

Chapter 20

The Southern Rhône



Climate and Grape Growing

Climate: Mediterranean (mild winter, warm summer - drought potential)

- Flatter than the N. Rhone (S of Valence).
- Stony soils 'galets'- radiate and absorb sun's heats - especially in C-d-P (Châteauneuf du Pape)
- Mistral winds - damaging
 - Grenache = bush trained low; warm soil, protect from wind.
 - Syrah = easily damaged - trellising systems used.
 - Windbreaks planted.

Grape Varieties and Wine Making

Black varieties

Grenache = dominant grape. Warm summers - ripens fully. Red fruit/spice flavours. Jammy/cooked if too hot.

Syrah = adds colour and tannin - can struggle in hottest sites

Mourvedre = Northern limit of ripening - thrives in heat - deeply coloured/high tannin - adds black fruit/game/meat. Prized in C-d-P.

Cinsault = provides red fruit flavours - used in rose blends

Winemaking (red)

- WM must manage high tannin/alcohol
 - **Pre-fermentation maceration** → warm extractive fermentation and maturation in large old oak vessels
 - Blends from different techniques
 - New oak only used by some - can overwhelm Grenache flavours.
- **Light-med body/fresh/fruity/low tannin** → **high tannin/full body/game/meat/earth**

White varieties

Clairette, Grenache Blanc, Bourboulenc, (Viognier, Marsanne, Rousanne)

Best = rich texture/full body/high alcohol/low-med acid/subtle fruit (new oak rarely used)

Generic appellations

Cote du Rhone

- 50% of production
- Medium body/simple/fruity - usually red

Cote du Rhone Villages

- Villages entitled to use name is 100% of grapes from that village, ie, Cairanne
- Stringent min. alcohol levels/yields control
- Greater % of blend GSM
- Best wines outside of crus (all villages can apply for Cru status)

Crus

Châteauneuf-du-Pape

- Largest cru - east bank of Rhone
- First Appellation Controlee in France
- Notably flat - some small variations in aspect
- No of. Soil types and grapes (13 total) - diverse wines, ie, some 100% Grenache or several varieties
- Best = **full-body/rich texture/spiced red fruit**
- Lots of poor quality high alcohol versions sold

Tavel and Lirac

- 2 Crus west of Rhone
- Rose production (Tavel) - Grenache/Cinsault - more full-bodied/complex than Provence - greater aging
- Lirac - red + white in C-d-P style

Gigondas/Vacqueyras

- Similar styles to C-d-P = Grenache led **full-bodied/spicy red fruit**

Baumes de Venise

- Separate AC for fortified muscats (Muscat de Beaume-de-Venise).

Multiple Choice Practice Questions

1) Which soil type is commonly found in the Châteauneuf-du-Pape appellation of the Southern Rhône region?

- a) Granite
- b) Limestone
- c) Marl
- d) Galets

2) Which of the following is NOT an appellation within the Côtes-du-Rhône Villages category in the Southern Rhône region?

- a) Gigondas
- b) Vacqueyras
- c) Beaujolais
- d) Tavel

3) What is the traditional blend of grape varieties used in the production of red wines from the Southern Rhône region?

- a) Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot
- b) Grenache, Syrah, and Mourvèdre (GSM)
- c) Chardonnay and Pinot Noir
- d) Syrah and Viognier

4) Which is the largest cru of the Southern Rhône?

- a) Vacqueyras
- b) Châteauneuf du Pape
- c) Tavel
- d) Lirac

5) What does the Beaumes de Venise region specialise in?

- a) Fortified muscats
- b) Oaked whites
- c) Powerful red wines
- d) Sweet ice wines

Answers

1. d) Galets

2. c) Beaujolais

3. b) Grenache, Syrah, and Mourvèdre (GSM)

4. b) Châteauneuf du Pape

5. a) Fortified muscats