



The Châteauneuf-du-Pape seminar contrasted stone-versus sand-dominated soils.

Rendezvous in Paso Robles

FRANCE MEETS AMERICA AT HOSPICE DU RHÔNE 2016

by David Gadd / photos by Stasi Seay



Jeb Dunnuck of The Wine Advocate moderated the Châteauneuf-du-Pape seminar.

A BRACING WIND WHIPPED THE MAKESHIFT ESPRESSO BOOTH

on the grounds of the Paso Robles Event Center as guests lined up for warming cappuccinos on Friday, April 15. Hospice du Rhône Paso Robles 2016 was getting off to a rousing, if chilly, start. The event would span two days, featuring seminars, tastings and meals on both days.

It was a brave new world for Rhônes as French-speaking attendees (*lots* of them) chatted in their native language under a sign welcoming them to “Pioneer Town,” where the morning’s seminars would be held. Blue-jeaned and booted American winemakers from Paso, Santa Barbara and beyond seemed right at home in this mock Western stage set (also home to the California Mid-State Fair every July). The two tasting seminars, scheduled for what would normally be breakfast time, were about to examine Rhônes Old World and New, revealing just how passionate people on both sides of the globe get about these varietals and blends.

The Intricacies of Châteauneuf-du-Pape

In the first seminar, Rhône specialist Jeb Dunnuck of *The Wine Advocate* led attendees through an exploration of the terroirs of Châteauneuf-du-Pape, the Rhône Valley’s largest appellation. In addition to wines from the famous rolled stone soils (*galets roulés*) that the region is known for, Dunnuck selected wines from the region’s sand-dominated terroirs for a comparison, with both classic and modern styles from the region being represented.

Standouts from among the ten wines included the gorgeous, silky-textured 2010 Domaine de la Font du Loup, the meaty and very old-school 2012 Domaine du Pegau Cuvée Réservee and the 2011 Le Clos

du Caillou Réserve, with its stunning explosion of flavors swathed in oak.

Seated to my immediate right was David Shiverick, of importer Langdon Shiverick, who introduced me to Florent Lançon from Domaine de la Solitude, whose wines he had presented the evening before at one of the kick-off dinners. Domaine de la Solitude deserves mention, as their 2000 Réserve Secrète (its first vintage) remains the greatest Rhône—and one of the greatest wines period—that I've personally ever tasted.

Washington Rhône – State of Address

After giving an amusingly witty introduction to the history of Rhône varieties in Washington State, Patrick Comiskey of *Wine & Spirits* moderated a panel discussion of the current state of Washington's Rhône-style wines. (Comiskey also disclosed that his groundbreaking book on the American Rhône movement is due out this fall, something every Rhône lover should be on the lookout for.) Todd Alexander of Force Majeure, Greg Harrington of Gramercy Cellars, Sean Boyd of Rôtie Cellars and winemaker Bob Bertheau of Château Ste. Michelle discussed their wines before an enthusiastic audience. Ste. Michelle's Tenet Wines project is a collaboration with winemaker Michel Gassier and celebrated Southern Rhône enology consultant Philippe Cambie, who were also in attendance.

My favorites were the Rôtie Cellars 2015 "Southern White" Viognier/Roussanne/Marsanne, with heady aromatics and beautiful white fruit notes, the softly feminine Tenet Wines 2013 "Tenet" GSM and the thrilling Force Majeure 2013 Estate Grenache from Red Mountain.

The seminar left everyone in attendance awed at the progress Washington State vintners have made with Rhône-style wines.

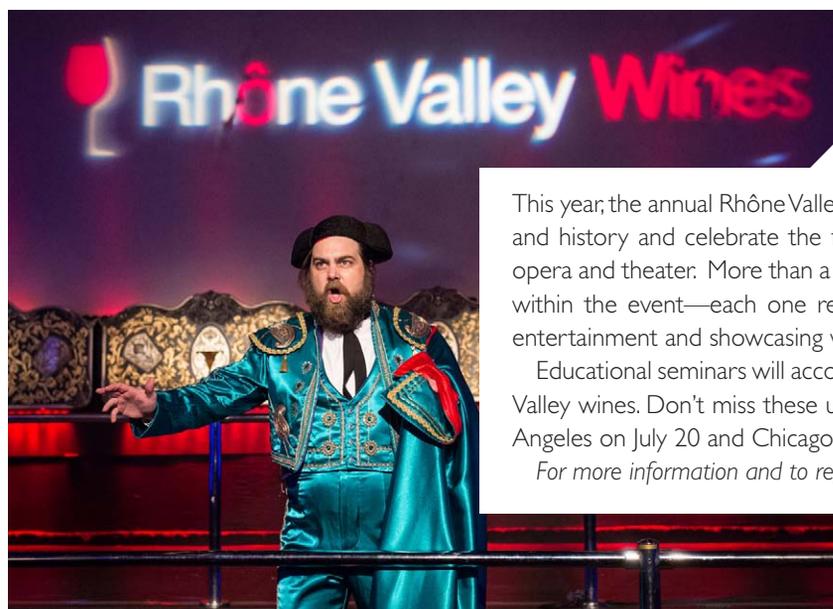


Washington Rhône seminar panelists (left to right): Sean Boyd of Rôtie Cellars, Bob Bertheau of Château Ste. Michelle, moderator Patrick Comiskey, Todd Alexander of Force Majeure and Greg Harrington of Gramercy Cellars.



Rosé wines were served at the al fresco lunch.

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You're Invited to Rhône Valley Wines: A LAND OF WINES AND FESTIVALS

This year, the annual Rhône Valley Wines tasting will draw upon Rhône's artistic culture and history and celebrate the four largest artistic festivals of the region: jazz, dance, opera and theater. More than a simple walk-around tasting, four spaces will be created within the event—each one representing a different festival, complete with unique entertainment and showcasing wines to sample and enjoy.

Educational seminars will accompany the experience to educate guests about Rhône Valley wines. Don't miss these upcoming events for consumers and trade alike in Los Angeles on July 20 and Chicago on September 14 from 3–7 p.m.

For more information and to register, visit rhonevalleywines-annualtasting.com. S|

The Rhône Valley Wines annual tasting kicked off with opera baritone Brian Shircliffe at Majestic Metro in Houston last month.