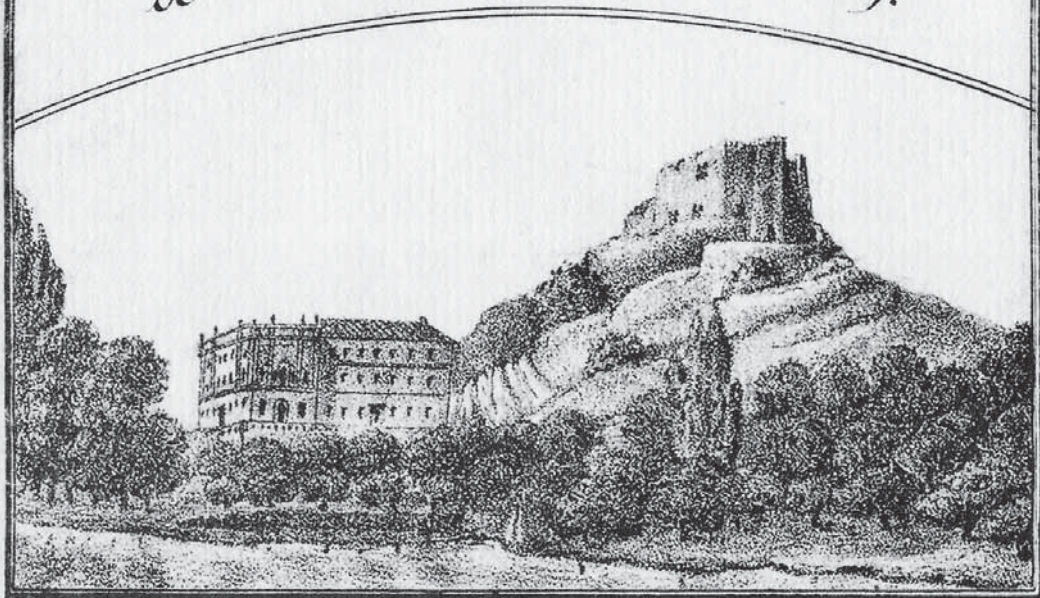


O.W.
LOEB
& CO.LTD

Vin
de M^r. le Baron de Montfaucon.



C^h. de Guichard aîné, à Arisquo.



Rhône 2010 Primeur offer

2010 Rhône Primeur Offer

Total ripeness plus vivid freshness = an ideal vintage?

2009 and 2010 are destined to go down in history as one of those magical pairings of vintages which, each in their own different ways, have produced remarkably high quality wines, with rare consistency and stylistic homogeneity across all the major vineyard regions upon which we at Loeb focus.

2009 was all about power and ripeness, whilst 2010 is about concentration and freshness. The world's wine trade first had a glimpse of the style of the 2010 vintage in northern Europe in April, at Bordeaux's Union des Grands Crus tastings. Here I tasted some wines which beautifully combined totally ripe flavours with bracing levels of acidity, ensuring that the wines danced across the palate. Of course we - for we are all customers of the great châteaux of Bordeaux - were then abused by the greedy price demands of this most grasping and short-sighted of wine markets. However, despite the nasty taste that the market left in all our mouths, please do not forget that there are truly beautiful, elegant, sumptuous wines to be had from Bordeaux in 2010.

Next we had 2010 in the Mosel. Here, where the natural vibrant acidity of both the Riesling

grape and the vertiginous slate 'terroir' of the region is such an essential element in the make-up of the wine, the 2010 reputation for freshness with total ripeness was further enhanced. Whilst you may reason that Mosel Rieslings do not necessarily need higher levels of acid, I can tell you that the balletic balance between ripeness and acidity in 2010 is something quite wonderful. 2010 is a great vintage on the Mosel; indeed I have just opened our copy of the December Decanter (today is 1st November...why do magazines play that game?) to read that Stephen Brook regards the 2010 Mosels from the best estates to be "sensationally good". By the way, we had 6 wines in Stephen's top 15.

Next week I am off to look at 2010 in our heartland of Burgundy, but last week I was in the Rhône Valley (as my two followers and their dog on Twitter will know....by the way, if you want to make it three and a dog you will find me '@ChrisfromLoeb' - and I promise to only witter when there is something vaguely interesting going on, and I will do my best to avoid drowning you in inanities).

So, to the meat of the matter, the Rhône Valley wines in 2010.

As already mentioned, perhaps it is not obvious that a high acid vintage would benefit the Mosel; however, the reverse is of course the truth in the Rhône. Here in recent, globally-warmed vintages alcohol levels have been rising ever higher as the vignerons struggle to achieve phenolic ripeness (ripeness of skins, pips and stalks) before losing all their acidity and piling up monumental levels of grape sugar, which translate into potentially head-splitting alcohol levels. This is a particular problem in the southern Rhône, where the Grenache grape is the chief culprit. In the north, where Syrah is king, this balance is more readily achieved. In this context it is easy to see why a vintage which achieves total ripeness whilst maintaining useful levels of vibrant acidity is of considerable interest.

The second critical feature of the 2010 harvest - and this is yet another facet of the vintage which is common to all our favourite wine regions - is that blustery weather during the spring flowering meant that the fruit set was variable. Known as coulure, this condition, whereby flowers are either not pollinated or the tiny berries drop off at a very early stage, is, of course, the precursor to a small harvest. In the Rhône the loss of volume in 2010 against the average is of

the order of 20 to 35%. In Burgundy it is even more serious.

A loss of volume is naturally a fiscal problem to vignerons, and therefore potentially to we consumers as well, as there may well be 'upward pressure' on prices. However, to have a harvest which is limited in volume so early in the annual cycle, and by so natural an agency, is a great positive from the quality point of view. Harvests can be unnaturally concentrated by what has come to be called a 'green harvest', whereby a heavy crop is thinned by use of the secateurs in July, in order that the vines can concentrate their efforts on the remaining fruit. Concentration can also come during the summer months when lack of rainfall can dry the fruit, or wind can evaporate liquid from the skins. All these various events will deliver smaller, and therefore more concentrated crops. However, they all carry with them to a greater or lesser degree what we could term 'side effects'. However, the form of crop concentration that took place in 2010 is, without doubt, the best way to achieve a smaller, more concentrated, more intense, more mineral-infused, characterful harvest - and the wines of 2010 stand witness to that.

So, what were the climatic conditions which led to such a wonderful harvest? Well, winter

was, not surprisingly, cold and long - a definite positive as it forces the vines to slumber, whilst killing off various bugs and parasites in the vineyards.

As already mentioned, the flowering saw wind and rain, resulting in a poor fruit set. But from then on the weather picked up, with a very good, sunny summer, accompanied by unusually moderate temperatures; thus acidities were maintained. Rain came at sensible intervals and in sensible volumes to keep the plants fresh and productive.

The season proved to be long, with an Indian summer following on from the bright but not scorching days of summer. Thus vigneron were very happy to trust the weather forecasters, whilst keeping an eye on their analyses and tasting their fruit (including crunching pips and stalks between premolars to check that all-important phenolic ripeness).

Sugar levels drifted upward at a sensible pace, whilst the acid levels drifted downward at an even slower pace. The possibility of a great harvest was on the cards, as long as the weather didn't turn. Some areas saw light showers during harvest, but vigneron felt relaxed about leaving moist fruit for a day to dry as they could see that all was moving very gently, and therefore they were unlikely to risk the

essential balance by any small delays.

The good weather - bright and sunny but fresh - continued into October, as did the harvest at many of the better estates, the vigneron eager to make the most of the benign conditions.

South or north? The perennial question in the Rhône. Well, in 2010 the answer is a rare but resounding both! Last week Brough Gurney-Randall and I tasted what we both consider to be truly great wines from all corners of the Rhône Valley, and from all mixes of grapes. I suppose that one could rationalise that it is the rich blends of the south that will most benefit from additional acidity and 'lift', and that therefore the balance of quality perhaps tips to the south, but truly the northern Syrahs vary from very good (with one exception) to exceptional.

Finally, a word more on concentration; one of the analyses that the more scientifically minded producers might use is the IPT, or 'indice polyphenol totale'. This is an analysis of must in the tank and gives an indicator of the concentration of that must - the 'content' of the juice. This results in a number, which for Château Pesquié's Artemia cuvée averages 75 to 85; the 2010 Artemia hit 106!

Chris Davey 1st November 2011

Southern Rhône

Château Pesquié, Côtes du Ventoux

organic, and converting to biodynamic - not certified

If you managed to stay awake to the end of the general introduction you will know that the Pesquié wines have hit record levels of concentration in 2010. In addition, young Alexandre Chaudière, who has taken over from father Paul as chief winemaker, is really hitting his stride, and producing ever-more stylish, interesting wines. This has been given more weight by Robert Parker ensuring that the IPT on the 2010 Artemia is not the only record broken this year; in the last edition of the Wine Advocate Parker gave the 2010 Terrasses a truly astonishing 94 points out of 100, and described it as a "phenomenal bargain" (his underlining, not ours). 94 for a Ventoux, let alone one selling at this fantastic price? Utterly unheard of. 94 is Dujac Clos St. Denis/Bonnes Mares territory. Fill your boots!

Côtes du Ventoux Cuvée les Terrasses

£60 ib

70% 60 year old Grenache and 30% 30 year old Syrah aged 35% in old barrels or foudres and 65% in stainless steel. "Bright, lively colour - not black and dead from over-extraction. This is a brooding and involving nose. Silky, cool, and very stylish attack. Crisp, crunchy, blue fruit flavours here. This hints at violets and other fine aromas. Wonderfully svelte tannins. The concentration is there in the mid-palate, but the freshness ensures elegance. Incredible Ventoux." Drink: 2012-2017

Côtes du Ventoux Cuvée Quintessence

£110 ib

80% 40 year old Syrah and 20% 60 year old Grenache, 100% small barrel élevage. We tasted the constituent parts from various barrels, and this is a synthesis of my notes: "Very intense nose with hints of spice. Beautiful enveloping fruit on the attack. Deep, plush, rich, ripe dense fruit. Cacao, blackcurrants, summer pudding - they're all here. Lovely tannins. This is totally wonderful. Big! Very long." Drink: 2013-2020+

Côtes du Ventoux Cuvée Artemia

£175 ib

50/50 Grenache/Syrah from the same two plots each year, situated on limestone. 80+ year old Grenache, 50+ year old Syrah. "Closed nose, and attack. Flavours come slowly; dense, pure, mouth-filling. Totally ripe, yet there is energy and a cool quality here (we revived the word coolth to describe it, hope you don't mind...?). Blackberries and

garrigue herbs intermingle. Tremendous wine!" We have noticed that older vintages of Artemia show a truly charming lavender quality on the palate - a translation of an aroma into a flavour. For sure this superb 2010 will develop in the same way. Drink: 2013 - 2025+

Château de Montfaucon, Lirac organic - not certified

This is only our second primeur offer to feature the wines of Rodolphe de Pins, but I can tell you that tasting with Rodolphe and his delightful Finnish wife Mari is fast becoming one of the highlights of the year. It so happens that Rudi (to his mates) is great friends with the Chaudière family at Pesquié, and his wines are every bit as exciting as those of young Alexandre Chaudière.

As explained last year, the majority of Rudi's 30 hectares of vineyards lie within the Lirac appellation, on the right bank of the Rhône, just opposite Châteauneuf. However, Rudi thinks that no one has ever heard of Lirac, so he has been marketing all his wine as simple Côtes du Rhône (in the early nineteenth century and before, long before Châteauneuf rose to prominence, the area around Montfaucon and Roquemaure was known as **la** Côte du Rhône, an indicator of the historic quality of the terroir here). However, after two years of pushing we have finally convinced Rudi to use the Lirac appellation where possible, ie on the Baron Louis cuvée.

Rudi's wines were silky, elegant, and cool in 2009 - a rare feat; in 2010 they are simply stunning (sorry, I am not fond of that word so beloved of estate agents, but it seems to fit here..). Again, we tasted the constituent parts of the various cuvées, as well as prototype final blends, made on the hoof by Rudi, dashing around the barrels in his 16th century cellar. The quality was uniformly high and exciting; I put to you in all seriousness that the Baron Louis, superb in 2007 and 2009, is a serious contender for stardom in 2010. Put that wine in a line up of top Châteauneufs at twice, or thrice the price and I challenge any great taster to pick it out as not being of equivalent quality.

Côtes du Rhône

£60 ib

There are a few acres of vines which do not lie within the Lirac appellation, and also, in order to maintain an incredibly high quality on the Baron Louis, Rudi needs to 'deselect' some barrels of Lirac as necessary. "Beautifully deep, ripe, bright colour. Floral, rose petal nose, with hints of lush, sweet blueberries and blackberries behind. There is

Château de Montfaucon (contd.)

lift and freshness in this ripe, plush palate. The tannins are quite considerable, but utterly svelte and integrated. This wine will provide incredibly good drinking at the price." Drink: 2013-2020+

Lirac 'Baron Louis'

£99 ib

Named after Rudi's ancestor (yes, this is a proper Château, with real history..... and even the odd aristocrat - Rudi fills that bill very well, he is delightfully eccentric). "Even more intense colour. Ripe fruitcake nose. Beautiful finesse on the attack. Balanced, full, silky, expressive, no heat. Great wine! Amazing perfumed finish." Drink: 2013-2030+

le Vin de Monsieur le Baron, Vin de Pays du Gard

per 6 bottles £118 ib

This is typical of the man. Whilst rootling around in a dusty attic of the family home (Mum and Dad still live in the château) Rudi found some original labels, still on sheets of two, uncut, which date from about 1810. They feature an etching of the château, and the simple but accurate legend "Vin de Mr. le Baron de Montfaucon" (halcyon days - no stuff about containing sulphites, or pictures of pregnant ladies with lines through them...). Rudi thinks that these are probably the oldest wine labels in existence, and he has faithfully reproduced them for this wine (see the cover of this offer). But he didn't stop there, he has also faithfully reproduced the wine to go with the label. He has made this wine 'à l'ancienne', co-fermenting 15 different varietals (including 4 white varieties). The modern laws for the Lirac appellation do not permit some of the varieties included, although Rudi's research tells him that they were planted in the olden days. The concept, and the pricing (!) - but not the wine - are as eccentric as Rudi, but this is a fascinating exercise. "Rich, full colour (despite at least 10% of the juice being from white varietals). Dark bramble nose, with hints of spice and tapenade. Huge richness here. This is very well melded and balanced (a result of co-fermentation). Intense and complex. This stitches the palate with concentration. Great wine." Another wine that boxes way above its weight. Drink: 2015-2030+

Rudi mentioned, 'en passant', that the diurnal temperature ranges throughout the summer of 2010 were particularly wide - the days were relatively fresh, but the nights were veritably cool. For some reason that I have yet to get my head around this means that the levels of polyphenols were very high, giving wonderful colours and 'extraction'.

Domaine les Hautes Cances, Cairanne

Organic - they were certified, but gave it up because of the bureaucracy!

Jean-Marie and Anne-Marie Astart continue to make great progress. In the 13 years that I have been calling to taste they have gone from very artisanal producers of character wines, via their new 'winery' in 2004, to serious players in the southern Rhône, with a range of wines to match anyone. This was yet another highly impressive tasting.

2011 White & Rosé

Note the vintage. Year in, year out the Astarts produce brilliant white and rosé; we have never bought them before because Cairanne Blanc is a tricky name to sell, and rosé, however delicious, is always a huge gamble with our weather....and we have several others. Anyway, this year both wines were so toothsome that we could resist no longer. We suggest that you succumb similarly. Both wines will be bottled late January, and we will ship for the late spring.

2011 Cairanne Blanc, Côtes du Rhône Villages £82 ib

30% Viognier from the high (280 metres) Col du Débat vineyard, plus roughly equal quantities of Grenache blanc, Clairette, and Bourboulenc. Still 'milky' from the fermentation, but the blend was fully assembled and settling in tank. "Fresh, juicy nose. Floral, with hints of crunchy apples. Charming ripe fruit on the attack, definite florality in the mid palate, and a cool, menthol finish. Delightful". Best drunk young, but will be fine through to 2015.

2011 Cairanne Rosé, Côtes du Rhône Villages £74 ib

"Deep pearl pink. fresh, sweet strawberry nose. Lovely fruit attack. This is a beauty - the fruit is so ripe that it almost seems sweet. Crammed with gorgeous, plump red fruits." Jean-Marie confirmed that the wine is, analytically, as opposed to organoleptically (sorry, but I had to squeeze it in somewhere) speaking, bone dry (less than 2gms per litre residual sugar...like claret, or white Burgundy). Drink whilst you watch the blur that will be Usain Bolt next summer, although it will still drink in summer 2013.

Côtes du Rhône

£66 ib

"Fabulous deep colour. Deep, rich bramble attack. Sweet fruit plus suave tannic presence. Seriously rich wine. Very fine, with good *fraicheur*. It may lack detail, but what a glass! Plenty of tannin, but so ripe and juicy. Plenty of length. Super wine." Drink: 2012 - 2018

Jean-Marie explained (and indeed this was confirmed by several growers) that the 2010 crop was unusual inasmuch as, to the eye, the volume looked normal - in other words fermenting vats were full. However, the concentration of the harvest was confirmed when the final pressing was done and the resultant juice was much less than usual. In other words the grapes contained more pulp and less juice, which is great news for quality, character, and complexity.

Cairanne Cuvée Tradition, Côtes du Rhône Villages

£85 ib

"Magnificent colour! There is more character on the nose here, more expression. Also more complexity. Delicious black fruits swamp the palate - this is so juicy! Long, very concentrated, very rich. Great structure, but very well integrated. This will be such a bargain!" At time of writing I did not know the price. Drink: 2013 - 2020+

Cairanne Cuvée Vieilles Vignes, Côtes du Rhône Villages

per 12 bottles £108 ib

per 6 mags £120 ib

"Even deeper colour - there is blue here. Deep, brooding nose. Cool bramble jelly. This is so cool and pure and lovely. Hints of menthol. Big but svelte tannins. Lovely sweet fruit and long, cool, menthol finish." Here is where we really see the effect of 2010; this cuvée is usually the hot, spicy one of the pair. This year it is all elegance - so what will the Col du Débat bring? Drink: 2013 - 2020+

Cairanne Cuvée Col du Débat, Côtes du Rhône Villages,

per 12 bottles £130 ib

per 6 mags £142 ib

From the highest site in the village (about 280 metres) and slightly north facing, very exposed to the cooling Mistral wind. "Beautiful deep colour - definite blue edges. Blueberry fruit on the nose. Bright and pure, but the tannins are more obvious here. Almost leathery. This stitches the mouth. Juicy blue/black fruits everywhere. Great length. Hints of menthol again." Drink: 2014 - 2020+

Domaine Jaume, Vinsobres organic, with their own charter

Here we have another estate with some 'serious altitude' - in fact up to 420 metres. The hills of Vinsobres are truly beautiful. We are all in love with France, but believe me until you have rooted around in this little corner of 'la belle France' you ain't seen nothin'. The Jaume brothers are producing absolutely textbook wines from their massive 70 hectares. All their wines are extremely well made, but for this 'primeur' offer we have decided to focus on their 'Référence' cuvée.

Vinsobres Cuvée Référence

£89 ib

"A1 deep, rich colour. This is a fine and involving nose. No heat, just plump, juicy fruit - black plums - lovely. Good subtle power on the attack. Lovely body, superb tannins. Great length, with subtle aromas of lavender and herbs. Velvet finish." Brough commented "2 to 3 years and this will be a real 'drinker!'" I can't argue. Drink: 2013 - 2020+

Domaine du Pesquier, Gigondas 'lutte raisonnée', or semi-organic.

We have not featured Guy and Matthieu Boutière's Gigondas in recent primeur offers as the wine has showed 'a little hot' - ie alcoholic - when we have tasted it from tank each autumn. Having said that, we have continued to ship the wine for restaurant use at a later date, and each time the wine has proved to be splendid once in bottle. It just goes to show that however hard you try, you cannot be right all the time! Anyway, better safe than sorry. However, Brough and I both liked the 2010 and have no reservations about offering it this year.

Gigondas

£112 ib

"Amazingly dense colour - opaque. This is not hot. Very full and rotund, with beautifully ripe tannins. Robust, but balanced, with good freshness. Lacks a little detail, but impressive." Drink: 2013 - 2018

Domaine Montirius, Gigondas and Vacqueyras

biodynamic - ie super organic!

Sitting here, back in sunny Bermondsey, tapping away furiously, it occurs to me that the southern Rhône really is a hotspot for quality, and indeed **extraordinary** value. Montirius, Jaume, Hautes Cances, Montfaucon, and the rest of them - all fantastically devoted, driven, almost evangelistic people who live and breathe wine and terroir. All of them fanatically keen on producing absolutely the best they possibly can from nature's bounty. The fact that they then sell it and live off the proceeds really is secondary to them all; passion is the word. How refreshing (no, don't worry, I'm not going to bang on about Bordeaux again). If anyone of these producers really encapsulates all that passion and drive it is Eric and Christine Saurel of Montirius. They have been producing serious wine from their 50-odd hectares of vines for a decade or more now, but in 2010 they have truly excelled themselves. I know I am drowning you in superlatives, but really, if you don't buy any of these wines,well, just don't blame me!

Côtes du Rhône 'Sérine'

£89 ib

We have never offered this wine before. It comes from a vineyard that the Saurels rent, and hope to buy. With 50 hectares of their own they really do not need to rent any more, but Christine and Eric could not resist the 60 year old Sérine vines which are planted here. Sérine is an old and particularly pure form of the Syrah, with small berries and therefore an excellent juice to skin ratio, which has been pushed further by the low volumes of the 2010 juice. Just like Christine and Eric, we could not resist. "Beautiful colour (hardly worth mentioning colour in 2010!). Great bramble nose - deep, rich, sweet, and very primary. This is powerful Syrah. Rich and dense and ripe. This is special. Long. Perfumed. Very good indeed." Drink: 2014-2020+

Vacqueyras "Garrigues"

£79 ib

From a 22 hectares (11 plots) of vines planted with 70% Grenache, 30% Syrah, with an average vine age of 55 years. The bargain of the range. "Beautiful sweet grape nose. Pure, racy, and fine. Svelte tannins. Perfect balance. This is truly excellent. Great length. Extra!" - as the French would say. At the time of writing I do not know the price, but if this isn't a steal, I'm a Dutchman! Drink: 2012/3 - 2020+

Vacqueyras le Clos

per 12 botts £96 ib

per 6 mags £108 ib

This single plot adjoins the Saurel's remote house; it was planted 50/50 Syrah/Grenache only 22 years ago. Despite that relative youth, this vineyard has truly excelled in 2010. This is a star wine, and, in my opinion, overshadows the (officially) grander Gigondas which follow. "Blackstrap, with glints of cobalt blue. Amazing nose - plump black fruits mingle with graphite and charcoal. Very bright, intense, structured, sweet fruit - explosive attack, but then the structure closes. Massive and intense. Potentially a very great Vacqueyras." Drink: 2015 - 2030+

Here's something interesting. In order to catch the whole 8 hectares of le Clos at absolutely optimal maturity they machine harvested it in one day. Machine harvesting is normally anathema to great winemakers, but the Saurels claimed that the advantages outweighed the disadvantages in this case, and the proof of the pudding etc.

Gigondas "Terres des Aînés"

per 12 botts £115ib

80% Grenache, 20% Mourvèdre. "Deep, brooding nose here. Touch of heat on the palate (alcohol). This needs time. There are glimpses of fine fruit and style, but it is rather monolithic at the moment." (after 2 minutes) "The more I taste it, the more I like it. Excellent depth. Hints of tar and cacao on the finish." Drink: 2014 - 2025+

Gigondas "Confidentiel"

per 6 botts £92 ib

The Saurels are very particular about their bottling dates; nothing is done by rote, everything is done by tasting. They bottle a wine when their palates tell them the wine is ready. The Sérine was bottled before the 2012 harvest, the Garrigue, Clos, and Terre des Aînés were all still in tank last week, but this, the grandest wine (officially) in the cellar, was bottled on 18th July 2011! "Deep, plush, bramble nose. Vibrant, bright, sweet, pure attack. Hints of menthol and white pepper at the finish. Very good length. Today the Terre is the bigger of the two." And le Clos is king of the heap! Drink: 2014 - 2025+

Domaine la Monardière, Vacqueyras

organic, not certified

The Vache family are really splendid people. Each year Martine invites us either to lunch or dine with them; I usually wriggle (guilt over always accepting), but there is no escaping Martine! As always, we ate fabulously well (the have a friend in the Landes who farms geese...) and spent the whole evening giggling and guffawing. It's not all hard grind, you'll be glad to hear! Their 2010s were absolutely up to the mark, and whilst more juicy and a slightly less serious style than Montirius, are more than worthy of your attention

Vacqueyras Cuvée les 2 Monardes

£105ib

70/30 Grenache/Syrah. This had been racked and assembled in tank ready for pre-Christmas bottling. "Medium rich colour. Sweet, pure, black fruit nose. Very pure, expressive, and remarkably pretty. Good sweet fruit. Very fine structure. This is going to be a delight quite soon!" Drink: 2012 - 2017

Vacqueyras Vieilles Vignes

£149ib

70% Grenache, 15% Syrah, 15% Mourvèdre. Racked into tank last week, but will settle and meld for 10 months for bottling next August. "Deep, rich colour. Quite closed nose (post racking) but what a sweet attack! Deep and plummy. Very suave. Cool and fine. This is a beauty. Will be very juicy and very satisfying." Drink 2014+ - 2025

Domaine Bosquet des Papes, Châteauneuf du Pape

'lutte raisonné', or semi-organic

From one lovely family to another. If the noise levels at dinner with the Vaches were high, they would have been ear-shattering had Nicolas and Jeanne-Claire Boiron been there! Mind you, they have a lot to be happy about. Nicolas has hit a rich seam of quality in recent vintages. This was yet another excellent tasting of thoroughly well made, truly classic wines.

Côtes du Rhône Domaine Nicolas Boiron

£66 ib

This was bottled in May, to capture the freshness. "Fabulously deep, glossy colour. Fresh, pretty nose of ripe, plummy fruit. Glossy, and not at all hot. This is sweet and juicy, with beautifully rounded tannins. Will make lovely drinking at a sensible price. Drink: 2012 - 2018

Côtes du Rhône “Clavin”

£116ib

“Deep purple. Fresh, intense, beetroot nose. Fresh, crunchy, cool, ripe, sweet fruit on the attack. Very elegant and rounded tannins. Super concentration in the mid-palate. Lovely length. Classic and masterly 2010.” Drink: 2013 - 2025+

Châteauneuf du Pape ‘les Sources’

per 6 bottles £182ib

per 6 mags £375ib

The Vieilles Vignes cuvée as was. “Very deep colour. Closed, but undeniably cool and juicy nose. Creamy texture and incredible density. Very svelte tannins. Pure, totally ripe, yet fresh fruit. Masses of tannin on the finish, but very glossy, rotund, friendly tannins. This is a very big wine indeed!” Drink: 2016-2035+

Châteauneuf du Pape ‘Réservé’

per 6 bottles £695ib

18 hectolitres per hectare, from a plot originally planted in 1905. 85/10 Grenache/Syrah, plus a tickle of Cinsault. “Very deep, opaque colour. Deep bramble nose. Sweet attack. Oodles of cassis here. The tannins come in the mid palate, plenty of them, but round, harmonious, and in balance. This is expressive and lovely, with layers of cool black fruits.” I note that Mr. Parker has given it 96-100 out of 100, which means the Americans will cut their right arms off for it. It is undoubtedly a very impressive wine, but it has to be said that there just may be better value elsewhere..... By the way, despite showing relatively ‘cool’ this is over 16% alcohol. Stocks are strictly limited, and we may have to ration.

and now for Château Rayas....

I’m afraid that we still cannot offer you the 2007 vintage from Rayas and its stablemates. Emmanuel Reynaud tells us that he will be announcing the allocations ‘early next year’, which probably means March. Fear not, we have not sold it all to Hong Kong and bought a yacht. You will hear as soon as we do.

Northern Rhône

To the land of Syrah. Now, I have to admit that we had a few conflicting signals about the state of the vintage 'oop north'. First of all, when I phoned Jean-Michel Stéphan to make the appointment he told me that he couldn't receive us (but his father would) and that he had only made one cuvée in 2010 instead of the usual four. That always sets alarm bells ringing (in the end, we discovered that this was because, with his tiny domaine and the small harvest, he just didn't have the volumes - mind you, read on). Then, when we arrived at Murinais Luc Tardy told us that he had not made his wonderful Crozes Caprice de Valentin in 2010; more alarm bells. But then we went on to taste some magnificent northern Syrahs.

Domaine du Murinais, Crozes-Hermitage

converting to organic

Luc Tardy is a refreshingly honest and open young(ish) man. Despite running his own domaine for well over a decade he is still honing his methods and his style, and is not afraid to admit it. His problem has not been a lack of quality, but rather the reverse - his Amandiers cuvée has at times been too good, too big, too manly. However, his 2007 was a delight (after a little time), he was unhappy with his 2008 so he sold it all off, his 2009 was spot on, and so is this 2010. He was all smiles last week, and in a very French way basically said "I've cracked it!". Rather charming really. As mentioned in the introduction, he did not produce Caprice de Valentin in 2010 - but that takes nothing away from this wine.....

Crozes-Hermitage Cuvée les Amandiers **per 12 botts £92 ib**
per 6 mags £102ib

"Beautiful bright, deep colour. Sweet, juicy nose. This explodes on the palate and fills the mouth. Lovely fresh, supple fruit. Great texture. This is a delight. Lovely back flavours which remind me of Jaboulet's Domaine de Thalabert from its '70s and '80s heyday. Excellent length." This is a brilliant mid-term prospect. Drink: 2012 - 2020

Domaine 'Aléofane', Natacha Chave, Mercuroil

organic, will be certified in 2012

Natacha was new to our range last year, and what a welcome addition! She is making totally beautiful wines, and we are convinced that she is destined for stardom. The wines were assembled in tank ready for bottling, which is taking place as I type.

Crozes-Hermitage

per 12 botts £108ib
per 6 mags £118ib

"Beautiful deep colour. Quite closed nose, but there is richness, purity, and finesse here. The attack is very fresh, racy, and fine. There is a really fresh edge here, and yet there is also density and concentration. Blackcurrants and cream, with hints of chocolate on the finish. This is very good. Lovely length." Drink: 2013 - 2020+

St. Joseph

per 12 botts £125ib
per 6 mags £135ib

"More dimension on the nose. Deeper and richer, but still with a fresh lift. This is lovely. Silky texture. Mineral complexity. Great intensity. Brambles and chocolate, with a dash of cream. Also a whiff of parma violets. Really lovely wine." Drink: 2013 - 2025+

Domaine Lionnet "Terre Brûlée", Cornas

organic, will be certified in 2012

Ludovic Izerable (Mr. Corinne Lionnet) told us that his yield was 50% down in 2010; when you only own 2.2 hectares that is a real problem! Still, he is busy planting another hectare, and has also secured some land in St. Joseph, so watch this space. He also told us that he would maintain our allocation this year as we paid our bills! It does pay.... in the end. The wines from his 5 separate plots were still in large demi muid barrels, but as there was so little wine this year he had vinified Brugères and Chaillots together, and Mazards with Combe. He always blends everything together at the end to make one, very good Cornas.

Cornas

£199ib

"Wonderfully deep, vibrant colour. Inky, plummy nose, with just a whiff of roses. Sweet, berry fruit attack - powerful dark red berries. Plenty of wine here. Lovely ripe, suave tannins. Cool, elegant, ripe, fresh red/black fruits. Definite hints of parma violets (again). Hints of cacao. This wine is a delight. So pure, so expressive, excellent balance. Amazing finish - parma violets and cinnamon. Long." 2014 - 2030

This is the best wine I have tasted here. Buy some!

..and now for something new!

Domaine du Tunnel, Stéphane Robert, St. Péray

organic, not certified

Last year we drank a truly delicious bottle of Stéphane Robert's 2000 Cornas, and resolved to call on him this year. We are glad that we did, for we discovered not only excellent reds, but also one of the most seductive and charming whites that we have come across in a long time. Stéphane's family were not wine people, but he passionately wanted to go into wine. So in 1996 he bought some land in St. Péray and St. Joseph. Under his land in St. Joseph there was a long disused railway tunnel, hence the unusual name. He has vowed to restore the tunnel to use as his winery - when he gets some time. He now has 9 hectares, 4 in Cornas, 3 in St. Joseph, and 2 in St. Péray.

White Wine

2010 St. Péray, Roussanne

per 6 botts £99 ib

"Beautiful lime green hints. This moves thickly in the glass. Glorious nose - white flowers. Very floral and elegant. Great body. This is a beauty. Great texture in the mouth. Peaches, pears, limes, flowers. Good length. Lovely wine!" We will ship soon. Buy a case to drink next spring and summer. Perfection. Drink: 2012 - 2014

Red Wines

St. Joseph

per 6 botts £99 ib

This had been racked the previous day, and yet showed brilliantly. "Black to the eye, and sweet black fruits on the attack. Quite modern but very expressive. Juicy, plump, ripe Syrah. Lovely aromas on the back palate - more parma violets! Beautifully rounded tannins. Cool. Good weight and length." I liked it! Drink: 2013 - 2025

Domaine du Tunnel (contd.)

Cornas

per 6 bottles £135ib

This had been racked precisely 30 minutes before tasting! "Very deep purple. Lovely rich nose. A real fruit cake. Sweet grape attack. Plenty of wine here. This is alive - so fresh and vibrant, yet dense and compact. Again, quite modern and svelte, but lovely wine." Drink: 2013 - 2025

Tunnel or Lionnet? Lionnet for traditionalists, Tunnel for those with less patience, and who require something a little more silky.

Domaine Michel et Stéphane Ogier, Côte-Rôtie

organic - not certified

Stéphane was on cracking form; 3 very good harvests (the 2011 is no slouch) on the trot, a burgeoning business with over four times the acreage he started with (and he is still in his thirties), a young family - what isn't there to smile about? These lucky chaps - at least the good ones - don't really have to worry about the absurdities of the Euro and the World economy; demand outstrips supply several fold, so even if their market halved they would still be alright, Jack. Hey ho. Anyway, to wine: really rather good.

Please note the price estimates for the reds. Please state your interest. We should be able to confirm prices by the end of the year. If our estimates are incorrect there will be no problem in cancelling your order. Invoicing for the reds will take place after prices have been confirmed.

White Wines

2010 Viognier de Rosine, Vin de Pays des Collines

Rhodaniennes

£135ib

Bottled last June. "Very fresh nose - floral, but with edgy minerality. Pure, fine, mineral attack with good volume and acid to balance. Apricots and peaches. Very stylish wine with real backbone." Drink over the next two years

2010 Condrieu 'la Combe de Malleval' per 6 bottles £129ib

"Nose rather closed (the samples were too cold). Real minerality here - immediate presence on the attack. This fills the mouth. Taut, fresh, and intense. White peaches and apricots, with a touch of honey. Lingering mineral finish. Top notch Condrieu." Drink to 2014

Red Wines

la Rosine Syrah, Vin de Pays des Collines Rhodaniennes

Estimate: £125ib

This vineyard, which father Michel Ogier planted in the 80s, sits up a little side valley, facing due south west, to the north of the village of Condrieu - and so just beyond the southern limit of the Côte Blonde. The wine had been in bottle for only four weeks. "Fabulous deep colour. Deep, burly, black fruit nose. Brambles all the way. Rich, warm, toasty blackberry attack. Ripe and fresh. Super balance. Tannins are round and very well integrated. Lovely lingering, silky finish. Beautiful aromas fill the mouth for minutes." This is ready to better many a Côte-Rôtie! Drink: 2013 - 2018

l'Ame Soeur, Seyssuel, Vin de Pays Est: per 6 bottles £115ib

The steep granite slope above the village of Seyssuel, just north of Vienne, was terraced and planted with 'Syrah' from Roman times (Pliny the Elder wrote of the resulting wine) right up to phylloxera in the 19th century. The slope faces south, south west, and is almost the mirror image, or 'soul mate' (l'âme soeur literally translated = soul sister) to Côte-Rôtie's granitic south, south east facing slope, or perhaps precipice would be more accurate. The mica-schist soil is more akin to the Côte Blonde, as there is no iron oxide here. After phylloxera the whole area was left to rack and ruin. However, this great and ancient site started to be re-planted in the nineties, and the Ogiers planted their 1.5 hectares in 2001 and 2003. "Very plump nose, but with hints of freshness and finesse. Bright, fresh attack. There are violets here. Despite freshness there is plenty of density and weight. Glossy tannins - lovely mouth feel. Definite florality - those violets again. Fresh, vibrant finish." Drink: 2013 - 2025+

Côte-Rôtie Estimate: per 6 bottles £195ib

There is the odd Viognier plant in Stéphane's Côte-Rôtie vineyards, but this is 99.9% Syrah, to quote the man himself. This was a little pre-assemblage; the wine will be bottled, probably, in the spring. "Beautifully deep, plump nose, with hints of cacao (but only 20% new wood here). Ripe and spot on - everything feels right here. A silky attack which fills the mouth. Immediate presence. Notes of dark chocolate and fresh blackberries. Lingering finish. Impressive." Drink: 2015 - 2035+

Domaine Patrick et Christophe Bonnefond, Côte-Rôtie

lutte raisonnée, or semi-organic

I think I can safely say that this was the best tasting we have had chez Bonnefond. Stéphane Ogier just seems to have 'had it' from birth (he is one of those guys the rest of us love to hate - good looking, no doubt captain of rugby at Ampuis High, boy scout, good at whittling etc etc) but brothers Patrick and Christophe are more like the rest of us. They have learned by their mistakes (they were over oaking in the nineties) and are gaining in strength and knowledge. They have made superb wines in 2010.

The domaine, an impressive 7 hectares, is concentrated around the two adjoining Côte Brune slopes of Rozier and Rochains. The two vineyard sites sit on either side of a buttress of rock which forms the entrance to a tiny side valley. They are both incredibly steep, with Rozier facing south east, and Rochains south west.

2011 Condrieu Côte Chatillon

per 6 botts £140ib

"Beautiful fruit/mineral nose. Wonderful expression. Intense, fresh, balanced. I love it!" Drink by 2015

Côte-Rôtie

£269ib

This basic cuvée is 20% Blonde (from Semons) and 80% Brune (from Rozier). We tasted a pre-assemblage from tank that had been racked for bottling in time for the local market this Christmas (!), and we then tasted several barrels which will be bottled next year - for us! "The usual 2010 deep, dense, yet vibrant colour. Beautiful plump, plush, ripe nose - if velvet had an aroma, this would be it. Juicy, ripe blackberries explode on the palate. Great volume, great intensity, great freshness and life. Definite mineral background adding to the life. Tannins totally involved and integrated (and there is a good skeleton here) - velour texture. Long after, lovely florality. Great start!" Drink: 2014 - 2035

Côte-Rôtie, Côte Rozier

per 6 botts £185ib

per 6 mags £385ib

"Richer nose here. More 'torrefaction' on the attack (roasted coffee notes - this is 50% new wood, but can take it). Very tight and closed in. This needs work. Glimpses of violets in the mid palate. Serious, racy fruit here. Then the tannins close. Big wine." Drink: 2016 - 2035+

Côte-Rôtie, "les Rochains"

per 6 botts £185ib

per 6 mags £385ib

"Plumper nose here. This is good. Great texture. This is super. Balanced, full, intense, concentrated, and yet with real finesse and that ever-present freshness. Notes of graphite and cacao, with hints of violets and blackberries. Excellent, expressive length." Drink: 2015 - 2035

Tasting wine from barrel is a funny old game (but not of two halves); if we had had the time to go back and taste chez Bonnefond the next day there is a strong possibility that it would have been the Rozier that was showing, and the Rochains that was all bound up in itself. C'est comme ça! However, rest assured, all the Bonnefonds are great in 2010 (and 2011). Unfortunately we cannot say the same everywhere.....

Domaine Jean-Michel Stéphan, Côte-Rôtie

Those of you who manfully ploughed through the introduction may have noticed that my summation of a rare universally good harvest in the Rhône was marred by mention of one exception, and I am afraid this is it. As already mentioned, Jean-Michel could not meet us at the time we wanted to visit, and therefore we could not discover what had happened, but we were unimpressed - for the first time ever at this address. It could very easily be just a phase (wines can lose and regain colour, body, aroma during barrel maturation) and therefore we shall return in 2012 to re-judge the vintage here. However, we are not happy to offer the wines yet.

So, what a week we had! I know you probably feel that we are always crying wolf, so to speak, but both Brough and I feel that 2010 with its unique balance of total ripeness and uplifting acidity, plus incredible concentration and velour tannins, has the potential to be very great indeed. Mr Parker may consider 2007 to be the best vintage of his lifetime, but I bet you will have even more fun with these 2010s!

To mis-quote some grand old boy on Radio 4 whose name I have forgotten: if you have been, thanks for reading.

**Chris Davey
4th November 2011**

Terms and Conditions

This is a primeur offer. **All prices are per case** (12 bottles unless stated otherwise) **in bond** (hence ib) Tilbury.

We will invoice the prices featured here on receipt of orders*, for payment within 30 days. If possible, please state when ordering whether, post-shipment, you would like us to store in bond on your behalf (see below for charges), transfer under bond to your own account elsewhere, or despatch duty paid to your usual delivery address. If the latter, post-shipment we will issue an additional invoice for duty (currently £21.71 per 9 litre case - ie 12 x 75cl bottles, or 6 x 150cl magnums) plus VAT on the duty **and** the original invoice value of the wine. *Where prices have been estimated we will wait until final price confirmation from the producer before invoicing, and we will check with you if our estimates prove to be too low.

Please note that for onward delivery, either duty paid or under bond, we charge £15 excluding VAT for any movement of less than 24 bottles (excluding islands and north of Glasgow/Edinburgh, where delivery is charged at cost to us).

The wines will be shipped next autumn/winter, unless stated otherwise (ie certain rosé and white wines).

All wines are offered subject to remaining unsold. Split case orders will not be accepted on this offer. See our full list for comprehensive terms and conditions.

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E&OE

O.W. Loeb & Co. Ltd.

November 2011



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