

Dom Calvet-Thunevin, Cuvée Constance 2004 Vin de Pays des Côtes Catalanes

30 Oct 2006 by JR

[find this wine](#) - from £5.99, \$11.99 and 5.43 euros

There is no particular connection between today's wine of the week and Halloween except that it, like so many red wines made today, will stain your teeth nice and black.

Longstanding visitors to this site may be thoroughly bored with my banging on about the upper Agly Valley in Roussillon in southwest France. I first wrote about it in [July 2003](#) and have been enthusiastic about many reds and whites from this unusual schistous soil and dry climate ever since. All manner of investors from all over France, South Africa and Britain have poured into this corner of France, attracted by high potential wine quality and still-low vineyard land prices.

Calvet Thunevin is one of the more established of the new outfits. ([Gérard Gauby](#) was the pioneer of table wines here, Mas Amiel the most famous producer of the vins doux naturel that used to predominate here, depending on lots of very old Grenache vines in particular). Young Jean-Roger Calvet runs things, based on old vines bought in 2000 which now average 45 years old. The big sales push plus, presumably, the cash, comes from Jean-Luc Thunevin of Ch Valandraud in St-Emilion, which was the top-scoring French wine in the recent blind [California v Bordeaux 1995 taste-off](#) organised by the Grand Jury Européen.

This **2004 Cuvée Constance** is made from roughly equal parts of old Grenache and Carignan, with yields under 30 hl/ha thanks to the arid climate, the age of the vines and strict pruning, this unoaked wine already displays the classic schist and tar quality of the Agly Valley on the nose but has lots of Thunevin richness and roundness on the palate. The back label suggests that we drink it with roast lamb, roquefort or *before* a chocolate dessert - the first time I have seen a wine specifically recommended as an introduction rather than a complement to a dish. I think it's good value at the regular price of £8.99 that the UK upmarket supermarket Waitrose sells it for in just over half its stores. But from yesterday until Dec 3 it is reduced to £5.99 - surely one of the more appetising special promotions now so prevalent in British stores.

According to [wineseacher.com](#) it's fairly widely available so was presumably made in a fair old quantity. You can find it in France for as little as 5.43 euros and quite widely in the US from \$11.99 right up to \$17 a bottle. By chance I happened to meet the guy responsible for selling Thunevin wines in the US at the enterprising, bright new [BottleRocket](#) store in New York's W 19th which is really good fun and highly recommended. You can always contact him at christian.dalbavie@planet.nl (don't ask me why he's based in Holland).

I have also tasted **Dom Calvet-Thunevin, Les Dentelles 2003 Côtes du Roussillon Villages** which I liked considerably less, even though it costs more than twice as much as the Constance. Maybe it was the vintage but this porty, raisiny wine seemed utterly bogged down in alcohol and sweetness and I could feel a headache coming on just by sniffing it.

Mind you, even the Cuvée Constance has 15% on the label and, although well balanced, has to be drunk with caution. My counterbalance to this is to introduce you to another wine from the south of the France with just 9% alcohol, deliberately reduced to this gulpable level by reverse osmosis by the enterprising Pugibets of Domaine la Colombette just north of Béziers in the Languedoc. They devised the **Plume de Colombette** range of wines, which come in all three colours, in response to their own desire to drink wine at lunchtime without feeling what Edmund Penning-Rowell used to call 'jaded'. (See your exclusive online version of the [Oxford Companion to Wine](#), still the 2nd edition online, for more details of the common practice of reverse osmosis.)

I particularly liked the red version which is not, as far as I can see, available outside France, where you can find it for as little as 4 euros a bottle according to [wineseacher.com](#). It's a super-juicy blend of Grenache and Syrah grown organically, picked mechanically at night and vinified without oak. It reminded me of a cross between a Beaujolais and a Coteaux du Languedoc. Obviously it doesn't have masses of body - *tant mieux* in certain circumstances. The white, a Chardonnay,

seemed a bit astringent to me, but the Grenache-based dry rosé is also quite jolly and can be found chez [Leon Stolarski](#) for £5.95.

Happy Halloween.

find the Constance