



THE  
WINES  
OF  Rhône Valley



PHOTOGRAPHY BY LANDON NORDEMAN







## A River Runs Through It

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THE RHÔNE VALLEY, MOST SIMPLY, IS DEFINED BY A RIVER.

It's a river on a wild journey south, beginning at the frozen Rhône glacier in alpine Switzerland, roaring over the French border, and ending in the Mediterranean Sea. Along the way, it endlessly twists and turns through a patchwork of geologic configurations, which yield some of the most delicious wines on earth.

As the river rolls, the wines respond. Light and complex whites, capable of great aging; brilliant young rosés ranging from

tingly to textured; and of course, the region's famous and most-produced type of wine: red. Reds of every stripe—from youthful and boisterous to august and magnificent. And, some of the best sweet wines in France.

You can find this for yourself, easily. Any trip to and within the Rhône Valley reveals it all: whether on a medieval hilltop toasting the sun-blazed Dentelles de Montmirail mountain range with a glass of local rosé, or prepping the palate by inhaling Provence's

distinct, earthy perfumes—garlic, lavender, herbs—and fully satiating it with sweet local lamb accompanied by a regional red.

Just as a background in art history enables you to extract even more pleasure from, say, a Picasso, so does an awareness of the Rhône's riches make the wines mean more—and taste even better.

In pursuit of that tasty edge, may this guide take you through the many loops of the river and bottles of Rhône wine.

# Rhône Valley Know-How

The first thing to understand about any wine region is that, while nature gave us the land, winemakers planted it, choosing to put these grapes here and those grapes there; deciding this particular hill yields wines of similar style, whereas that hill yields wines of another style—all of which warrant giving each area its own distinct name.

Nowhere was this more important than in the Rhône, where this roiling landscape of many moods presented wine pioneers with thousands of choices. But this is no tale of yesterday. Modern vintners in the Valley continue to make choices concerning the names and locations of famous Rhône wines, a testament that winemaking here continues to be dynamic and change with the times.

## A Great Divide

The Rhône Valley, France's second-largest wine area, is divided into two distinct regions: north and south. And though you can drive their geographic span in an hour, the differences between the two regions—in wine, food, and temperament—are like going from zero to 60 in a few seconds.

Côtes du Rhône, as a general appellation used throughout the region, is a collection of villages; mostly on a plain but creeping up the hillsides, hence the name, which means “slopes of the Rhône.” The smaller appellations in the Syrah-dominant north produce less wine than the “workhorse” south, where Grenache and Mourvèdre grapes prevail. But in the case of Rhône wines, size does not matter; some of the most prestigious wines come from the little appellations of the north. The stand-outs for cultists are Hermitage, Saint-Joseph, and Côte-Rôtie, but other appellations in the north make terrific, distinctive wines—some of them the perfect solution for everyday drinking.

What can you expect to taste? Wine-makers have long-noticed different growing conditions when you compare regions in the north and the south, so classification of wines from the region has evolved this way. The first distinction to make is between northern Côtes du Rhône wines and southern Côtes du Rhône wines. Reds of the north have a greater “crunch,” or liveliness to them, while the reds of the south are more robust. Wines of the south are delicious and distinct from northern varietals, thanks to not only the winemakers who understand how to express the terroir, but to chefs (at home or in restaurants) who know the best ways to pair the cuisine of this rich region.

Gastronomically, southern Rhône has ties to one of France's greatest regional cuisines, the sun-kissed table fare of Provence. This unpretentious style of cooking goes well with the warm wines produced

here. The northern Rhône has more ties to the cooking of central France and Burgundy—rich, hearty, earthy dishes of the land.

## Color Scheme

The Rhône Valley makes wine in three colors. Its whites from both north and south have captivated many international wine-lovers. The reds make up more than 80% of the region's production and run the gamut from everyday quaffing wines to some of the world's most venerable and collectible bottles. Rosés from the southern Rhône are among the most delightful and recognizable seasonal wine to be found. This tri-color spectrum makes it easy to drink with a wide variety of foods and occasions: a picnic in the park with fish just out of a lake, a backyard grill blessed with bounty from the garden, a casual weekday dinner out, or a white-linen table at the finest restaurant.

## The Right Price & the Right Time

The Rhône Valley offers some of the world's best-value wines that complement both haute cuisine and everyday fare. Indeed, an ideal feast on-the-go may be jambon on a baguette on the banks of the Rhône River and a \$12-bottle of the local rosé. But more important than knowing *how* to drink a Rhône wine is knowing *when* to drink it. And that is to say any time, because many of these wines—fruity, fresh, convivial—can be appreciated in their youth.

## Easy-Going from Beginning to End

A fact that is becoming better known to wine drinkers is that Rhône Valley wines are easy pairings for every part of every meal, not just the main course. A sparkling wine from Saint-Péray can start your meal as an apéritif, and two great sweet wines, Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise and Vin Doux Naturel Rasteau, are perfect with or as dessert.



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1 A glass of local red in an outdoor café is a classic scene throughout the Rhône; 2 Winemakers of the northern region: François Villard of Domaine François Villard, Yves Gangloff of Domaine Gangloff, and David Duclaux of Domaine Duclaux share a laugh and open a bottle of local white; 3 Tasting a white Condrieu from Yves Cuilleron; 4 The ancient Roman Pont du Gard aqueduct crosses the Gard River between Uzès and Nîmes in the south.



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This page: **1** The affable chef Serge Chenet in the kitchen of his recently opened Entre Vigne and Garrigue, in Pujaut, north of Avignon; **2** Stuffed zucchini flowers, steamed with a filling of house-smoked salmon mousse, from Chef Chenet; **3** Local beans, onions, and potatoes at an outdoor Provençal market **4** A plate of hard and soft cheeses; **5** Chef Laurent Deconinck of L'Oustalet in Gigondas; **6** Fresh from the market, a basket of young vegetables makes its way down the rue des Tenturiers in Avignon; **7** The famous Provençal caillette, served with a local red.

Opposite page: A casual lunch at Domaine des Pasquiers exemplifies how families throughout the Rhône region enjoy the wine's food-friendliness.



# Food-Friendly Wines

One of the greatest features of Rhône Valley wine is its ease in matching with food—all kinds of food!

## Traditional Food from the Region

An exploration like this begins with the historical local cuisine, for the pairing of regional food and wine is *de rigueur* for the people who live there. No matter which part of the Rhône you're in, the central ingredients of garlic, olive oil, tomatoes, and fresh herbs work beautifully with the herb-and-pepper scents, luscious fruit, and the richness of Rhône wines.

To further the exploration, try digging a level deeper into the vegetable tradition—artichokes, eggplant, zucchini, fennel, olives, beans—all of which go beautifully with rosés and lighter whites from the Rhône Valley. At auberges such as Le Mas des Aigras near Orange (with its chic and lovely in-house restaurant, La Table du Verger), delivery vans bring bushels of dew-kissed local produce, sprays of floral bouquets in purple, yellow, and white, and local wine stacked case after case, ready to be chilled and guzzled. It all comes together, every day—or, as they say, “what grows together, goes together.” And what do chefs do with those veggies that make an appearance on the flower-splashed tables of the auberge? A tian of zucchini, a *barigoule* of artichokes (the thistles are braised and sometimes stuffed with mushrooms), or a spinach-and-egg gratin. These are all ideal dishes for young, light-styled Rhône wines.

Up in the hills and mountains of the Rhône Valley, there is a powerful tradition centered on meats, a great target for reds.

Lamb, rabbit, beef, duck, and pork prepared with strong-flavored Provençal elements make great partner dishes for young to moderately aged reds. Garlicky daubes of beef and mutton, with strong herbs and even anchovies, are perfect here, as are any strongly flavored stews you might make at home. If you prepare the meat more subtly, as in the famous seven-hour roast of lamb with white beans, you'll have a perfect launching pad for the refined, complex Rhône reds, such as Hermitage or Côte-Rôtie.

On the casual side, start your meal with great local hams or caillettes, the terrific local paté made with spinach, pork, and liver, wrapped in caul fat. Picnic fare like this is scrumptious with light local whites, young, fresh rosés, and fruity young reds.

And don't forget about the fabulous goat cheeses such as Banon, wrapped in chestnut leaves. Local whites with good acidity work well here, as do reds like Gigondas.

## Modern Creative Food from the Region

Unless you visit a home where *grand-mère* is still cooking, it is difficult to find textbook versions of old Provençal cuisine today. Rhône Valley chefs have modernized their menus and fused their dishes with flavors and styles from across the globe.

Still, two things distinguish the Rhône Valley. First, the central ingredients of the cuisine are so strong that even when eating “creative” food, you always know you are in Provence. Second, market culture still has a strong influence on local menus. Nearly every town has a daily market. Purveyors of fish, poultry, sausage, bread, produce, cheese, and honey co-mingle with vendors selling the other local riches such as lavender, soaps, and textiles.

Chefs are tailoring this new cuisine so that local wines work with it as beautifully as they do with the old. One of the best chefs in the Rhône Valley is Serge Chenet who, after decades in grand, traditional

restaurants, recently opened his own, less formal country place, Entre Vigne and Garrigue, in Pujaut (just north of Avignon). Here, on the bank of the ancient Rhône, he's perfectly translating old into new.

Chenet's version of a beloved local classic, stuffed zucchini flowers, is breathtaking in its modernity. The golden flowers are stuffed with an airy, unusual house-smoked salmon mousse. Traditionally, the flowers are fried in local olive oil, but Chenet steams them and surrounds them with a gorgeous array of seasonal vegetables. A foamy *cappuccino de coriandre* glistens atop the presentation. Regional light white and rosé wines have never seemed so perfectly matched as they do with this enlightened Provençal dish.

Another genius of this sort is Laurent Deconinck, the Belgian-born journeyman at L'Oustalet in Gigondas. Deconinck transforms the Provençal favorite of fresh fennel into a confit paired with raw tuna, drizzled with dark soy sauce and rice wine vinegar. With a medium-bodied rosé like the great 2010 Gigondas rosé from Domaine Les Teyssonnières, the match sings in the Provençal sunlight. This pairing shows us that rosés, like those from Tavel, become almost obvious mates for various raw dishes like sashimi, *ceviche*, carpaccio, and tartare.



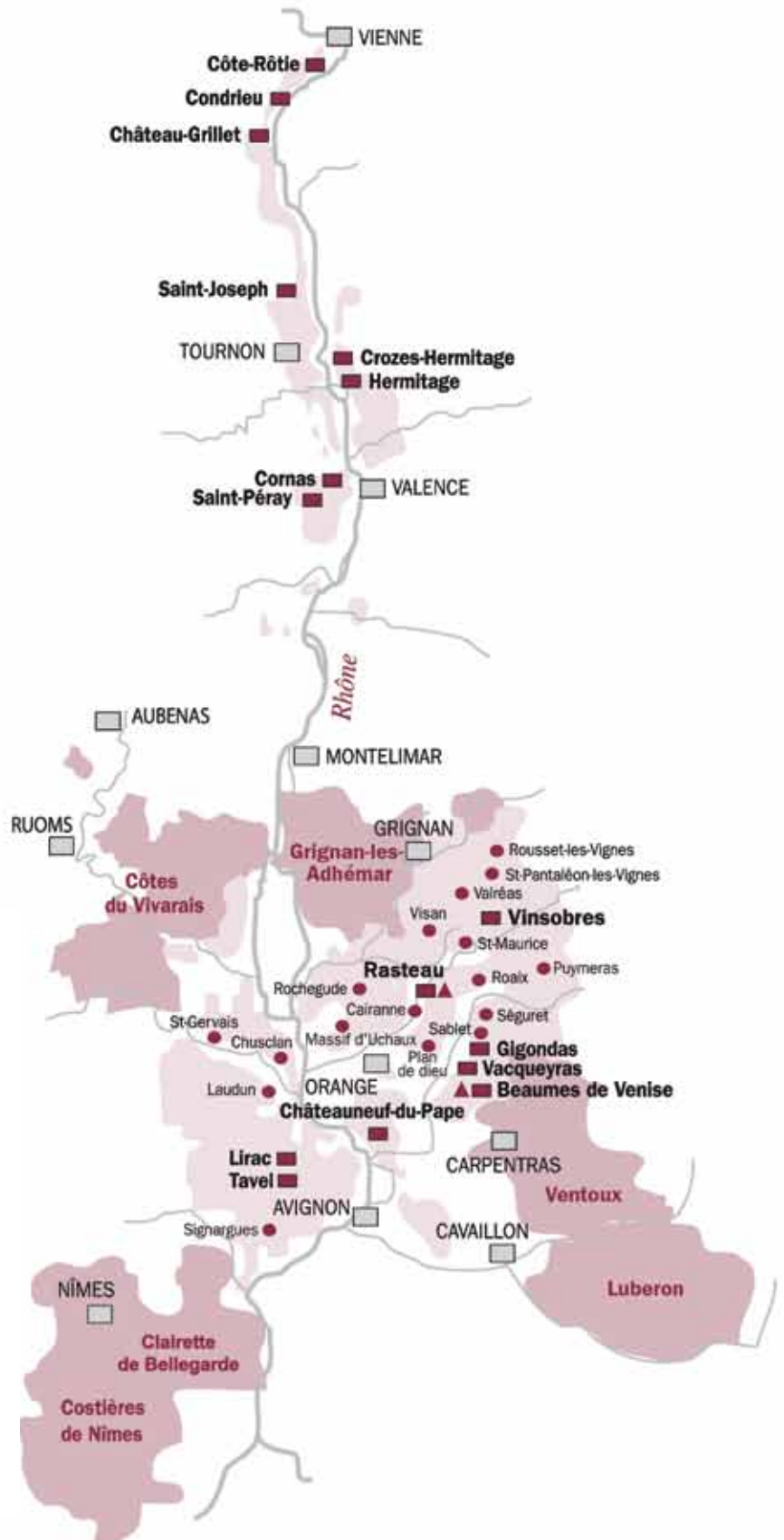
# The Rhône Valley

Presented here are the Appellations d'Origine Contrôlée (appellations or AOC's) of the Rhône Valley. From the steep slopes of the northern Rhône to the Dentelles de Montmirail range in the south, landscape affects the grapes, and therefore the wines, of each region—a classic illustration of terroir.

See the Rhône Wine Buying Guide on page 22 for an overview of key regions and labels to try.



- Côtes du Rhône production area**  
 171 villages total for Côtes du Rhône production area
- 17 Côtes du Rhône Villages with their geographic names**  
 95 villages total for Côtes du Rhône Villages with or without their geographic names
- 18 Crus of the Côtes du Rhône**  
 Including the 2 Vins Doux Naturels
- 2 VDN Vins Doux Naturels (Sweet Wines)**
- Other appellations of the Rhône Valley**  
 Ventoux, Luberon, Costières de Nîmes, Grignan-les-Adhémar, Côtes du Vivarais, Clairette de Bellegarde



# Need-to-Know Grape Varieties of the Rhône Valley

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The taste of a wine is mightily affected by the grape variety, or blend of varieties, that went into it. French appellation laws permit the use of 22 different grape varieties in Rhône wines. These nine are the most frequently used and the most important to know. Use this as a tasting guide as you swirl and sip your way through the wines.

## White Grape Varieties

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**N** & **S**

### Viognier

Viognier grapes, from the Condrieu appellation, produce a highly perfumed, floral wine—very fruity, usually rich, and with considerable alcohol. Up to 20 percent Viognier may also be used to add fruit to one of the northern Rhône's most famous red wines, Côte-Rotie.

**N**

### Marsanne

Flowery when young, Marsanne develops notes of dried fruit and hazelnuts with age. Find it blended with Roussanne from the Hermitage, Crozes-Hermitage, Saint-Joseph, and Saint Péray appellations.

**N** & **S**

### Roussanne

Roussanne gives wines more freshness than Marsanne, with better acidity, more complexity, elegance, and finesse. Characteristic young aromas are honeysuckle and iris. Roussanne wines also age beautifully, turning the corner into magnificently haunting honey-scented wines.

**S**

### Grenache Blanc

Much used by winemakers for the body and structure that it lends, Grenache Blanc wines are often round and unctuous, with noticeably low acidity. Ripe examples offer up mild aromas of white flowers and yellow fruits, particularly peaches. A favorite in southern Rhône whites.

## Red Grape Varieties

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**S**

### Grenache

The mainstay of southern Rhône rosés and reds, especially in Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Grenache yields low- to medium-acid wines of great richness, color, and tannin, often crossing the line into sumptuous, jammy wines, sometimes touched with freshly ground black pepper and licorice. Aged Grenache suggests dried fruits—even cherry brandy—and minerals.

**S**

### Cinsault

Cinsault yields wines of moderately light color and moderately light tannin. It creates wine with an appealing, easy-going fruitiness, not meant for long aging. It is an ideal grape for rosé, especially from Tavel, where only rosé is made.

**N** & **S**

### Syrah

Born in the north, but produced in the south as well, Syrah presents wines rich in color, body, tannin, and aroma. Shows expressions of raspberry, black currant, violet, black pepper, and licorice. Blending with Grenache, as it increasingly is in the southern Rhône, gives a kind of finesse to the wine. Syrah's greatest feature, perhaps, is its ability to age, evolving into marvelous and complex realms of spice, forest floor, truffle, and tobacco.

**S**

### Carignan

This late-ripening grape, once the workhorse of southern France, is regaining its notoriety thanks to modern growers. It produces dark, well-structured, tannic wines that, within a few years, show the most local of aromas: *garrigue*, the mixture of wild herbs that grow all over the Rhône region.

**S**

### Mourvèdre

Powerful fruit in youth, Mourvèdre is the aging grape par excellence of the southern wine region. It is particularly revered for its tannic structure and for the aromas that emerge after years of aging: leather, musk, black pepper, spice, resin, and truffle.





# Everyday Meals at Home and in Casual Restaurants

Ultimately, this is what wine is for: to go easily and deliciously with your food every day. These internationally inspired dishes, from simple and fresh starters to hearty and soul-satisfying main courses, show how easily Rhône wines of all varieties can be paired with your favorite cuisine or weeknight meal.

## Whites

It would be hard to find more agreeable, everyday drinking wine than the array of Rhône whites at the entry level. To enjoy them best, keep the focus on simple dishes.

### PROSCIUTTO ROLLS WITH FIG PRESERVE

**Suggested Pairing:** Côtes du Rhône Coup de Coeur: *Domaine de la Janasse, 2010*

The trick in matching this dish is finding a white wine that goes well with savory food, with a little fat to stand up to the sweetness of the figs. Côtes du Rhône white offers many examples. This match is a burst of perfumed, late-summer fruit in your mouth, refreshed by a burst of late-summer Provençal wine.

The typical character of a young Côtes du Rhône white is pear-like fruit, medium-body, and, occasionally, a perception of sweetness, which makes it a good companion with a dish that is also a little sweet.

## Rhône Wines In Your Real Life

The real beauty of Rhône Valley wines is that they slip easily into your gastronomic life, whether you're sipping a white on the terrace, uncorking a rosé for a summer picnic, preparing the family meal on an autumn evening, or hosting guests for a winter dinner party.

Wines from the Rhône Valley are equally as accessible for life's casual moments as they are for sumptuous culinary events. Here you'll find dishes for both everyday and special occasion drinking, paired with wines from specific appellations. Each dish's *coup de coeur* presents a label you'll fall instantly in love with—look for it at your wine shop or on a wine list.

Consider this section a starting point...inspiration for your imagination!

||||||| RECIPE MAKES 24 ROLLS |||||||

- 2 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tsp. grated lemon zest
- 1 tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- 6 oz. soft goat cheese, at room temperature
- 2-3 cloves garlic, peeled and minced
- 12 slices (not paper-thin) prosciutto, halved crosswise
- ½ cup fig preserves
- ½ bunch arugula, trimmed
- Freshly ground black pepper



1. Whisk oil, lemon zest, and lemon juice together in a small bowl, and set aside. Mix goat cheese and garlic in another small bowl.

2. Spread a thin layer of the goat cheese mixture on each piece of prosciutto; spread a thin layer of fig preserves over cheese, top with 1–2 arugula leaves. Drizzle with some of the lemon vinaigrette and season to taste with pepper. Roll prosciutto around filling and arrange on serving platter, seam side down.

#### **THAI CHICKEN SOUP WITH COCONUT MILK (Tom Ka Gai)**

**Suggested Pairing:** Côtes du Rhône Villages  
**Coup de Coeur:** Domaine du Trapadis, 2009

All Thai dishes with coconut milk demand richness from the wine, along with enough acidity to cut through the dish's creaminess. Côtes du Rhône Villages white answers the call.

Wines from Côtes du Rhône Villages are more complex than a regional Côtes du Rhône so you can expect them to be a little richer. But they also seem to have a little more acid, creating a lovely weight and liveliness that brings interest. For this reason, any way you can add a little extra acid (like lime juice) or textural weight to the food (like coconut milk) may pay off in better matches for Côtes du Rhône Villages whites.

#### **CHILAQUILES (Mexican Tortilla Casserole)**

**Suggested Pairing:** Côtes du Rhône Villages  
**Coup de Coeur:** Domaine de l'Échevin, Guillaume de Rouville, 2010

This is a wonderful homestyle dish made all over Mexico—a next-day casserole, made from leftover tortillas, overflowing with melted cheese. Because it includes some tomatillo, a tart member of the tomato family, partnering white wine with acidic zip really helps, as long as the wine has enough body to stand up to the dish's texture. Look to the northern reaches of the southern Rhône for white wines with finesse, acid, and elegance—good for this and many other Mexican specialties.

#### **BERGEN FISH SOUP WITH SALMON**

**Suggested Pairing:** Saint-Péray  
**Coup de Coeur:** Cave de Tain, Fleur de Roc, 2009

Matching salmon, especially in a creamy broth like this simple soup from Norway, is a challenge. Which wines are light enough to cut through the fat, yet full-bodied enough to hold their own? And which are aged enough to echo the minerality of salmon? The answer: a slightly aged

Saint-Péray, a “gastronomic” wine that's a good match for light crayfish dishes, asparagus, and fish or chicken in cream sauce or broth.

Roussanne and Marsanne are the grapes in these balanced, elegant, white wines. Dry and reserved, with good acidity and not bursting with fruit, they're flexible partners for food. It is essential to serve Saint-Péray whites well-chilled to preserve their all-important freshness.

#### **MARYLAND-STYLE CRAB CAKES**

**Suggested Pairing:** Luberon  
**Coup de Coeur:** Marrenon, Doria, 2010  
**Alternate Pairing:** Ventoux, Domaine de la Verrière Rosé, 2010

The kind of rich, modern white being made today in the Luberon is perfect for this shellfish classic. Crab cakes pick up a golden, toasted character from their pan sauté. A light white filled with toasty nuance, like the Marrenon Doria, is ideal for the dish.

More whites (and rosés) are being produced in the Luberon right now, a place that has a glamorous, Hamptons-like atmosphere and is home to a group of terrific winemakers who are causing a stir. Some of the Luberon whites have an everyday loveliness to them, but also look for richer, oak-inflected wines with greater concentration. These are beautiful wines to pair with cooked shellfish: lobster, crab, shrimp, mussels, and more. Creamy sauces will enhance them further.

Known mostly for its reds, Ventoux is also an important rosé area. The appellation's location, on the slopes of the great Mont Ventoux, helps the reds and rosés maintain an acidity and juicy snap. A Grenache-blend rosé, such as la Verrière, balances fruit and richness and works well with this heartier preparation of crab and cream-based accompaniments like tartar sauce.

#### **RECIPE MAKES 18 CAKES**

- 2 lbs. jumbo lump crabmeat
- 2 eggs
- 2 tbsp. mayonnaise
- 1 tsp. dijon mustard
- 1 tbsp. worcestershire sauce
- ¼ cup fresh parsley, minced
- 6 tbsp. cracker meal
- Vegetable oil

1. Discard any cartilage or shell from crabmeat. Mix together eggs, mayonnaise, mustard,

Worcestershire sauce, and parsley in a bowl.

2. Add crab, taking care not to break up crabmeat. Add cracker meal, then shape mixture into 18 2” cakes. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate 1 hour.

3. Pour vegetable oil into a large skillet to a depth of ¼” and heat over medium-high heat. Fry the cakes until golden brown, turning once, about 5 minutes per side.

#### **Menu Ideas for Lighter Whites:**

##### — QUICK BITES —

Turkey sandwich with mayo and lettuce

Cured ham slices

Goat cheese (from young to aged)

Carpaccio of meat or fish

##### — SIMPLE FARE —

Grilled bratwurst

Quiche Lorraine

##### — INTERNATIONAL —

Portuguese caldo verde (soup of greens and chouriço)

Greek spinach pie

Sashimi made from light-textured fish

Tortilla Española

#### **Menu Ideas for Richer Whites:**

##### — QUICK BITES —

American grilled cheese sandwich

Croque Monsieur

New England clam chowder

##### — SIMPLE FARE —

Cream of vegetable soups


Bucatini all'Amatriciana

Grilled swordfish

##### — INTERNATIONAL —

Moroccan vegetable couscous

Chicken tandoori



Saucing the Papeton d'Aubergines  
at Chef Christophe Bonzi's  
restaurant Le Mesclun in Séguret.

## Rosés

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All of the Rhône's rosés fall into the everyday category. Though some are darker than others, some richer, there isn't a rosé here that you do not want to drink in its youth—within a year of being made—and enjoy on its own or with your next meal.

### A Note About Rosé:

All Rhône Valley rosé is dry, so enjoy as apéritif wines, first- and main-course accompaniments, and cheese wines. Rosés are not for matching with dessert! Whenever you're about to serve a rosé, notice the color: darker usually means fuller-bodied, guiding you toward richer food.

Tavel is a single-minded appellation known as the "King of Rosé:" it makes only this type of wine. Because of their extra weight and concentration, Tavel rosés stand up to most red meats. They also partner well with rich, exotic foods that have some heat or spiciness, matched by a kind of spiciness in the wine itself.

### PAPETON D'AUBERGINES (Provençal Eggplant Flan with Tomato Sauce)

**Suggested Pairing:** Côtes du Rhône Villages Séguret  
**Coup de Coeur:** Domaine de Cabasse, Le Rosé de Marie-Antoinette, 2010

On the upper floors of a medieval building in Séguret, Christophe Bonzi prepares meals in his hilltop restaurant, Le Mesclun. Though you might take him for a hip guy in the music industry, he aims to evolve the traditional cuisine of Provence into something lighter, yet still recognizably Provençal. Like his version of *papeton d'aubergines*, a traditional eggplant flan made with cream and eggs. Chef Bonzi's take is "aired out" and surrounded by fresh tomato sauce.

A certain local wine is a natural match to this dish: a fresh, latest-vintage Côtes du Rhône Villages rosé. This slightly richer world of Côtes du Rhône Villages rosés, where fruit aromas may become confit-of-fruit aromas, calls for richer dishes: if you thought lamb before, think duck now. Double your drizzles of olive oil. And move into the realm of lush Provençal soups, such as the glorious *soupe au pistou*, a kind of rich minestrone, enlivened by a swirl of pesto (pistou, locally).

These enrichments call for the Côtes du Rhône Villages that have named villages on their labels, such as this Séguret, just down the road from Bonzi's restaurant.

**IMAM BAYELDI**  
**(Turkish Stuffed Eggplant)**

**Suggested Pairing:** Lirac  
**Coup de Coeur:** Domaine du Joncier rosé, 2010

*Imam Bayeldi*, one of the great dishes of the Ottoman Empire, translates as “the priest swooned!” Halved eggplants, stuffed with more eggplant, and cooked with tomatoes, onions, and garlic, comes from Turkish cooking known as *zeytinyagli*, meaning the food was cooked in lots of olive oil. No wine matches up with this velvety Mediterranean kind of food as felicitously as rich Lirac rosé (try ratatouille, as well). This lovely example from Domaine du Joncier has both fruit-supported strength, and a lovely, elegant balance of elements.

RECIPE SERVES 6

- Canola oil, for frying
- 6 eggplants (about 2 lbs.), ends trimmed
- 4 tbsp. unsalted butter
- 1 lb. ground lamb
- 1 tbsp. tomato paste
- ½ tsp. ground cinnamon
- 6 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- 1 small yellow onion, roughly chopped
- ½ green bell pepper, cored, seeded, and finely chopped
- 2 medium tomatoes, cored and finely chopped
- ½ cup chopped flat-leaf parsley
- ¼ cup chopped mint leaves
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1. Pour a ½-inch off oil into a 12” skillet. Heat over medium-high heat until the oil starts to shimmer. Fry eggplants 3 at a time, turning occasionally, until softened, 6–8 minutes. Move eggplants to paper towels to drain; discard oil, and set aside.

2. Melt butter in a 12” skillet set over medium-high heat. Add the lamb and cook, breaking the meat into small pieces until lamb is browned, about 8 minutes. Add the tomato paste, cinnamon, garlic, onions, and peppers and cook, stirring frequently, until onions are soft and golden brown, about 8 minutes. Add the tomatoes and cook until they’re soft, about 6 minutes. Stir in the parsley and mint and season with salt and pepper. Remove skillet from heat and set lamb filling aside.

3. Heat oven to 475°. Halve reserved eggplants crosswise into 12 pieces. Working with one piece at a time, cut a lengthwise, ¼”-deep incision in the eggplant to make a pocket (be careful not to cut all the way through the bottom). Lightly season inside of each pocket with salt and pepper and spoon about ¼ cup lamb filling into it, pressing filling lightly into pocket.

4. Arrange stuffed eggplants in a 9” x 13” baking dish and bake until hot, about 5 minutes. Serve.

**BRANDADE DE MORUE**  
**(Provençal Whipped Salt Cod Mousse)**

**Suggested Pairing:** Costières de Nîmes  
**Coup de Coeur:** Château de Nages rosé, Réserve, 2009

One of the great dishes of southern France is made from soaked salt cod, whipped into an airy frenzy with mashed potatoes, garlic, and olive oil, called *brandade de morue*. It goes beautifully with one of the great rosés from southern France: Costières de Nîmes.

With its culture of bulls and horses, Costières de Nîmes, an appellation in the extreme southwest of the Rhône Valley, is cowboy country. But, the appellation’s famous plain of Camargue is right near the Mediterranean, which

**Menu Ideas for Rhône Rosés:**

— QUICK BITES —

- Ham and salami
- Olive tapenade
- Muffaletta sandwich

— SIMPLE FARE —

- Pissaladière (Niçoise flatbread with onions, black olives, and anchovies)
- Rich grilled fish (such as tuna, swordfish, and sturgeon)
- Grilled chicken with BBQ dry rub (but no BBQ sauce)
- Cedar-plank salmon

— INTERNATIONAL —

- Skordalia (Greek potato purée with garlic and almonds)
- Baba gannouj
- Chicken tandoori

is why *brandade de morue* makes so much sense. The area is rich in history: traders came here from northern Europe to barter their cod for salt. The result: great local salted cod, which means great *brandade de morue*, spread on bread and eaten in mass quantities with mass quantities of rosé.

Other food ideas for the highly pairable Costières de Nîmes rosé include tabbouleh, pizza, and grilled lamb with lots of olive oil. When matching Rhône rosés, look for foods that are low in acid and not sweet, but that have an inherent richness that lines up well with the red-wine soul of any good rosé.



Above: Crespéou, a simple yet impressive Provençal egg dish. Thin omelets are stacked between various vegetable and herb layers (basil, zucchini, spinach, eggplant, tomatoes, and more) to form a multicolored cake. Great for pairing with rosé.

## Reds

The reds of the Rhône Valley are legendary and incredibly varied. The biggest choice when getting ready to open a bottle concerns its age right now.

Younger red wines from the Rhône can be light, frilly, merry, bursting with party-making fruit. Not rich in tannin or oak, these are highly flexible wines that harmonize with a wide range of foods: simple fish and meats, ethnic cuisines, and the light, modern, creative dishes that chefs are making all over the world.

Other young red Rhône wines are purple and brawny, with enough tannin to sustain years of evolution. But they can be delicious in youth, peppery and intense. Rich, fairly tannic young reds go well with strong-flavored meats like game; long-cooked, full-flavored stews; well-peppered grilled meats; and barbecue, if the wine is fruit-forward and a little sweet.

For older, rounded, more complex red wines from the Rhône, look for simpler meat preparations. Dishes that are not extreme in acid, sweetness, or spice let the nuance and pedigree of the wine show through.

### STEAKHOUSE-STYLE PORTERHOUSE

**Pairing:** Côtes du Rhône

**Coup de Coeur:** Domaine Galévan, Paroles de Femme, 2009

This is the first guise of the reds of the appellation “Côtes du Rhône:” simple, fruity, boisterous, bistro-like, and highly drinkable! The most food-flexible Côtes du Rhône reds will be these young wines, which have a low-tannin, fruit-forward style.

Don’t miss the experience of drinking a Domaine Galévan Paroles de Femme, with its lovely, mysterious nose, and supple, subtle body, paired with a grilled Porterhouse steak. As with all complex and subtle red wines: the simpler the food, the better the match.

There are many wineries that make lovely Côtes du Rhône reds in a straightforward style like this. Serge Ghoukassian, the roguish owner of the highly popular restaurant Chez Serge in Carpentras, in the southern region, loves serving the light but slightly more complex 2009 Côtes du Rhône from Domaine Delubac with a long-cooked leg of lamb, “but it’s also good with tinned sardines!” he says.

RECIPE SERVES 2

- 1 2”-thick prime dry-aged porterhouse steak (about 3 lbs.)
- 3 tbsp. canola oil  
Coarse salt and coarsely ground black pepper
- 2 tbsp. butter

1. Place a steak on a plate and allow it to come to room temperature, about 1 hour. Heat oven to 500°. Open all of your windows, readying your kitchen for quite a bit of smoke. Heat a large cast-iron skillet over high heat until very hot, 6–8 minutes.

2. Rub steak all over with 2 tbsp. of the oil, then season generously on all sides with salt and pepper. Add remaining 1 tbsp. oil to skillet and carefully add steak. Cook, without turning, until deeply browned and crusty. When you’re cooking a steak at home, it’s nearly impossible to brown both sides sufficiently and still cook it to medium rare, so make sure you cook the first side (the presentation side) until it has a charcoal-like crust, about 7–8 minutes.

At right: Horses of Camargues are free to explore the vines; Bottom: Fresh-shelled peas from the local market.

Opposite page: Wedding festivities happily spill into the Place du Palais des Papes in Avignon.





3. Flip steak and cook until browned on second side, 2–3 minutes more. Transfer skillet to oven and roast until medium rare, 6–8 minutes.

4. Transfer steak to a rack over a tray, top with butter cut into thin slices, and tent loosely with foil. Set steak aside to let rest for 5–10 minutes, then transfer to a cutting board, retaining the buttery juices that have collected on the tray.

5. Following the contour of the bones, cut the filet off one side of the steak and the top loin off the other. Working on the bias, slice both pieces of meat into ½”-thick slices, keeping slices together as you go. Reassemble the steak on a platter along with bone, fanning out steak slices slightly. Pour reserved juices over meat.

#### MEMPHIS BBQ RIBS

**Pairing:** *Côtes du Rhône Villages Cairanne*  
**Coup de Coeur:** *Domaine Richaud, 2009*

When you see the names of specific villages on the labels of *Côtes du Rhône Villages* bottles, particularly that of Cairanne, you move up to richer, firmer young wines. Wines like these, sweet with fruit in youth, can perform special tricks at the table. They accompany the strong, smoky,

fatty flavors of American barbecue, and even stand up to the sweet glaze when the sauce is moderate. Try Memphis-style ribs here because, often presented as “dry rub,” they are the southern ribs most likely to go easy on the flavoring. Then try a little BBQ sauce at your discretion: this purple, powerful, slightly sweet, tannic, oaky Cairanne from *Domaine Richaud* can dance the duet with it any day.

#### CUBAN ROAST PORK WITH BLACK BEANS, RICE, AND YUCA CON MOJO

**Suggested Pairing:** *Côtes du Rhône Villages Laudun*  
**Coup de Coeur:** *Laudun Chusclan Vignerons, Clos de Taman, 2009*

*Côtes du Rhône Villages* wines from Laudun also need meatier food, but try dishes that are a little less flamboyant. Cuban food is a great option, known for its subtlety, eschewing heady spices and chiles for the presentation of true, essential flavors. Try the combination of deep, crunchy-skinned pork with steamy white rice, and earthy black beans, alongside the mineral-y tang of starchy yuca, glistening with a garlicky-citrusy mojo with the elegant Laudun from *Clos de Taman*, made by the local co-op.

#### GREEK SKEWERED LAMB WITH HERBS AND TZATZIKI

**Suggested Pairing:** *Côtes du Rhône Villages Sablet*  
**Coup de Coeur:** *Domaine de Verquière, 2007*  
**Alternate Pairing:** *Beaumes de Venise, Domaine de Fenouillet, Terres Blanches, 2009*

Shish-kebabs made of chunks of lamb marinated in herbs and olive oil call for tzatziki and light-ish red with flavors that will express the earth and the herbs. A fabulous Greek dinner is just a skewer and a grill away—but it does not need a bottle of Greek wine to reach perfection!

Wines from the town of Sablet are distinguished by fruit-forward richness, with lots of cherry and red fruit prettiness in youth, as well as by more-than-usual elegance. With age, Sablet gain spicy-mineral notes within five years or so.

Beaumes de Venise reds are also an excellent accompaniment to simple offerings like grilled lamb or roast chicken. These preparations, eschewing exotic spice or sweet sauces, allow the wine’s toasty, black-pepper characteristics to shine through.

## OLD-FASHIONED AMERICAN MEAT LOAF

**Suggested Pairing:** *Côtes du Rhône Villages Visan Coup de Coeur: Domaine de la Bastide, 2009*

Why not wine with meat loaf? It's delicious! This pairing works especially well when the loaf is tender, deeply meaty, and not touched with too many herbs, pastes, or chopped vegetables—that's when the meatiness comes through, be it beef, veal, pork, or a mix.

Wines from Visan are a lovely compromise between fruit and complexity; softness and firmness. This 2009 wine will not overwhelm a subtle meat loaf, but instead add a whole spectrum of complimentary flavors to it. Visan produces considerably soft fruity wine, some made in a very fresh style, like the wines of Domaine de la Bastide. This wine can also show excellent complexity, with notes of perfume, sandalwood, game, *garrigue*, and truffle.

RECIPE SERVES 6-8

- 3 tbsp. olive oil
- 2 large onions, finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled and minced
- 3 lbs. ground beef chuck
- 1 8-oz. can tomato sauce
- 1 large egg
- 1 cup fresh bread crumbs
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 3 tbsp. ketchup

1. Heat olive oil in a medium sauté pan over low heat. Add onions and garlic and cook until translucent, about 15 minutes. Let cool.
2. Preheat oven to 350°. In a large bowl, combine chuck, tomato sauce, egg, bread crumbs, salt and pepper to taste, and half of the onion-garlic mixture, and stir just enough to mix.
3. Place meat in a 3" × 7" loaf pan and round the

top with your hands to form a crown. Top with remaining onion-garlic mixture and drizzle with ketchup. Bake for 45 minutes. Remove meat loaf from oven and let set about 10 minutes, for easier slicing.

## CANTONESE ROAST DUCK

**Suggested Pairing:** *Crozes-Hermitage Coup de Coeur: Domaine des Entrefaux, 2009*

France and China are arguably the two greatest duck countries in the world. The former has many popular duck preparations, many of which go beautifully with Rhône wines. The latter has two of the most famous: Cantonese Roast Duck and Peking Duck. Being very different from each other, the two Chinese ducks have different wine requirements.

Many diners are not drinking wine with Cantonese Roast Duck, and they are missing out! It is a perfect dish for the kind of rich, sophisticated fruit that a young northern Rhône can bring to the table, with an acidic "snap" that will help cut through the fatty duck.

The gorgeous plum-cherry notes of the 2009 Domaine des Entrefaux make it a roast duck wine beyond compare. For other ideas, look for young, fruity reds with good acid and a modicum of tannin.

## TURKISH LAHMAJUN (Flatbreads with Ground Lamb and Parsley)

**Suggested Pairing:** *Saint-Joseph Coup de Coeur: Domaine Faury, 2009*

A kind of Middle Eastern pizza, this is a favorite street food in Istanbul, and it's also pretty easy to make at home. To do so, heat some kind of thin flatbread in a single layer, such as pita bread, readily available at Greek or Middle Eastern groceries. Sauté ground lamb with onions, garlic, and chopped tomatoes, and season with dried chili and cumin. Spread a very thin layer of the warm ground lamb mixture on

the flatbread. When you serve it, sprinkle it with lots of chopped parsley and a little lemon juice. Each diner folds up their *lahmajun* into a cylinder and gets busy.

Native Turks consume fruit drinks with this dish, so why not enjoy it with red wine such as a young, light version of Saint-Joseph? It produces sublime refreshment after the lamb and spices. This young, fruity wine exemplifies the pure, exciting, almost raspberry-like essences in this part of the appellation, with an intriguing nose of red fruits, peaches, violets, and black cherries.

### Menu Ideas for Lighter, Younger, Fruitier Rhône Reds:

- Charcuterie from French, Italian, Spanish, American traditions
- Modern raw fish dishes (best with wines up to one year old)
- Pasta with tomato, white, cheese, or garlic-oil sauce
- Grilled fish of all kinds (including sardines, if the wine is very young)

### Menu Ideas for Richer, More Complex Rhône Reds:

- Aged, hard cheeses (parmigiano-reggiano, comté, aged goat)
- Sausages, boiled and grilled
- Grilled Indian meats
- Hamburgers (without sweet sauces)
- Roast chicken
- Steaks and chops, brisket/pot roast
- Meat stews of all kinds

At right: Winemaker Florent Viale of Domaine du Colombier, located in the northern region, not far from the eastern bank of the Rhône river, enjoying a glass of Crozes-Hermitage.

With their magnificent dark color, Domaine du Colombier wines offer delicious dark fruit and tannins in their youth.





At left: Long-cooked leg of lamb by Chef Serge Ghoukassian of the highly popular restaurant Chez Serge in Carpentras, simply presented with rustic vegetables and a dark, savory sauce.

Below: Carefully tended rows of sundrenched vines in Costières-de-Nîmes, one of the southernmost regions in the Rhône Valley.



# Special Occasions and Entertaining

As your meal goes upscale, so does your wine. The only constant is this: all of the pairings for these “special occasion” wines were conceived as fine-dining moments, when the presentation of a special wine further boosts the delights of a special evening, whether at home or on the town.

## Special Occasion Whites

All over the world, it’s harder to ride the upscale wine rocket with a white than a red. But the Rhône offers two great opportunities for launching *les vins blancs* into space.

### **CHEF BRUNO D’ANGELIS’S CABILLAUD AVEC KUMQUATS (Fresh Cod Sautéed with Kumquats)**

**Suggested Pairing: Condrieu**

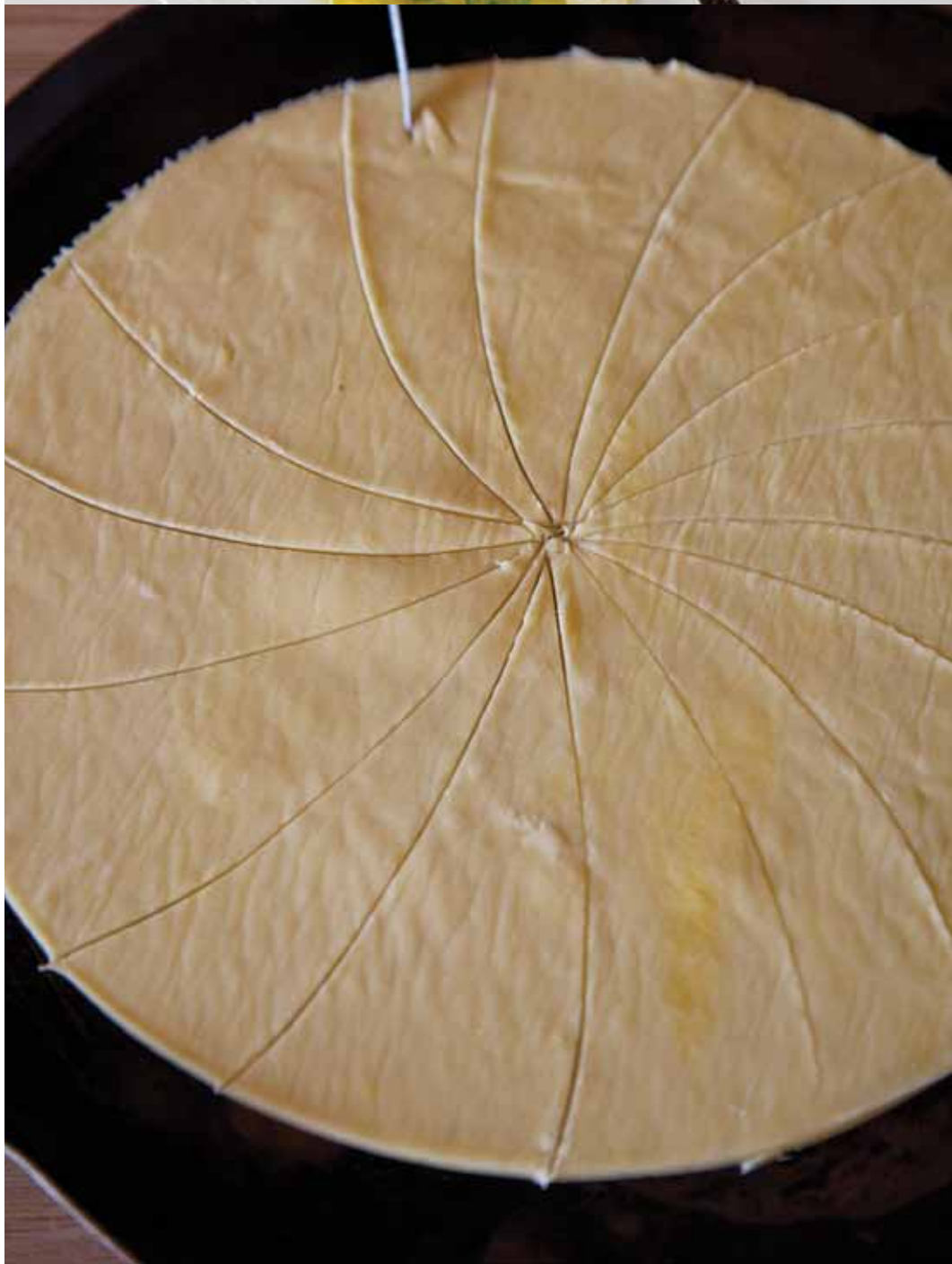
**Coup de Coeur: Yves Cuilleron, Les Chaillets, 2009**

For the chef or host, there is nothing else in France quite like Condrieu in the northern Rhône. Why? The Viognier grape yields wines with boisterous, baroque, nose-filling fruit that can include such riotous essences as melon, peach, honeysuckle, quince, lychee, ginger, apricot, fig, gardenia, and more. It follows up with an almost oily richness and often an impression of sweetness.

Be forewarned: This is not a wine for delicate dishes. You don’t want to serve Condrieu with sliced raw fluke dressed only with lemon juice. The key imperative: *cherchez le fruit!*

La Vieille Fontaine is a lovely restaurant at Avignon’s elegant Hôtel de l’Europe. Here, Chef Bruno d’Angelis cleverly serves fish courses with fruit. He offers his extraordinary cod with kumquats with Condrieu, which becomes drier and more complex as you drink it. It demonstrates the flexibility of Rhône wines with modern, chef-driven foods. Cuilleron’s Les Chaillets works perfectly here, its marmalade and honey characteristics crossing over into minerality with the food.

Condrieu’s possibilities extend beyond fish and fruit. Select any white-meat protein (chicken, veal, sweetbreads, pork), partner with some sweetness (fruit, balsamic vinegar, maple syrup) and you’re Condrieu-savvy.



## COULIBIAC (Salmon-Stuffed Pastry)

**Suggested Pairing:** Hermitage  
**Coup de Coeur:** Paul Jaboulet Aîné, Chevalier de Sterimberg, 2004

The traditional salmon-stuffed pastry known as Coulubiak has its roots in Russia, but the French have made it their own. It's almost always an elaborate affair, with a yeasty brioche or pastry surrounding layers of salmon, spinach, mushrooms, rice, and hard-boiled eggs.

Because salmon loves white wines that are able to age, you'll find a great partner in an upscale, aged Hermitage Blanc. Like many other Rhône whites, it is made from Marsanne and Roussanne grapes, but grown on the clay-chalk and sandy pebble soils of the Hermitage hill the grapes take on special concentration and flavor, making this one of the great white wines of France. In its youth, Hermitage Blanc shows a spectacular purity of fruit and a sumptuous richness, but it is even better with age. Expect wines aged 10 to 30 years to have developed a full panoply of nutty, spicy, honey-like flavors.

Most Hermitage Blanc is not high in acid or low in alcohol, so in matching food, avoid acidic, salty foods; focus instead on rich dishes with their own kind of sumptuousness. Some producers create a slightly lighter style of Hermitage, which can have more flexibility at table with lighter dishes, such as fish in beurre blanc, lobster thermidor, and veal stews in cream sauce, or even exotic possibilities such as Moroccan tagine of chicken and Indian kormas.

## Special Occasion Reds

You have a majestic old red—a wine that has defied time, slept through decades in the bottle awaiting its destined date to be opened. You have a special occasion, special guests, and a corkscrew. So, what is uncorked?

This is wine's ultimate mystery, and where the Rhône Valley has a special edge. Red wines from many of its appellations can often achieve sublimity—clouds of truffle, wild mushroom, forest floor, Asian spice—at times within as little as five to seven years.

Of course, patience is not always necessary to enjoy great Rhône reds; those wines destined for 20 years in the cellar can also cause a stir at the table when served young.

### CHEF LAURENT DECONINCK'S RIB-EYE ROAST OF VEAL, WITH MORELS, GIGONDAS, AND PASTRY CRUST

**Suggested Pairing:** Gigondas  
**Coup de Coeur:** Domaine Montirius, Terre des Aînés, 2004

**Alternate Pairing:** Vacqueyras, Vignerons de Caractere, Eternité, 2007

The elegant wines of Gigondas have the weight and the power to age richly, thanks to the extraordinary hillside location of this town. The vineyards have the highest altitude of any vineyards in the southern Rhône Valley, with western and northern exposures and cool breezes tempering the grapes. In the best vintages (2009, 2007, 2005), the wines have a floral character, suggesting violets, along with notes of spicy plum in youth that can evolve into leafy, leathery old age after 15 years or more.

But they can also start to show their funky side at only seven to eight years of age, exactly the idea behind this great match-up. Laurent Deconinck, the brilliant chef of L'Oustalet in Gigondas, likes to serve aging Gigondas like the Domaine Montirius with a seared rib-eye roast of veal, finished with wild mushrooms and Gigondas in a casserole under a flaky crust. Perfection!

The Belgian-born Chef Deconinck boasts a resumé in France's grand kitchens as long as your oldest wooden spoon. Recently, he decided to give his all—including his philosophical views on wine and food pairing—to L'Oustalet, owned by the famous Perrin winemaking family. Here, he could focus on a small production of France's best ingredients for just a few tables. The veal he chose for this dish, a local breed called Charolais, registered on the descriptive meat scale somewhere between the sweetest beef and the earthiest pork. Its wine braise increases the meat's juiciness, while the browned flavors of its crusty exterior highlight the wine's unique characteristics. The 2004 Gigondas has aged harmoniously, with a virile structure that has somehow brought together a delicious combination of young fruity elements with an undertone of earthy elements, such as black truffles.

As an alternative, Vacqueyras wines show a lovely richness and are often positioned as a sister village to Gigondas. The wines offer a rustic, family feel, which is nice when paired with roasted meats. The tannic backgrounds of many Vacqueyras wines can show sublime elegance and flavors of age in less than 10 years. The 2007 Eternité is a good example; its gorgeous scents and generous structure belie its relative youth.

Opposite page: Top: Fresh cod sautéed with kumquats; Bottom: Pastry for a modern take on Coulubiak.

At right: Chef Bruno d'Angelis of La Vieille Fontaine at Avignon's elegant Hôtel de l'Europe tastes a Condrieu to pair with his cod dish.





This page, from left: Chef Christian Étienne's browned guinea hen breast with cocoa beans, green olives, and a brown basil-flecked sauce; the boisterous chef Étienne. Opposite, from left: The season's best black truffles; stone fruit tarts.

**CHEF ÉTIENNE'S BREAST OF GUINEA HEN WITH COCO BEANS AND GREEN OLIVES**

**Suggested Pairing:** Vinsobres

**Coup de Coeur:** Domaine Coriançon,

L'Exception, 2000

**Alternate Pairing:** Domaine Jaume, Référence, 2009

One of the great characters of the city of Avignon is one of its great chefs, the curly-haired Christian Étienne, who has been cooking in the Rhône Valley for many decades. Take a walk with him to the bustling local market and you'll see he's practically mayor of the city! He is also a leader in creating food for local wine.

At Restaurant Christian Étienne, he prepares a gorgeous browned treatment of guinea hen breast with local green olives and a brown pan sauce kissed with a little basil. It's superb with an earthy red, such as the 2000 Domaine Coriançon L'Exception. Even at ten years old, its fruit is still available to wash over the green olives, with a little tannin to match.

Vinsobres wines age in a particularly wonderful way. When young, they're slightly glossy, fruity red wines: pretty, lively, not too ripe. On the palate, they echo the fetching fruit notes, which are balanced by good acidity and elegance. They're not particularly tannic, but the concentration of the fruit seems to hold them together. As they age, the wines move into tertiary aromas and flavors—dried fruits, figs, coffee, mocha, tobacco, and cedar.

This is what made the guinea hen match superb: the 2000 L'Exception of Domaine Coriançon has its decadent elements emerging, but the strength of fruit keeps it alive.

**BUTTERFLIED, MARINATED, AND GRILLED LEG OF LAMB, INDIAN-STYLE**

**Suggested Pairing:** Cornas

**Coup de Coeur:** Cave de Tain, Arènes Sauvages, 2009

Owning some of the steepest, wildest-looking vineyards in the Rhône Valley, the appellation Cornas has always had a reputation for wild, rustic wine, as if it had naturally sprung forth from the region. Modern Cornas winemakers, clinging to their image of rusticity, have found new ways to give their wines more "wildness," starting with a lavish use of new oak, which seems to bring out the chunky, mineral side of the wines. Today's Cornas is not overly expressive when young, but you can sense the dense, concentrated fruit, which in 15 years or more transforms into wonderful notes of licorice, amber, truffle, and forest floor.

Choose a young wine to match the spice of an Indian-style leg of lamb, with its delicious overload of cumin, coriander, fenugreek, mace, clove, and chili powder. The Cave de Tain wine from a wonderful co-op across the river, is gamey-roasty itself, with a considerable amount of tannin, which gets joyously immersed in the dish's richness and spice.

**ROAST RIB OF BEEF WITH YORKSHIRE PUDDING**

**Suggested Pairing:** Côte-Rôtie

**Coup de Coeur:** Domaine de Bonserine, La Garde, 2000

A festive treat for an English-style holiday dinner is a majestic standing rib roast. This is exciting and enthusiastic food for wine, but an educated selection will reap greater rewards. If you like your prime rib rare, young and

forceful reds will simply be too much; you need something grand that has aged for at least ten years, softened by time and pushed into funky flavor territory to match the well-aged beef.

The answer: the bright-berry-to-bright-funk evolution of one of the Rhône's greatest reds, Côte-Rôtie, or "roasted slope." Made from at least 80% Syrah, with up to 20% Viognier, Côte-Rôtie, from an extremely steep granite slope, has a fascinating conflation of hillside power and fruit retention. Even as these wines age over five to 15 years, the gorgeous raspberry and violet lingers, joined by dried fruits, truffles, leather, spices, vanilla, and chocolate. In the best examples, where the tannin has melted away, there is a suave, elegant, rounded wine, with considerable brightness for an old-timer.

This 2000 Domaine de Bonserine, La Garde shows absolutely gorgeous leather and fruit, along with gamey, savage animal scents. It's not heavy, just rich enough, beautifully balanced, with great acidity. This is what aged red wine should be—and what a prime-rib's mate should taste like.

**RACK OF VENISON WITH BLACK TRUFFLES, FOIE GRAS, AND SAUCE PERIGUEUX**

**Suggested Pairing:** Hermitage

**Coup de Coeur:** M. Chapoutier, le Pavillon

Hermitage is the most revered wine in the Rhône Valley, as well as one of the most revered in the world. Gazing upon its hill is like looking at a monument: steep, terraced, at a sinuous bend in the river, with most of the vineyards facing the brilliant sunlight of the south. So sacred is this



place that the huge, mounted Hollywood-like signs of its two most famous producers, Jaboulet and Chapoutier, do not detract from its purity of spirit.

That combination of sunlight, soil, and particular bend in the river makes Hermitage reds the richest, and most powerful of the northern Rhône wines. Indeed, before Hermitage had developed its own top-drawer reputation, wines made here were shipped north to places like Burgundy to strengthen the wines made in less sunny climes.

Today, Hermitage is at the top of the price charts in the Rhône. It is not an easy wine in youth, as it is packed with concentrated fruit and dense tannin, made to withstand 40 years of cellaring. When it emerges, however, it is a peak experience: sensuous, layered with scents of earth, leather, truffles, coffee, and spice.

If you have a grand old bottle, you should pull out all the stops and match the wine with the most luxurious treasures of your pantry.

Once again, older red wine is ideal for rare meat—in this case, the rack of a well-aged venison. To create the perfect sumptuous dish to merit this wine, add dollops of foie gras terrine to each chop, laying on as you would bone marrow on a steak. Cover everything with a rich wine sauce made with truffle shavings, plus shavings of truffle, slicing the black diamonds in copious amounts to flow over each diner's portion. It does not get better than this!

## Sweets for the Sweets

### THE TWO GREAT RHÔNE DESSERT WINES

To many chefs and home cooks, many of the world's sweet wines are simply too cloying to serve with dessert, so they are served either before dessert or *as* dessert.

The Rhône is lucky in this regard: it has two appellations for sweet wines, and each of them can play multiple roles at the table—including the accompaniment of desserts.

#### Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise

Because of its light sweetness, bolstered by good acidity, a glass of Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise is a much-appreciated *apéritif*. It can accompany lightly sweet, pre-meal pass-arounds such as melon, or lightly salty amuses such as prosciutto, smoked salmon, sushi bites with some sweetness, such as glazed eel, and deep-fried Asian-style spring rolls.

At the table, the first-course possibilities expand. As long as the dish features a little sweetness—a Waldorf salad or something similar—the wine will work well. Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise also is an excellent choice for foie gras, either seared or in a terrine, with or without a sweet accompaniment.

Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise works very nicely with cheeses that have a light sweetness to them, like a young goat cheese, and with salty cheeses, such as any kind of blue.

You could perfectly pair it with a wide range of desserts, as long as they are not too sweet.

Think flaky pastry with light pastry cream, rhubarb tart, or vanilla cookies. Or, as the meal is winding down, a glass of Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise may serve well as a sweet parting taste, all on its own.

To taste a classic style Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise—flowery, fresh, lightly sweet—seek out the most recent release from Vignobles La Coterie.

#### Vin Doux Naturel Rasteau

The intriguing thing about this dessert-wine appellation is that the wines come in three styles, and each of the three have different applications for food.

VDN Rasteau Blanc, with its light hues, is simpler than the others; it is rather sweet, lightly citric on the palate. It is good for mildly sweet fruit tarts, such as a classic tarte tatin.

The tawny Port-colored VDN Rasteau Doré (golden) has similar flavors to its Portuguese cousin: butterscotch, treacle, caramel, raisins. It is spectacular with dried fruits, like apricots, and rich nuts like walnuts.

The most popular and widely produced style is VDN Rasteau Rouge, a cousin to vintage Port, but without the brutal tannins. Big, purple, lush, insanely grapey, it has much fresher acidity. Drink it with chocolate non-pareil—the darker (and therefore less sweet) the chocolate, the better. It also goes well with hard and strong cheeses; pair it with a hard-rind mountain tomme or a salty Roquefort.

An excellent Rouge style comes from the Caves de Rasteau; look for their 2007 Signature VDN Rasteau Rouge.

# Rhône Wine Buying Guide

## NORTH

### APPELLATION: Crozes-Hermitage

- Makes both whites and reds (no rosés)
- Only Marsanne, Roussanne, and Syrah grapes
- Wines from vineyards on the plain are on the softer, fruitier side
- Wines from vineyards on the granitic slopes are more structured and minerally
- Young reds (1-2 years) have dazzling fruit and wonderful structure
- Reds show exciting aromas and flavors of age after only 5 years

#### Labels to Try

**Domaine des Entrefaux, red, 2009:** Lots of fruit when very young, good acid, moderately tannic, gorgeous plum-cherry color

**Emmanuel Darnaud, Mise en Bouche, red, 2009:** Serious, oak-kissed, combines wood in an elegant way with crunchy black-cherry fruit

**M. Chapoutier, Les Varonniers, red, 2008:** strong fresh-ground black-pepper notes

**Emmanuel Darnaud, Les Trois Chênes, red, 2009:** Toasty, oaky, dark, rich, and tannic

**Philippe & Vincent Jaboulet, 2007:** Strong notes of cassis and truffles, softening beautifully

### APPELLATION: Saint-Joseph

- Most famous for Syrah-based reds, which are rich and graceful, with juicy acidity
- Whites made exclusively from Marsanne and Roussane grapes are fresh and fairly generous
- Good candidates for aging into leather-and-licorice-scented beauties, pick up extra complexity and suppleness in 4-5 years
- The appellation's length and the twists and turns of the river create micro-climates that deliver styles from simple, everyday sips to upscale, special occasion wines

#### Labels to Try

**Domaine Fauray, red, 2009:** Intriguing nose of red fruits, peaches, violets and black cherries

**Cave de Tain, Esprit de Granit, red, 2009:** Spicy and peppery

**Domaine de Coursodon, L'Olive, red, 2009:** Lots of raspberry fruit, with a long, silky, voluptuous palate

**Guy Farge, Gourmandise, red, 2009:** Dark, complex, and mysterious

## SOUTH

### APPELLATION: Côtes du Rhône

- A good starting point to discover Rhône wines
- The largest appellation, offers great value wines
- Whites are clear and crisp, with lovely young fruit
- Rosés are pleasant and fresh
- Reds range from youthful and easy-to-enjoy to deeper, richer wines that age surprisingly well

#### Labels to Try

**Côtes du Rhône, Domaine Saint Amant, La Borry, white, 2010:** Fresh acidity

**Domaine de la Mordorée, rosé, 2010:** Light, scintillating, crisp

**Alain Jaume & Fils, Les Champavins, red:** Ripe and jammy

**La Bastide Saint Dominique, Jules Rochebonne, red 2009:** Tons of mixed fruit and toasty oak and a little tannin.

**Domaine du Terme, red:** Straightforward style, light, balanced, fruity, food-loving

**Domaine Courtois, red:** Dazzlingly fruity, with lovely berries and cherries and very little tannin.

### APPELLATION: Côtes du Rhône Villages

- A more prestigious group of winemaking collectives found only in the south
- A little richer, little more complex than the wines yielding basic Côtes du Rhône appellation
- 17 villages are allowed to append their names to their "Côtes du Rhône Villages" wines, considered a step up the ladder
- Reds are quite full-bodied and can age very well
- Whites are heavier with more acid and weight, creating a lovely tussle that brings extra interest

#### Labels to Try

**Côtes du Rhône Villages Cairanne, Domaine Richaud, red, 2009:** Sweet, hot, and forceful

**Côtes du Rhône Villages Chusclan, Château Signac, Cuvée Terra Amata:** Balanced, lush, elegant, medium body, subtle elements of dried fruit and minerals

**Côtes du Rhône Villages Saint-Gervais, Domaine Clavel, Syrius, red, 2009:** Tastes of game, spice, pepper, and licorice

### APPELLATION: Beaumes-de-Venise

- Vineyards are spread over the southeast side of the Dentelles de Montmirail
- Reds are ample, generous, full-bodied with very ripe red and black fruits

#### Labels to Try

**Domaine Saint Amant, Grangeneuve, red, 2009:** Glossy, supple with lovely, tender fruit

**Vignerons de Caractère, Domaine de la Brune, red, 2009:** Extremely rich, with a hint of black fruit, blueberry, and licorice

### APPELLATION: Gigondas

- Heart of the southern region, up the hillsides of the Dentelles de Montmirail
- Cool breezes tempering the grapes; wines in youth have a floral character, suggesting violets, along with notes of spicy plum
- Reds are sturdy, warm, rich, and elegant, with the weight and power to age richly

#### Labels to Try

**Alain Jaume, Terrasses de Montmirail, red, 2009:** Relatively sweet and forceful

**Domaine des Bosquets, Le Lieu Dit, red, 2009:** Big, spicy and sexy

**Domaine Cécile Chassagne:** Roasted flavors, juicy acidity

**Domaine Notre Dame des Pallières, les Mourres, red, 2009:** Spicy-peppery, forceful

**Gigondas La Cave, Le Primitif, red, 2005:** Aging brilliantly, healthy young fruit, purple-garnet color

**R** INTER RHÔNE



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APPELLATION: **Lirac**

- Better known for reds and fairly dark rosé, floral/red-fruit characters, reasonably full body
- Lightly-scented whites have good body with subtle flavors
- Reds are striking: Grenache-based, warm and rich, big, fruity, and lush, with considerable tannin and structure for aging—locals say 8-10 years or more!

*Labels to Try*

**Château de Ségriès, red, 2009:** Dark, Grenache-dominated, with a rich palate; unusual fruit freshness on the nose, like just-cut plums

**Les Vignobles Assémat, Domaine des Causes, Réserve Syrah, red, 2009:** Explosive fruit on the palate

**Château Correnson, Divinitas, 2009:** Dark purple in the glass, rich and structured on the palate, very pretty ripe red fruit (and a little black fruit) rising off of it

APPELLATION: **Vacqueyras**

- Reds have a subtle balance between freshness of fruit and fullness of aromas, giving them good structure
- White and red wines age beautifully, with the tannins melting into refinement in less than 10 years

*Labels to Try*

**Domaine La Monardière, Galéjade, white, 2008:** Fresh, with a slight impression of sweetness, to be drunk young

**Château des Tours, Réserve, red, 2004:** Tender, stewed red fruit, elegant finish

**Domaine de la Monardière, Les Deux Monardes, red, 2005:** White truffles and vanilla, tannic

**Clos de Caveau, Carmin Brillant, red, 2007:** Lively herbal nose of *garrigue* (thyme, romanin), bee pollen, and camphor; bright, juicy palate

APPELLATION: **Vinsobres**

- Beautiful, slightly glossy, ideally fruity red wine: lively, not too ripe, pretty, not in your face
- On the palate, the young wines echo the fetching fruit, balanced by good acidity and elegance
- Concentration of fruit seems to hold young wines together as they age, moving into tertiary aromas and flavors, without thinning out.
- Enchants with its youthful fruit, but can age in its own idiosyncratic way for ten to twelve years

*Labels to Try*

**Domaine Coriançon, red, 2009:** Lovely, balanced core of red fruit

**Domaine Chaume-Arnaud, red, 2009:** Glossy purple, with deep and mysterious fruit

**Perrin et Fils, Les Cornuds, 2009:** Light, with a young fruitiness

APPELLATION: **Tavel**

- Probably the most famous rosé name in the world.
- Produces rosé wines exclusively and was the first rosé of France
- Because of their food-friendliness, considered to be the only “gastronomic” rosé

*Labels to Try*

**Les Vignerons de Tavel, les Lauzeraies, rosé, 2010:** Good minerality, along with uncommonly good acid

**Les Vignerons de Tavel, Cuvée Tableau, rosé, 2010:** Riper fruit, with a tomato confit character

**Les Vignerons de Tavel, Cuvée Royale, rosé, 2010:** Shows spices and strawberry

**Château de Trinquedel, 2010:** Ripe, deep nose, with mature red fruits; for people who like their rosés “big”

**Domaine Maby, Prima Donna, 2010:** Almost like a concentrated fruit soup of peaches, apricots, and cherries

APPELLATION: **Costières de Nîmes**

- The sea air near Nîmes contributes coolness to the vines, and the humidity drenches them in the morning
- Rosés are crisp and fruity, with body and freshness.
- Reds are rich, serious, and complex

*Labels to Try*

**Domaine Marc Kreydenweiss, red, 2008:** Radiant reds very fresh, with pure and clean suggestions of red berries

**Château l’Ermitage, Sainte-Cécile, red, 2009:** Glossy purple, with beautifully behaved cherry and eau-de-vie scents

**Château Vessière, Prestige, red, 2009:** A fairly dark garnet-hued, with flavors of dried cranberry and lavender

**Michel Gassier, Nostre Pais, red, 2008:** Easygoing red—fresh, juicy, fruity, balanced, with suggestions of mint

**Michel Gassier, Les Piliers, red, 2009:** Gamy nose, combining minerals, high-toned fruit and toast

APPELLATION: **Luberon**

- One of the real up-and-coming spots in the Rhône for both whites and reds
- Fresh, fairly crisp and dry rosés, with some body
- Perfect conditions for reds in the persistent sunshine and cool nights of its appellation area

*Labels to Try*

**Marrenon, Pétula, rosé, 2010:** Pale pink, big and attractive pear nose, crisp and racy palate but with some structure

**Château La Canorgue, red, 2009:** Minerally, gentle fruit, with an excellent tannic backbone, leathery-earthly complexity begins to show fairly early

**Château La Verrerie, Grand Deffand, red:** Richer, more opulently fruity side of Luberon

**Domaine de Fontenille, red, 2009:** Young, boisterous

APPELLATION: **Ventoux**

- Mountain-clinging vineyards under the shadow of Mont Ventoux
- Red are helped by their northerly position: little lower in tannin, with the juicy snap of more northerly fruits
- Snappy, young, juicy red feature both richness and acid

*Labels to Try*

**Château Pesquié, Terrasses, red, 2009:** Juicy, low-tannin has perfectly proportioned bright fruit

**Château Pesquié, Quintessence, red, 2009:** Star-quality with beautifully integrated, high-toned vanilla, and leather

**Domaine Vindemio, Amadeus, red, 2006:** Has aged into a rich, mouth-filling, balanced wine, extraordinary raspberry jam/white truffle nose

## What’s left to say about Rhône wines?

They’re delicious companions to many styles of food, yes. And many, you can enjoy on your own. What makes the wines beloved by so many is more than what’s in the glass. Rhône wines come from a region that’s beautiful, colorful, sunny, dynamic, and, above all, human. And that’s reflected in these wines—all of them.

The wines are just some of the exquisite pieces that make up the mosaic of the Rhône Valley: the ancient river and vineyards, the lavender fields and local markets, traditional recipes, and enlightened chefs—it is the lovely and fluid intermingling of all of these elements that makes up the *art de vivre* here. So, get on a plane, in a car, and, road map in hand, follow the river.

Whatever the Meal



Côtes du Rhône **Wines**



**Always Right**