

JEB DUNNUCK

Domaine Jean-Louis Chave

as reviewed by Jeb Dunnuck

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Taking over the from his father, Gerard Chave, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the brilliant Jean-Louis Chave continues to keep his family estate at the top of the heap in regard to true reference point estates in the world today. Drinking a mature Hermitage from the Chave family is one of the greatest wine experiences a wine lover can have. These are majestic, singular wines. And while it would have been easy to rest on his laurels and reputation, Jean-Louis has done nothing of the sort and has worked tirelessly at the estate, overseeing the creation of a new cellar that was completed in 2014 as well as resurrecting numerous new vineyard sites in Saint Joseph, which are just now coming largely online. In addition, he and his wife, Erin Cannon-Chave, have created a négociant label called Chave Selection that offers fabulous bang-for-the-buck and includes both Northern and Southern Rhône. Looking specifically at their Hermitage releases, the grapes are always destemmed, with the individual terroirs vinified separately in stainless steel and aged in small barrels, most being used. The percentage of new oak has decreased over the past few decades and today hovers around 20-30% new French oak. Blending occurs a few months before bottling, and the wines are unfiltered. Looking at the vintages reviewed here, the 2015s are from a magical vintage in the Northern Rhône, and both Hermitage releases are as profound as wine gets. The Cuvée Cathelin is a deeper, richer, more exotic wine, but good luck finding bottles in the market. I include that wine in the handful of greatest young wines I've ever been lucky enough to taste. The classic Hermitage is more classic and elegant, with a rare sense of minerality, structure, and concentration. These are both Desert Island wines. The 2016 Hermitage shows the more elegant style of the vintage, but certainly isn't far from the 2015. In addition, this estate continues to be a bastion for true Hermitage Blanc, and the 2016 Hermitage Blanc delivers the richness and depth as well as minerality that can only be achieved from this magical hillside. Thankfully, this estate has ignored the ridiculous trend over the past decade toward producing so-called "fresher" and more "elegant" wines. The 2017s showed beautifully from barrel and have the sunny, upfront nature of the vintage. They don't have the sheer density of the 2015s, but they have more sex appeal than the 2016s. In

short, you can't go wrong with any of these wines, and life is too short not to drink as much Chave as you can!

2017 Chave Hermitage Blanc

The 2017 Hermitage Blanc looks to be fabulous, with a fat, opulent, unctuous style that's unfortunately far too rare from Hermitage these days. Awesome notes of white flowers, quince, ripe pineapple, and citrus notes as well as a liquid minerality all emerge from this incredible white that could come from nowhere other than this magical hillside in Hermitage. It shows the upfront, sexy nature of the vintage yet has plenty of tension and depth as well as obvious structure. Drink it on release and over the following couple of years or hold off for a decade or more. **(97-100 points)**

2016 Chave Hermitage Blanc

There's not much of the 2016 Hermitage Blanc to go around due to hail in the springtime, yet the resulting wine is another magical effort from this domaine. Bottled in August, it opens up with a fabulous blast of quince, white flowers, buttered citrus, licorice, and exotic spices. These all carry over to the palate, where the wine is full-bodied, rounded, and incredibly sexy, with a layered, mouthfilling texture. It doesn't have the sheer weight of the 2009 and 2010, but is deep, opulent, with plenty of fat and glycerin, and straight-up awesome purity of fruit. If you're lucky enough to have more than one bottle, it's an incredible drink today and should continue to shine for another 2-3 years. After that, I'd hold off for a good 6-7 years or more. **(100 points)**

2006 Chave Hermitage Blanc

Still fresh and lively, and drinking beautifully now at age 12, the 2006 Hermitage Blanc offers still fresh notes of buttered citrus, baking spices, white flowers, toasted nuts, and hints of licorice. A quintessential Hermitage Blanc, with incredible fruit, obvious minerality, and a richness that's offset by striking minerality and elegance, drink this beauty any time over the coming decade or more. **(98 points)**

2017 Chave Saint Joseph

The Saint Joseph from Jean-Louis Chave continues to improve in just about every vintage, and the 2017 Saint Joseph might just be the best yet. This cuvée comes from multiple estate vineyards, and while each has their own character, they all showed beautiful purity of fruit, notable complexity, and ripe, sweet tannins. This will unquestionably be an outstanding Saint Joseph that will have the upfront, sexy charm of the vintage front and center. **(92-94 points)**

2016 Chave Saint Joseph

Leading off the 2016s and tasted out of bottle, the 2016 Saint Joseph is rock-solid and shines in the vintage. Brought up all in older oak (Jean-Louis stated that he doesn't think Saint Josephs like oak) and offers plenty of darker, mineral, and smoked earth notes that slowly open up with more red fruits and spice. It's beautifully elegant and silky on the palate, with ample mid-palate heft, medium to full body, and sweet tannins. Put a case in the cellar and drink bottles over the coming decade or so. **(93 points)**

2017 Chave Saint Joseph Le Clos

The only single vineyard released last year (Jean-Louis could easily release a cuvée from each of his vineyards as they're so singular), the 2017 Saint Joseph Le Clos will be the third vintage from this larger site that spans the whole length of the hillside, with some of the oldest vines being down on the lower plain around the Le Clos de l'Arbalestrier estate in Mauve. This is a ripe, sexy, yet elegant style of Saint Joseph that has sensational notes of kirsch and blackberry fruits, loads of flowery incense, spice, and tapenade nuances, medium to full body, and sweet, sweet tannins. Drink it on release and over the following 7-8 years (or more if you're so inclined). **(92-94 points)**

2016 Chave Saint Joseph Le Clos

The second vintage for this single vineyard, the 2016 Saint Joseph Le Clos got a big "Wow" in the notes and is a total stunner that certainly bodes well for this vineyard, which is still not all in production. Awesome notes of blackberries, kirsch, pepper, and flowery spice flow to a powerful, ripe 2016 that has fine, silky tannins, beautiful sweetness of fruit, and no hard edges. While this wine always shows a riper, elegant style, this beauty has true density in 2016 and is a thrilling drink. As with the estate wine, put a case in the cellar and drink bottles over the coming decade. **(95 points)**

2017 Chave Hermitage

I was to go through all the different lieux-dits of the estate of the 2017 Hermitage and this is another undeniably great vintage for the domaine. The samples showed classic profiles, with the Péléat being the more supple and sexy, the Beaumes offering more spice as well as structure, the Hermite its classic purity, tightness, and class, the Méal the biggest and most opulent, and the Bessards having unquestionably the most tannic backbone and structure. It's certainly a ripe, sunny vintage, yet the wine has plenty of black fruits as well as density and is a classic, classic Hermitage from Chave. **(95-98 points)**

2016 Chave Hermitage

I was able to taste the 2016 Hermitage from three separate tanks which are blended prior to bottling. All three samples showed brilliant purity of fruit, full body, a forward, seamless, elegant texture, and classic building minerality. This is haute couture at its finest and is pure class that could come from nowhere else. As with most 2016s, it's going to be relatively accessible in its youth, yet this is one Hermitage that's not going to hit maturity for another 8-10 years and will keep for three decades. **(96-99 points)**

2015 Chave Hermitage

As good as Hermitage can get, the 2015 Hermitage from Jean-Louis Chave reminds me of a hypothetical mix of the 2010 and 1990 with its incredible purity, finesse, and elegant paired with awesome depth and structure. This heavenly wine exhibits a deep purple color as well as a powerful bouquet of crème de cassis, blackberries, dried violets, graphite, and crushed rocks, with a liquid mineral component that's just about impossible to find outside of the Bessards lieu-dit in Hermitage. Full-bodied and massively concentrated on the palate, yet with laser-like precision and clarity, it needs a solid decade of cellaring and will keep for 40+ years or more. It's not as sexy or overt as the Cuvée Cathelin, but is every bit as good. **(100 points)**

2015 Chave Hermitage Cuvée Cathelin

The 2015 Hermitage Cuvée Cathelin is a barrel selection made by Jean-Louis and is unfortunately made in tiny quantities. One of the greatest young wines I've ever tasted, it boasts a saturated purple color as well as a massive nose of crème de cassis, spiced blackberries, new saddle leather, flowers, and incense. Already incredibly complex and nuanced, it hits the palate with an opulent, powerful style that carries sweet tannins, incredible amounts of baby fat and richness, no hard edges, and a finish that won't quit. As with all great wines, it stays seamless and almost weightless on the palate, and needs to be tasted to be believed. Hats off to Jean-Louis Chave for continuing to make Hermitage in this authentic, pure, uncompromising style! **(100 points)**

