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Decanter

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ITALY: THE GREATS & THE NEW GENERATION

■ TUSCAN CLASSICS ■ SICILIAN STARS ■ SASSICAIA
■ 119 CHIANTI RISERVA 2001s: TASTED & RATED

PLUS:
**THE CREAM OF
BURGUNDY 2003**
**BEST-BUY RHONE
REDS UNDER £15**
**CHAMPAGNE'S
TOP IMPROVERS**



FIND YOUR RHONE

Value for money in the Rhône can be found – if you know where to look. Our expert tasters plot a map, as they select their favourite reds between £5 and £15

THE MAIN MESSAGE to Rhône lovers is 'know your vintage if you want value for money'.

Reassuringly, the appellation scale largely works out – the better wines cost a little more but can be relied upon for quality. But the key element is the year.

The 2003 vintage, with its beefy power and heady density, is a sound buy, its slightly sweet nature likely to appeal to younger drinkers. The Côtes du Rhône and Rhône Villages are the sort of wines suitable for drinking in noisy wine bars – they have enough guts to make an impression.

2002 was the vintage blighted by masses of rain, and the wines showed this. Probably the best value comes from St-Joseph from its northern zone around Chavanay. Crozes-Hermitage is pretty dodgy as a whole, by contrast, and the southern Rhône often dilute.

2001 has blossomed into a magnificent vintage in Châteauneuf-du-Pape – plenty of matter, lovely freshness and helpful tannins. Here the best work is from private domaines. The wines require more contemplation, and have more hidden corners than the vigorous 2003s.

2000 was up and down, with ripening not always well achieved. The wines can be fragile and lack true core. Selection by top names is best. The southern Rhône 1999s were full-bodied, with some delicious, clear-cut fruit, perhaps more refined than the more mineral-tinted 1998s.

John Livingstone-Learmonth

Clos Petite Bellane, Les Echals, Valréas, Côtes du Rhône Villages 2003

★★★★ (score: 17)

Masses of extraction, but packed with fruit. Very modern, smooth vanilla (oak), big New World style. Very positive fruit, balancing acidity. 2-5 years.

£10.49; Lai



Domaine de Cristia, Châteauneuf-du-Pape 2001

★★★★ (17)

Rich, gamey, Grenachy, slightly bretty bouquet. Fine, ripe fruit, and really good style. Good spice. Lots of characters, easy yet complex. Up to 5 years.

£14.99; Lai



Marie-France Masson, Cuvée Paul Emile, Rasteau, Côtes du Rhône Villages 2001

★★★★ (17)

Smoky, raspberry fruit. Leather, toffee, full. Well-knit, meaty presence. Solid, has a future. Good. Chewy black fruit, plenty of juice here. Persists well. Up to 6 years. £9.45-9.95; BRW

Domaine Saint Gayan, Rasteau, Côtes du Rhône Villages 2001

★★★★ (16.75)

Has the pebbly nose of the vintage, agreeable, smoky, hedge fruits. Showing well – good body and interesting muscly tannins thread through well. Good structure, length. Pretty scented fruit. Up to 6 years. £8.25; Yap



Les Grandes Vignes du Roy, Rasteau, Côtes du Rhône Villages 2003

★★★★ (16.75)

Warm nose with attractive fruit. Good. Lovely palate. Rich fruit and very well balanced. Good acidity. Supple with some black fruit and cherries. 2-5 years. £8.99; Adn

Château Beauchêne, Les Sens de Syrah, Côtes du Rhône 2003

(16.33) ★★★

Very ripe, and lots of good extraction, and lovely Grenache fruit. Open wine, quite Châteauneuf in style. Soft yet good natural tannins. Up to 4 years. £8.71; C&B



Château la Décelle, Valréas, Côtes du Rhône Villages 2003

(16.33) ★★★

Nice nose, deep fruit and nice perfumed black fruit. Rich with good balance. Black fruit, very good succulent, lovely wine. Excellent. Good acidity and very long. 2-5 years. £6.95; SVS

Château Redortier, Beaumes-de-Venise, Côtes du Rhône Villages 2001

(16.33) ★★★

Soft and Grenachy. Very good Châteauneuf style, good natural acidity. Good. Up to 2 years. £7.50; Rbs



Domaine de Mourchon, Grande Réserve, Séguret, Côtes du Rhône Villages 2003

(16.33) ★★★

Very big, rich and concentrated. Very extracted and concentrated palate. Loads of fruit, Syrah. Big rich, needs some time. Clean and ripe and juicy. 2-5 years. £9-11; Por

Château de Valcombe, Costières de Nîmes 2003

(16) ★★★

Rich, kirsch-like nose, deep and sweet. Ice cream soda. Sweet and ripe – big serious stuff. Good structure, clean, and good balance and potential. 2-5 years.

£8.39; Odd



Château du Trignon, Sablet, Côtes du Rhône Villages 2001

(16) ★★★

Scented, rose-tinged, soft, decent depth. Palate has an even keel. Black fruit is clear cut, and lasts well. Nice acidity, freshness. Stylish, more to come though fruit appealing now. Up to 6 years. £9.75; BBR

Domaine de Mourchon, Tradition, Séguret, Côtes du Rhône Villages 2003

(16) ★★★

A little stringy and gamey, but quite fresh. Very good concentration of fresh fruit, lots of character, spice and depth. Very good example.

1-4 years. £7-9; Ave



Domaine de Mourchon, Séguret, Côtes du Rhône Villages 2001

(16) ★★★

Good perfume and ripe fruit. Young and light. Very fresh. Tight, good black fruit. Very pure fruit. 2-5 years.

£7-9; Por

Domaine la Soumade, Rasteau, Côtes du Rhône Villages 2001

(16) ★★★

Nicely full, plum fruit and persists, some garrigue. Pretty flavour, harmonious, stone fruits, good lightly oily texture. Nice balance, good juice. Up to 4 years.

£13.40; Jer, Lay



Domaine le Clos de Caveau, Vacqueyras 2001

(16) ★★★

Fine, spicy bouquet and lovely Grenache fruit. Spicy and lifted fruit, elegant and succulent, a really good wine. Up to 5 years.

£10.75; Adn