Guigal 2009 C□tes du Rh□ne Rouge

15 Mar 2012 by Jancis Robinson

From €5.21, £9.95, $14.12

Find this wine

This week's wine is hardly a *trouvaille*, an unknown gem. The Guigals of Ampuis are the kings of the northern Rhône, in terms of both volume of production and, with their special LaLa Côte Rôtie bottlings, in terms of price and prestige. Marcel took over from his father Etienne who established the business after having worked for Vidal Fleury, and Marcel has now handed over the reins to Philippe, 37, proud father of very young twin boys (result!)

This red Côtes du Rhône is the Guigals' major production: all 3.5 million bottles of it. Such a quantity of wine is needed that the blend contains wine from as many as 500 different growers. It is very different from most Côtes du Rhônes (one of the best-value appellations in the world in my view). While 95% of all Côtes du Rhône is based on Grenache Noir, the Guigal blend has always showcased Syrah. It used to be the dominant ingredient in the Guigal blend but for the last 10 years the wine has been made of roughly equal parts of Syrah and Grenache sourced from the southern half of France's Rhône valley.

The 2009 blend, not made until the end of last year, is roughly 50% Syrah, 45% Grenache Noir and 5% Mourvèdre but, in view of the Guigals' disapproval of the dry tannins of the southern Rhône's 2009s as reported in Southern Rhône 20009 - an overview, they found it particularly difficult to find ingredients for this blend. Much of the Syrah came from the Ardèche and was vinified very traditionally with a long pre-fermentation maceration and prolonged ageing in large oak foudres - 18 months, much longer than most Côtes du Rhônes.

This is always one of the latest Côtes du Rhônes to be released and always has a longer life than most. I have suggested in my tasting note that it could be drunk at any time over the next three years but in fact my experience suggests that this wine will last quite a bit longer than that. The 2009 still exhibits much more savour and less obvious sweetness than most Côtes du Rhônes but it is richer than most Guigal Côtes du Rhône blends, thanks to the extreme ripeness of the vintage. The alcohol level on the label is 14% and the Mourvèdre has given the wine a little extra spiciness. You could certainly drink it now with pleasure - though I would suggest that its structure makes it a red for the table rather than for drinking without food. It went very well with a Cumberland sausage toad in the hole kindly cooked for me on Wednesday night by our son.

As you might imagine for such a big-volume wine, it is widely distributed - especially throughout Europe, and is just starting to make its way on to shelves and lists in the UK and the US. In the UK, The Wine Society is already listing it at £9.95 and the wine will be in Waitrose next month. It is also the sort of wine that is traded in order to acquire allocations of the famous LaLas so you can sometimes pick it up by the case from the fine wine traders at particularly good prices. It would make a great red to serve at a large event such as a wedding for example.

Note with the link below that it may also find instances of the white version, also well made but coming to the end of its life in my view.

Find this wine