

## Vintage report

# Southern Rhône 2015

Robust, long-lived reds with fine, firm tannins will offer wine lovers much to enjoy from this vintage, says John Livingstone-Learmonth, who recommends 30 of the best buys across the region

QUALITY IS HANDSOME across the southern Rhône in 2015. It is a generally very good vintage, but not on par with greats such as 1990 and 2010. The freshness is reminiscent of 2001, with the 2015 tannins superior thanks to progress in vineyard crop control and vinification.

The tune of the year was harmonised by the timing of rainfalls, with the later-ripening zones such as Gigondas and the Côtes du Rhône Villages of Valréas and Visan doing particularly well. But I place 2015 in the southern Rhône behind the northern Rhône this year – a situation that is reversed in 2016.

For once, there was an abundant crop after a good flowering. However, there is a quality gap between the early-ripening areas – like Châteauneuf-du-Pape – and the later ones, such as Gigondas. In the former, there was some blockage as grape sugars (ultimately the alcohol level) advanced ahead of tannins, while the later-ripening regions saw more harmony. Consequently there are some 'hot' wines in Châteauneuf, whereas the vintage is markedly cool and clear at Gigondas.

In general across the region, the red wines are robust, dense and lined with good tannins; the best will live for 20 years at least. Whites are full, unless made in the new-wave light style, and offer value at the Côtes du Rhône ➤

*'It's not far off being the perfect vintage. The wines can be drunk quite young but will also keep very well'*

Guy Ricard, Domaine Le Courroul, Vacqueyras



## Livingstone-Learmonth's top 30 southern Rhône

Wines are listed within their appellations from north to south, then by score, then alphabetically by producer. They are all red wines.

### Vinsobres

**Famille Perrin, Les Hauts de Julien** 91

£15.83 (in bond)–£26.95 **Berry Bros & Rudd, Big Red Wine, Tanners, The Wine Society**  
Big, ripe bouquet of black cherry and mocha oak. Thick coulis fruits in a deep, insistent palate that ends coolly. **Drink** 2020–2035 **Alc** 14.5%

### Rasteau

**Domaine Rabasse Charavin, Abel Charavin** 92

£14.40 **Georges Barbier**  
Sturdy black-fruit bouquet. A generous wine that hits the line with brio. It is alcohol-charged, but without heat. **Drink** 2018–2027 **Alc** 16%

**Domaine Combe Julièrre, Tradition** 91

£23.28 **Wineman**  
Rounded, forward red berry nose and an open palate led by garrigue and Grenache, a natural wine of its terroir. **Drink** 2018–2026 **Alc** 14.5%

### Gigondas

**Famille Perrin, L'Argnée Vieilles Vignes** 97

£30 (ib) **Big Red Wine**  
Very ripe fruit density on nose. Juicy, weighty palate with saline notes. Earth-shaking quality. **Drink** 2021–2039 **Alc** 14.5%

**Domaine Raspail-Ay** 96

£23 **Black Dog Wines, Butlers Wine Cellar, Harrogate Fine Wines, Harvey Nichols, Hedonism, Shaftesbury Wines, Vin Cognito**  
Rich nose showing southern bounty. Full, chewy wine, with floral dabs and great length. True terroir here. **Drink** 2020–2040 **Alc** 14.5%

**Clos du Joncuas** 95

£21.65 **Exel Wines**  
Stylish, floral, precise bouquet. Super elegance and finesse; a terroir wine with subtle prompts. **Drink** 2019–2035 **Alc** 15%

**Moulin de la Gardette, Ventabren** 95

£16.50 (ib) **The Wine Society**  
Bold, savoury, menthol nose. Delicious, spiced palate that is fresh and very long. Great value. **Drink** 2021–2041 **Alc** 15%

**Montirius, Confidentiel** 94

£19–£20 (ib) **Berry Bros & Rudd, OW Loeb**  
Really dark fruit filling up the bouquet. Broad and spiced palate; fresh, with extreme length. Good future. **Drink** 2020–2037 **Alc** 15% ➤



## Vacqueyras

**Domaine Le Sang des Cailloux, Cuvée Lopy** 95  
£18 (ib) A&B Vintners, Berry Bros & Rudd  
Smouldering, spicy, floral nose. Stylish richness: a complex wine whose old vines drank deeply from their dry soils. **Drink** 2018-2036 **Alc** 14.8%



**Domaine Le Clos des Cazaux, Templiers** 92  
£8.17(ib)-£9.58 Georges Barbier, Justerini & Brooks, Latimer Vintner, Private Cellar, The Wine Society  
Abundant life: herbal pep on the nose. Racy, peppery black fruit palate of inner strength: this rocks with energy. **Drink** 2019-2031 **Alc** 14%

**Château de Montmirail, Cuvée de l'Ermite** 91  
N/A UK +33 (0)4 90 65 86 72  
Stylish, warm, authentic nose. Spicy red fruit, handsome tannins and garrigue herbs. A good, honest wine. **Drink** 2017-2027 **Alc** 14.5%

**Domaine d'Ouréa** 91  
N/A UK +33 (0)6 76 71 32 44  
Fine Grenache spice, pepper and black fruit with well-judged intensity. **Drink** 2019-2030 **Alc** 15%

## Châteauneuf-du-Pape

**Chapelle St-Théodoric, Le Grand Pin** 98  
£45.86 (ib, 2014) A&B Vintners  
Magic perfume – a Pinot-styled symphonic nose. Silken, beguiling palate with beautiful detail. This is ace! **Drink** 2020-2037 **Alc** 15%

**Château Sixtine** 96  
£30 Laithwaite's  
Southern density on the nose. Strong core of flavour – discreet power but very long; connects to its terroir. **Drink** 2020-2036 **Alc** 15.5%

**Château de Beaucastel** 95  
£37.50 (ib)-£47 Berry Bros & Rudd, Big Red Wine, Georges Barbier, Goedhuis, James Nicholson, Justerini & Brooks, Private Cellar, The Wine Society  
Depth and detail on the dark-fruit nose. Stylish, balanced and very persistent, delivers crunchy, spicy fruit. **Drink** 2020-2044 **Alc** 14%

**Domaine Giraud, Les Gallimardes** 95  
£53 Gauntley's, Great Western Wines  
Iodine hovers above blackberry fruit perfume. Palate has drive and crispness. Complex, not obvious; very long. **Drink** 2020-2035 **Alc** 15%

**Domaine de Marcoux, Vieilles Vignes** 94  
£70-£79.17 (ib) H2Vin, OW Loeb  
Glistening, bright fruit aroma. Tasty, refined, sleek and wholesome palate: lovely finesse here. **Drink** 2020-2038 **Alc** 15%

level, as well as higher up the ladder in good areas such as Cairanne, Lirac, Vacqueyras and, of course, Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

## Rasteau

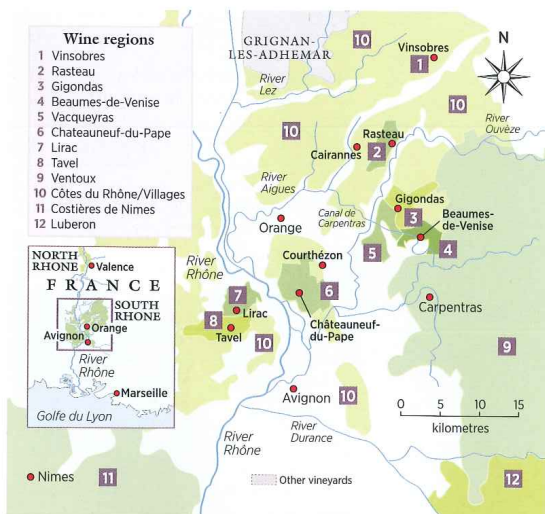
Balance is good at Rasteau – a sunny balance that reminds me of classic vintages such as 1985, with the wines well-fruited and the tannins comfortably mild. There are garrigue and herbes de Provence influences, and the wines' approachable style will go down well with drinkers. There is some similarity to the 2012 vintage, although 2015's crop was larger.

## Gigondas

The 2015 vintage is a real winner in Gigondas, aided by the fine September weather. There is a cool, sparky, crystalline quality to the wines, and abundant opportunity for true terroir expression. The purity of the fruit and structure of the wines bring to mind the finesse of Burgundy – while not an unusual comparison, this really only surfaces in vintages when the summer sun isn't too strong.

Louis Barruol of the impressive Château St-Cosme reported: '2015 is a major vintage, with the Grenache doing well – better than in 2014 and 2013. The wines are nice and free, and not hot, as they were in 2003 and 2001.'

This was not a vintage for showy oak, with wines matured in concrete vats showing especially well. Step forward Clos des Cazaux's La Tour Sarraïne, Montirius' Terre des Aînés and Domaine du Pourra's La Réserve. A feature of the vintage is also the length of the wines, which I expect to do well over 20 to 25 years.



Above: the vineyard of Château de St-Cosme in Gigondas, by the 12th-century chapel from which the property is named

*'It wasn't an easy year... but it's moving in the right direction – there is fresh fruit, but also a lot of minerality'*

Jean-Paul Daumen, (pictured, above right) of Domaine de la Vieille Julienne, in Châteauneuf-du-Pape

## Vacqueyras

This was a bold year in Vacqueyras, the red wines delivering stylish richness, lots of body and a southern mouthful of spice. Guy Ricard of the terroir-faithful Domaine Le Couroulu termed it thus: 'It's not far off being the perfect vintage. The wines are very complete, often complex, and can be drunk quite young but will also keep very well.'

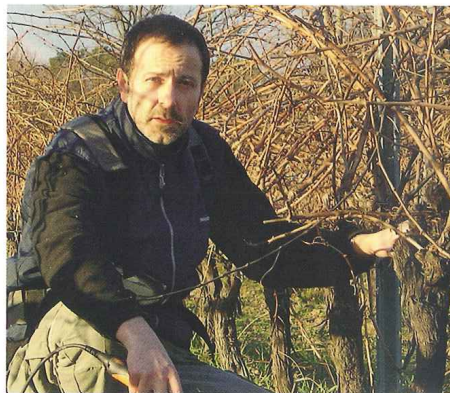
## Châteauneuf-du-Pape

Wines from Châteauneuf-du-Pape will gradually take shape, still locked up after only 18 months of life. The Grenache was slow to ripen in the more northerly zones, while alcohol levels could be high in the warm southern areas. Early September rain was heavy, which meant that free-draining sandy soils were favoured.

Jean-Paul Daumen, the accomplished owner of Domaine de la Vieille Julienne in the northern zone explained: 'It wasn't an easy year. The tannins weren't easy to manage and it was difficult to achieve a silken side to the wines. But it's moving in the right direction – there's fresh fruit, but also a lot of minerality.'

With different ripeness levels across the appellation's 3,300 hectares, 2015 is more a vintage for blends than single-vineyard wines – unless the plot was one on sandy soils, such as the wonderful Chapelle St-Théodoric's Le Grand Pin. I favour blends that compose the Tradition-level wines – they usually comprise several different locations and are cheaper and often more genuine than the Prestige wines. The latter immediately imply 1% to 1.5% higher alcohol levels as well, without always having the correct balance to handle that.

Tradition red wines that did well this year include those from Château de la Gardine, >



## Lirac

**Domaine de la Mordorée, La Reine des Bois** 91  
£12.50 (ib)-£35.83 A&B Vintners, Bancroft Wines, Côtes du Rhône-Select, H2Vin, Millésima  
Elegant nose of classy fruit. Stylish, rich palate, serene, rich and long. **Drink** 2018-2029 **Alc** 14%

## Ventoux

**Domaine de Fondrèche, Persia** 92  
£11 (ib) H2Vin  
Lucid nose includes herbs with its blue fruit. Stylish and deep, a genuine and notably long Ventoux. **Drink** 2018-2026 **Alc** 13.5%

## Cairanne

**Domaine Les Hautes Cances, Col du Débat** 94  
£12.42 (ib) OW Loeb  
Complex, multi-fruited life force on the nose. Noble, long, sparky, sustained palate: a genuine, cool, uplands wine. **Drink** 2019-2030 **Alc** 14.5%

**Domaine Boisson** 92  
N/A UK www.domaineboisson.com  
Wholesome fruit with racy qualities and notes of garrigue. Long **Drink** 2017-2027 **Alc** 14%

**Domaine Brusset, Hommage à André Brusset** 92

£18 (ib) Big Red Wine, Enotria & Coe  
Deep, sunshine-filled nose. Abundant palate of impressive content, with a cool fruit finish. Great potential. **Drink** 2019-2029 **Alc** 14.5%

## Côtes du Rhône Villages

**Domaine des Romarins, Signargues** 93  
£12.50 (2014) Fingal Rock  
Broad, deep nose. Very genuine, full of herbes de Provence: a grounded wine of passion. Great value too. **Drink** 2017-2025 **Alc** 14% >





**Domaine de Crève Coeur, Séguret 92**

N/A UK [www.domainedecrevecœur.com](http://www.domainedecrevecœur.com)

Firm fruit palate of density, freshness and lots of honest character. **Drink** 2017-2025 **A/c** 14.5%

**Domaine de la Janasse, Terre d'Argile 92**

£10.50 (ib) **Enotria & Coe, The Wine Society**  
Sweet, saline, floral nose. Buzzy, spiced palate based on vibrant Grenache. Character, energy and length. **Drink** 2019-2029 **A/c** 14.5%

**Domaine Les Aphillanthes, Vieilles Vignes, Plan de Dieu 92**

POA **Dynamic Vines**

Well-set nose of white pepper and berries. Notably tasty, but long and stylish too – a silken, elegant wine. **Drink** 2018-2025 **A/c** 14.5%

**Domaine Montmartel, Biologique, Visan 92**

£10.99 **Vinceremos**  
Aromatic nose breathes potential. Racy and thorough palate with local freshness and dense, bright fruit in tow. **Drink** 2017-2023 **A/c** 14.5%

**Côtes du Rhône**

**Domaine Gramenon, Sierra du Sud 91**

£18.60-£21.99 **Exel Wines, Les Caves de Pyrene, The Smiling Grape Co**  
Broad, smoky, herbal nose. Surging, intense fruit flavours and tasty tannins. Vinsobres in all but name. **Drink** 2017-2022 **A/c** 14%

**Costières de Nîmes**

**Domaine Galus 91**

£7.95 **The Wine Society**  
Herbs, aniseed and deft fruit on the nose. A pure terroir wine with cool red fruit at its heart and latent spice. **Drink** 2017-2021 **A/c** 13.5%

**Lubéron**

**Domaine Le Novi, Amo Roujo 90**

N/A UK +33 (0)6 22 07 90 60  
Red-fruited, floral, elegant nose. Effortless old-vine juice in a charming, truly terroir-driven wine of fine quality. **Drink** 2017-2020 **A/c** 14%

For full details of UK stockists, see p105

Clos St-Jean, Domaines La Barroche's Signature, De Cristia, Du Grand Tinel, Albin Jacumin, De La Janasse, Lafond's Roc-Epine, De La Mordorée's La Reine des Bois, Roger Sabon's Les Olivets, St-Laurent, Vieux Télégraphe's La Crau, Le Vieux Donjon and Ogier's Héritages.

Among some very good whites are Château de Beaucastel's Vieilles Vignes (great elegance), Domaine de Marcoux (aromatic and very fine) and Domaine du Vieux Télégraphe's La Crau (genuine and very Mediterranean).

**Lirac, Beaufort-de-Venise, Vinsobres**

The reds from these areas are all of a good standard. Freshness features at Beaufort-de-Venise and Vinsobres, the latter giving good, free-wheeling Syrah. Lirac's reds are well-filled and, with winemaking standards rising, these wines can present good value for money.

**Cairanne**

The 2015 vintage falls perfectly for Cairanne's first year as a grown-up cru on its own. Many of the leading domaines elected to present their wines as cru, though some have chosen to remain Cairanne Côtes du Rhône Villages (more wine per hectare). The reds are thorough and, even young, show terroir, indicating their balance. The tannins are so well ripened that many will be drinking well in a few months' time. The whites, however, can lack acidity.

**Côtes du Rhône Villages, Côtes du Rhône**

This is a vintage to buy from the best names in the Villages and Côtes du Rhône categories. Lots of fruit, some sparky tannins and dashes of enticing flavour are present. Progress in white winemaking also signals a value opportunity for consumers, but focus on the top domaine names. **D**

John Livingstone-Learmonth is DWWA Regional Chair for Rhône, the author of four books on the region and publisher of [www.drinkrhône.com](http://www.drinkrhône.com)

**Above: Château de Beaucastel in Châteauneuf-du-Pape produced both a fine red and Vieilles Vignes white in 2015**

**Below: Domaine Gramenon's Sierra du Sud is a reliable AC Côtes du Rhône**



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