruity giving lots of pleasure but with some reassuring structure under all that fruit. Good value, £150

### Châteauneuf du Pape, Cuvée Etienne Gonnet CS 2003 Domaine Font de Michelle 18.5 Drink 2007-15

Very strong garrigue perfume. Pretty concentrated and impressive, presumably thanks to those very old vines. The tannins are quite dry but the fruit is admirable. £240

## Languedoc Château Puech Chaud (René Rostaing)

## Coteaux du Languedoc CS 2003 Ch Puech Chaud (René Rostaing) 15.5 Drink 2005-08

This vintage is quite different from both Côte Rôtie where Rostaing is based and from most wines made around Nimes where the vines grow. This vintage is rather loose (not unlike his 2003 Côte Rôtie) and not nearly as rich and enticing as the 2001 selected as a wine of the week here recently. The 2002 he deemed not good enough to be sold as Ch Puech Chaud and is selling this very easy, supply but dilute 2002 as Les Combes. Should be good value. £120

### Château de la Négly, Fleury d'Aude

## Le Pavillon, VdP Côtes de Perignan 2003, Domaine de Boède 15.5 Drink 2005-07

This was tasting a bit coarse and rubbery, although it is already in bottle £39

#### Coteaux du Languedoc, Les Grès 2003 Domaine de Boède 18 Drink 2005-09

This is wonderful stuff – dense, voluptuous, exciting, with great roundness of fruit and just a hint of rusty nails. Jean Paux-Rosset's property on La Clape deserves every accolade. The wines have wildly outperformed their neighbours over the past few vintages and yet prices, very top cuvees such as Ancely excepted, are very fair indeed. £72

## Coteaux du Languedoc, La Côte 2003 Ch de la Négly 17 Drink 2005-11

Coffee bean notes. Real interest. A hint of mint. Extremely flattering. £48

## Coteaux du Languedoc, La Falaise 2003 Ch de la Négly 18 Drink 2008-14

This one's for cellaring not drinking, but past vintages have shown that the wait is worthwhile. £84

## Coteaux du Languedoc, L'Ancely 2002 Ch de la Négly 18 ?+ Drink 2010-16

Note that this is a 2002 and so concentrated it is almost tart at this stage. It will probably get there but for the moment is almost impenetrable. Est £300 and very limited

#### Coteaux du Languedoc, La Porte du Ciel 2002 Ch de la Négly 19 Drink 2006-13

Full, sweet, soft and round, almost exaggerated velvet qualities of ripe Syrah. £375 and very limited

## Coteaux du Languedoc, Le Clos des Truffiers 2002 Ch de la Négly 18.5 Drink 2010-20

Very intense and inky. Like a severe version of L'Ancely. Doubtless these will be snapped up. £400 and very limited.

## Clos de l'Anhel, Corbières

### Corbières, Les Terrassettes 2003 Clos de l'Anhel 17.5 Drink 2005-09

Sophie Guiraudon and Philippe Matthias' day job is at Ch Pech Latt and Clos de l'Anhel is their own weekend enterprise (hence Dimanches, presumably) up in the hills near Lagrasse. This is wildly much more concentrated than most Corbières and has notable sweetness – which is presumably more 2003 than terroir. Altogether an exceptional



representative of the appellation and a property to watch. £52

## Corbières, Les Dimanches 2003 Clos de l'Anhel 17.5 Drink 2007-13

Deep and dramatic – exceedingly unlike most Corbières though rather hard work at the moment. £72

## **Domaine St-Antonin, Frédéric Albaret**

## Faugères 2003 Domaine St Antonin 17 Drink 2005-08

Frédéric Albaret has delivered a wonderfully transparent rendition of the schists of Faugeres. Earthy and yet refreshing with fine acidity. Good value. £48

## Faugères, Cuvée Magnoux CS 2003 Domaine St Antonin 17.5 Drink 2007-12

Thick, almost syrupy. Extremely correct though still very much earth-bound. I'd like just a little more lift. £78