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September 2019

Northern Rhône: 2016 and 2017 Reds (Sep 2019)

featuring Jean-Louis Chave

by Josh Raynolds

Jean-Louis Chave says that 2016 is a vintage that will probably “not be appreciated until it has a little age to show how elegant it is,” pointing out that after their immediate satisfaction, wines from ripe vintages need to settle down to show what they’re really made of. “It’s kind of the same with lighter years. They aren’t usually very obvious when they’re young, they seem shy and in need of some time to grow.” Chave’s take on 2016 is that it is a very good year, “maybe not a great one for aging.” Intense hailstorms in April followed by scattered attacks of powdery mildew took a severe toll on yields, he said, but there was plenty of time to cull any damaged fruit, and what he had left “was clean and perfectly ripe, with the right balance of fruit and tannins.” Those fortunate enough to get their hands on some of Chave’s 2016 Hermitage should refrain from comparing the wine to his powerful 2015, which is truly a wine for the ages. The 2016 is quite a bit more graceful and, perish the thought, it should be enjoyable on the young side, but I would still give it at least a decade of bottle age before pulling the cork. For mere mortals the 2016 Saint-Joseph is a superb alternative and one of the very best examples of the appellation in this vintage. As for the 2016 Saint-Joseph Clos Florentin, by all means grab any you can find (there isn’t much of it to go around) as it is also a stunner.

2016 Saint-Joseph

Opaque ruby. Powerful, mineral-tinged aromas of blackberry, boysenberry, candied flowers, olive and licorice, along with a smoky overtone that builds in the glass. Stains the palate with sweet, energetic black/blue fruit, violet pastille and spicecake flavors that show outstanding purity and mineral-drive. The spice and floral notes repeat emphatically on a strikingly long, lively finish that's shaped by velvety, even tannins.
(94 points)

2016 Saint-Joseph Clos Florentin

Youthful violet color. Pungent black raspberry and cherry liqueur aromas are complemented by suggestions of potpourri, olive and exotic spices. Silky and expansive on the palate, offering spice-tinged black/blue fruit flavors that show wonderful delineation and mineral thrust. Juicy and seamless in texture, finishing with resonating blue fruit, floral character and harmonious, slow-building tannins. **(94 points)**

2016 L' Hermitage

Inky ruby. Highly precise, mineral-accented black/blue fruit, exotic spice, olive paste and incense aromas pick up hints of smokiness and candied licorice as the wine opens up. Seamless and penetrating on the palate, offering urgent blueberry, cherry preserve, spicecake and floral pastille flavors and a strong jolt of smoky minerality. Deepens steadily on the strikingly long, penetrating finish, which features smooth, interwoven tannins and resonating florality. **(97 points)**

2017 Mon Coeur Côtes-du-Rhône

Deep ruby. Pungent red and blue fruit and floral scents are complemented by suggestions of succulent herbs and white pepper. Lively, penetrating and appealingly sweet, showing good depth as well as detail to the black raspberry, cherry and floral pastille flavors. Finishes long and smoky, with supple tannins coming in late. **(90 points)**

2017 Crozes-Hermitage Silène

Bright violet. Mineral-accented cherry, boysenberry and smoky bacon aromas are complicated by suggestions of olive and candied flowers. Energetic and focused for the vintage, offering concentrated bitter cherry, cassis and violet pastille flavors braced by a spine of juicy acidity. Closes sappy, smooth and quite long, with sneaky tannins and a lingering suggestion of juicy black and blue fruits. **(92 points)**