



France, Northern Rhône: Part 2 – Bet You Can’t Choose Just One

featuring Domaine Martin Clerc
reviewed by Joe Czerwinski

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Readers might recall that the focus of Part 1 of my report on Northern Rhône was on the big-name appellations of Côte Rôtie and Hermitage. Part 2 includes reviews from the other appellations of the region, like Crozes-Hermitage, Saint-Joseph, Cornas, Condrieu and Saint-Péray.

These appellations have benefited from increased consumer interest in the wines of the Northern Rhône, as higher prices have meant that producers can invest more in the vineyards and accept lower yields in the name of increased quality. Add in a series of thrilling vintages (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018), and there has never been a better time to explore the nooks and crannies of the Northern Rhône’s hillside vineyards.

To refresh readers’ memories, for the Syrah-based reds, 2015 offers wines of enormous power, concentration and aging potential; 2016 is more “classic” and savory yet supple; and 2017 is a sun-driven year of what looks like considerable potential. The 2018s were being harvested during the time of my visit in early to mid-September, and growers were again excited about the quality of the grapes, some even making favorable comparisons with 2015.

For the whites, the more moderate temperatures of 2016 make that the obvious pick for most growers, although many of the 2017s show remarkable freshness for a year in which harvest was so warm. As I don’t typically advocate aging most of the white wines from Condrieu, Crozes-Hermitage, Saint-Joseph or Saint-Péray, in most cases, consumers will be best served by purchasing the most recent releases.

As has become my usual routine when visiting the Rhône, most of the reviews here are based on blind tastings conducted with the assistance of the local syndicats and Inter Rhône. My days begin with four or five hours of blind tasting, followed by visits to selected producers (and tastings there) in the afternoon. Rinse and repeat for up to two weeks, tasting hundreds of wines each trip. Then spend weeks writing up the notes, all in pursuit of one key goal: to provide readable, usable purchasing advice for Wine Advocate readers. Enjoy!

2017 Domaine Martin Clerc Condrieu

The showy, flamboyant 2017 Condrieu from Martin Clerc boasts expressive notes of honey, apricot and orange blossom. Yet on the palate, it's medium-bodied and crisply focused, with a solid bed of crushed stone and a long finish. I'd drink it young, while it retains those special aromas. **(93 points)**

2017 Domaine Martin Clerc Condrieu la Roncharde

Martin Clerc's 2017 Condrieu la Roncharde is a blend of 40% barrel and 60% tank components, with a fifth of the oak being new. It shows fewer floral notes than the regular bottling but more honeyed richness and ripe apricot flavors. Medium to full-bodied, it's plump, round and weighty, with lingering notes of white pepper on the long finish. **(94 points)**

2016 Domaine Martin Clerc Condrieu

The 2016 Condrieu is even better than the impressive 2017. Honey, flowers and apricots all come together harmoniously on the nose, while the medium-bodied palate shows a stony, mineral aspect, lubricated by ripe fruit and lingering on the finish. **(94 points)**

2016 Domaine Martin Clerc Côte-Rôtie

Blended from Bassenon, Tupin and Collet, the 2016 Cote Rotie represents the soft elegance of the southern end of Côte Rôtie. Bay leaf and raspberry notes appear on the nose, while the medium-bodied palate is silky and delicate, marked by hints of tea leaves and red berries. **(91 points)**

