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special

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Decanter

The exciting wines of Spain

Tempranillo's many faces,
dry Sherries – and more

Red Burgundy 2012
'Wonderful surprises'
if you select carefully

Cru bourgeois 2011
61 great Bordeaux
from a variable year

Also
this
month



Châteauneuf-du-Pape 2011
Expert's choice: New Zealand 2013
Producer profile: Yquem
Travel: Spain's Empordà
Interview: Sashi Moorman



Châteauneuf-du-Pape 2011

Nowhere else does southern Rhône charm like this famous region, with the balance of bygone years making a welcome comeback, says John Livingstone-Learmonth

AT ITS BEST, Châteauneuf-du-Pape represents the prime virtues of southern-climate winemaking. The southern custom has long been to blend bundles of different grapes, the result of higgledy-piggledy planting of vines over the years, mixing colours and varieties.

In an appellation the size of Châteauneuf (3,200ha), you have a further spur to this from different soil types: sands, clay, some limestone, old ocean deposits, and small to large stones. The result is a matrix of varied wine styles.

Even so, there is a hallmark here, and that is one of smoothly textured, delicious, round wines whose tannins are silken. Potentially, no southern area comes close to the finesse of which Châteauneuf is capable. Here, balance counts. This vineyard represents the land's ability to offer properly ripe grapes, usually Grenache, and convert those into aromatic, stylish red wines, whose texture and fullness make them a delight to drink, etched as they can be with splashes of local garrigue herbs, colour and mystery.

Beyond Grenache, dabs of extra stimulus were provided by the other 12 permitted varieties, with Syrah adding colour and Mourvèdre – a better contributor than the sometimes jammy Syrah – helping the length.

In the 1990s, the game changed markedly, however, so that the vibe became one of going for broke with extremely ripe crop: oenologists advised that 'you had to get the most out of the crop', and the dread word 'sucrosity' entered the vocabulary, elbowing out the word 'balance'. A destemmed, extremely ripe crop, macerated for a long time – added to an increased use of oak – resulted in Châteauneuf that often resembled a dessert wine more than a focused table wine.

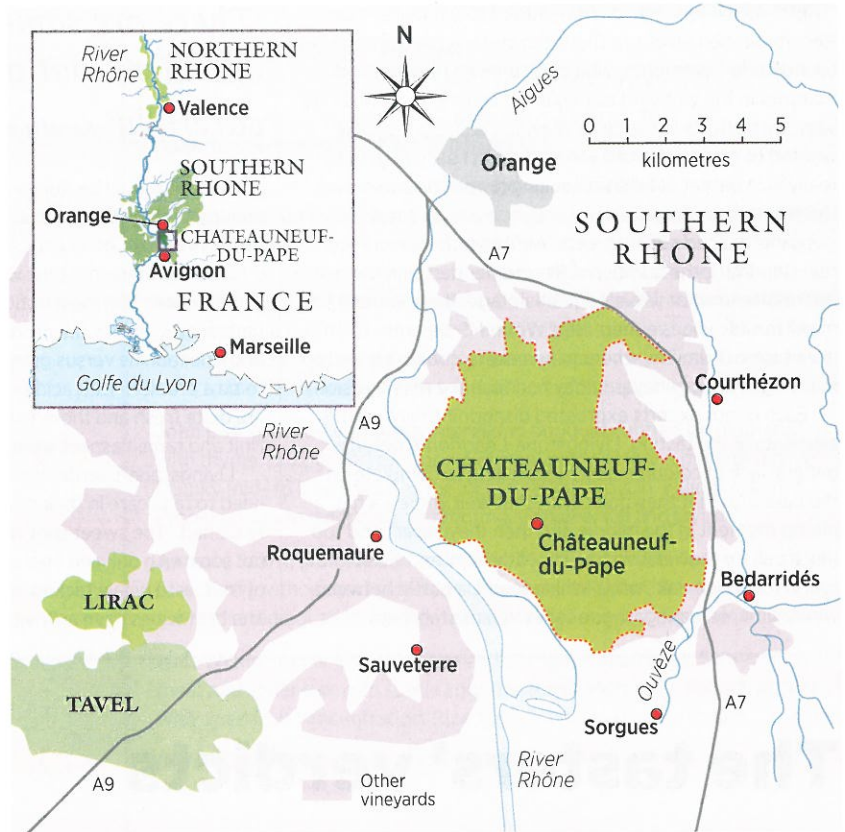
2011 comes at a stage when such practices are finally being questioned. Lumbering, unbalanced wines are not cool any more; sucrosity kills terroir. So when tasting 2011, knowing that 2010 is a virtuoso vintage of tremendous body and balance, and that 2012 is a year full of cool fruit and clear lines, it's encouraging that a move back to respecting balance and giving people wines they can actually drink (without a pre-dinner fitness-training course) is underway.

In 2011 challenges abounded, as ripening was irregular after an early spring, a cold July, threats of mildew and blocked ripening where tannin evolution and the sugars in the grapes fell out of step. High alcohol plays a role too, not helped by growers' having to wait for the tannins to ripen.

In 2010 Châteauneuf reds had enough body to handle oak maturation but not in 2011, when tender handling of an intrinsically fragile crop was required. The beating heart of 2011 remains the Grenache, though: the texture, the red plum fruit, the fat shape. But a relative lack of acidity does pose problems for the wines' longevity and their ability to gain complexity over time. So in 2011 the advice is to seek wines that hum a tune and offer kind, harmonious drinking.

Châteauneuf-du-Pape is still a name that resounds around the world, but it is now an expensive wine for people on a modest budget. It has to deliver drinkable wines that give buyers open pleasure and a memorable experience. If that means a return to the values and horizons of the less image-conscious 1960s and 1970s, then so be it.

John Livingstone-Learmonth is the DWWA Regional Chair for Rhône and an honorary citizen of Châteauneuf-du-Pape



Châteauneuf-du-Pape: know your vintages

2012 Good, can be very good; crisp, vibrant fruit, crunchy tannins. Stimulating.

2011 Good, but variable. Some fragile wines; the best sing good harmonies.

2010 Top-notch, not far from 1978. Great depth and freshness. Long life.

2009 Good to very good. The best are tight, compact, have big flavours and firm tannins.

2008 Dodgy ripening from rain and rot. The best have gained body, drinking well now. Good choice in a restaurant.

2007 Very good, can be excellent. Imposing, layered, persistent wines.

2006 Lovely now – lots of fruit in the Tradition wines. Better than 2004.

2005 Very good. Intense, slow-burn vintage that is well balanced. Tannins need time, but wines of classic structure.

2004 Delightful fruit, good tannins and freshness. Evolving and loosening.

2003 Stout, robust, low-acidity wines that have made progress and gained integration with age. No hurry.

Châteauneuf-du-Pape: the facts

Production 3,170 hectares; 94% red, 6% white

Main varieties Grenache 71.7%, Syrah 10.7%, Mourvèdre 6.6%, Cinsault 2.4%, Grenache blanc/gris 2.5%, Clairette blanche/rose 2.3%, Bourboulenc 1%, Roussanne 1%

Soils red clay, sand, alluvial stones

Estates 300 producers (240 private domaines), 1 co-op ➤

The results

Despite difficult growing conditions and uneven ripening, the 2011 Châteauneuf-du-Pape vintage is not to be written off, so long as you heed expert advice before making a purchase. Georgina Hindle reports

'THERE ARE A lot of wines that didn't make it higher than Recommended level, but that's the vintage,' declared John Livingstone-Learmonth, who cited uneven ripening and maturity in the vineyard as major difficulties. 'It's a vineyard year, with efforts in the cellar playing catch-up if people wanted to make balanced wines. It wasn't easy to get in a really nice basket of brilliant-looking grapes that were just there and ready to go.'

Annette Scarfe MW agreed: 'Although there were few real standouts, the number of Recommended wines is quite impressive in what was a difficult vintage; there weren't too many terrible wines either.' Matt Wilkin MS described 2011 as 'a vintage of humility' where winemakers 'couldn't have too many egos in the vineyard; they had to make wise decisions.'

Each of our experts expressed disappointment with elements of the tasting. Livingstone-Learmonth noted a general lack of colour, many wines failing to complete on the palate 'in that they don't start that well, there's a flat, plump moment in the middle and then they taper', and too much oak for the 'relative fragility of the content'. Scarfe, too, found too much oak', while Wilkin found 'a battle between wines with pleasant garrigue tones versus stalkiness'.

'There are some great wines out there, but you need to tread carefully' Annette Scarfe MW

He said this could be due to overt oak handling or to poor canopy management in the vineyard. He also noted unwelcome oxidative and reductive characters.

So what made the best wines stand out? Wilkin summarised: 'The most noticeable difference was that in the high-scoring wines the producer managed to get ripe fruit and ripe tannins versus green and grippy. There didn't seem to be a problem with acidity anywhere though; all the wines are quite fresh and those that didn't quite deliver on the fruit and tannin aspect were often saved by fresh acidity.'

Livingstone-Learmonth stressed that while buyers still need to take care in their purchases, the rewards are there to be had. 'The sweet spot will be a decent density of aroma, not too much oak and on the palate a good, consistent run of fruit, with nicely tucked in tannins and a cool, clear finish. The best wines have an inviting, drink-me-again clarity.'

The scores

107 wines tasted

1

Outstanding

5

Highly recommended

78

Recommended

17

Fair

3

Poor

3

Faulty

The tasters' verdicts

John Livingstone-Learmonth



Since first visiting the Rhône in 1973, Livingstone-Learmonth has dedicated most of his life to writing and talking about the region's wines. He is the author/contributor of five books on the Rhône, and runs the website Drinkrhone.com. In 2006 he was made a Chevalier de l'Ordre du Mérite Agricole, and he is an honorary citizen of the village of Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

Livingstone-Learmonth's verdict

'The tricky nature of 2011 was shown here.

Achieving balance in 2011 was difficult. The play is therefore to hunt down value wines that drink well, without bumps such as excess alcohol or over-the-top vegetal or green traces, which were the derivative of uneven ripening and very mixed quality bunches at harvest time.

'The Grenache role was vital, one of binding the wines together. The very high burst of late August heat meant that the Syrah fruit could become very jammy, and hence bring a blurred dimension on the palate.

'The colour and structure of the wines provided clues, as well: the hues of a few wines were lightening after only two years, while the best moment for some was their weighty richness in mid-palate which, either side of that, was looser in expression.

'2011 does not have the secure content to handle lots of oak, so wines with that struggle. The best, however, have an inviting, moreish late menthol clarity, and will sing a fine tune over the next 10 to 12 years. Châteauneuf-du-Pape needs to regain its drinkability factor after years of excess sweetness and degree, and with 2012, the signs are encouraging.'

Annette Scarfe MW



Scarfe consults for restaurants in London, Hong Kong and Singapore, including Alan Yau's Princi and St Betty. She has previously consulted for Sake No Hana and runs regular training sessions for the on-trade at several restaurants in London. Scarfe is a regular member of magazine tasting panels, educates on the topic of Bordeaux and is a WSET certified educator.

Scarfe's verdict

'The 2011 vintage was a good rather than great vintage, not as voluptuous as 2009 and less structured than 2010. This was reflected in our enjoyable tasting of 107 wines. While there were few Outstanding wines, there were equally very few poor ones. Consumers can therefore buy with confidence, as the majority were delicious to drink.

'The cool July temperatures were followed by a hot August shutting down the vines and stalling ripening. There were two distinct styles, the fresher mineral style indicative of earlier picking and a bigger, riper style. Both have a place - taste a few and decide on the style you prefer.

'Winemakers have clearly done a good job of managing the vintage with oak and fruit in balance. This, combined with lovely acidity, created rounded, well-structured, food-friendly wines.

'It was particularly pleasing to find so many good wines across a range of price points and only three faulty wines - two with excessive brettanomyces as the culprit.

'While some wines have plenty of ageing potential, most were approachable now and not for the long haul, offering both wines for connoisseurs and novices alike.'

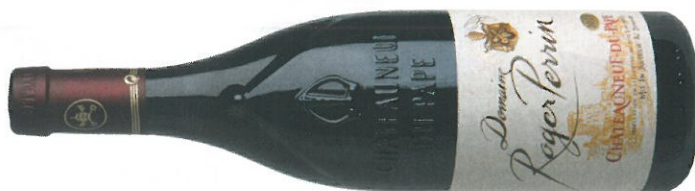
Drinkability was a topic highlighted, in a positive way, by the judges. '2011 really does perform this get-in-there-and-go role and is for shorter-term drinking,' noted Livingstone-Learmonth. Scarfe agreed that it was a vintage approachable now but that many would also improve with age. 'There's variation. Some wines are drinking immediately – quite a lot actually – but they still have life ahead of them.' Wilkin added: 'A lot of these will drink well until 2023 but you could easily start dipping into them from 2015 because of that freshness and attractive fragrance.' He said these characters also make the wines perfect partners for food.

So are the 2011s worth investing in? 'It's not necessarily a year to invest big sums in, unless you follow the wines we've chosen from here which we've had a good look at,' advised Livingstone-Learmonth. Scarfe added: 'We don't know the prices when we taste, but I'd hazard a guess that there are probably some pretty good bargains to be had.'

Livingstone-Learmonth however reiterated the need for caution: 'This is a year where pleasure is to be had, but you have to choose carefully.' Scarfe agreed that 2011 was not a vintage to blindly buy from any producer. 'There are some great wines out there, but you need to tread carefully and buy on recommendations or with knowledge.'

Entry criteria:
Producers and UK agents were invited to submit their 2011 Châteauneuf-du-Pape reds. Only one wine per producer was permitted.

Outstanding 18.5–20pts (95–100pts)



Domaine Roger Perrin

Decanter average score: 18.5/20pts (95+/100pts)

Individual judges' scores: John Livingstone-Learmonth 18.75

Annette Scarfe MW 18.5 Matt Wilkin MS 18.5

£19.95–£30 Best of Wines, Fullers, Stone Vine & Sun, Swig

Triumph over adversity sums up this domaine's achievement with its 2011, the year in which Luc Perrin died. Until November 2013, his sister Véronique operated her own winemaking consultancy from Isère. She and her son Xavier have juggled commitments and picked up the reins successfully. The crop is cooled before fermentation, there is light intervention in the cellar, and maturation is done with a mix of vat and mostly aged oak. Grenache back to the 1930s and 1940s lies at the heart of its stylish appeal.

John Livingstone-Learmonth Interesting bouquet centred on plum fruit with thyme, pepper and tarragon. Fragrant entry before a more assertive, chunky mid- to late-palate as the local strength kicks in. Fluid black fruit. Proper southern length, no soft footing. Genuine, full and stylish.

Annette Scarfe Delicate coffee notes with crème caramel on the mid-palate. Structured without grainy tannins or excessive alcohol. Classy and sophisticated but still showing rusticity. Not showy but genuine. A classic.

Matt Wilkin Savoury, spiced plum and garrigue-toned nose. Sweet dried meat and cedar oak with subtle liquorice tones. Rich, dark, seductive core with dried fruit concentration. Ripe tannins with very good length. Delicious.

Drink 2014–2023 Alcohol 14.5%

Highly Recommended

17–18.25pts (90–94pts)



Clos St-Pierre, Urbi

N/A UK 00 33 6 10 29 50 25

17.25 (90+) JLL 17.25 AS 17.25 MW 17

Bold, lifted oxtail, blackberry and liquorice. Big wine: the non-Grenache elements add to its assertiveness. Fragrant garrigue complements well. A classy wine of elegance and typicity. Time will help. **Drink** 2014–2021 **Alc** 14.5%



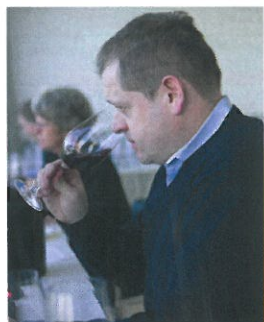
Domaine Lafond, Roc Epine 17.25

(90+) JLL 17 AS 17.25 MW 17.5

£28 Le Bon Vin, Montrachet Fine Wine

Dense, dark plum and spice with rich liquorice and savoury cedar oak. Engaging debut: the dark fruit has a savoury aspect, with pockets of sweetness and nicely tuned tannins that add freshness and length. Genuine. **Drink** 2014–2021 **Alc** 14% ➤

Matt Wilkin MS



Wilkin is trade sales and marketing director of London-based Rhône specialist merchant H2Vin. He also works as a restaurant wine consultant and became Australia's first Master Sommelier in 2004. He contributed to the Academy of Food & Wine Service's UK Wine Service Standards Committee, and is actively involved in the examining board for the Court of Master Sommeliers.

Wilkin's verdict

'This is a vintage where success favoured winemakers who were more experienced and prepared in advance. Vineyard management played a major role in 2011, distinguishing those wines with attractive garrigue aromas from stalky tones; ripe and balanced fruits from green and hard.

'Winemakers who gambled on overt new oak paid a price higher than those who chose to favour the subtle influences of older wood. This was often the case when encountering modern styles versus old-school classics. Wines with a higher percentage of Grenache were prettier than those based on Syrah, which had a notable flatness on the finish.

'The 2011s exhibit less power and density compared to 2010, yet there are some charming examples: lifted and full of fruit, structured tannins and a fresh acidity that will fare well for early drinking. Cuvées from many top estates are seductive and will drink well from 2015 to 2023.

'This is a superb vintage for pairing with food, particularly because of the savoury fruit and fresh acidity. I expect 2011 will become a popular vintage in restaurants, where many fine examples will be served by the glass, attracting new fans to the region so long as the prices are fair.'

Highly Recommended (continued) 17-18.25pts (90-94pts)



Vidal-Fleury 17.25 (90+) JLL 17.75 AS 17.5 MW 16.75

£32.50 Guildford Wine Co, Hailsham Cellars, Winedirect

Fine herbal nose with dark plums underlying savoury cedar oak and dried meat. Ripe but firm tannins – a wine for the long haul but delicious now. All elements are well lined up. Long and fresh. Classy potential. **Drink 2015-2025 Alc 14.5%**



Domaine de St-Siffrein 17 (90) JLL 17 AS 17 MW 17

£23.50 Boxford Wine

Spicy fruit compote with sweet liquorice and blackcurrant pastille. Palate sets off well with good fruit and sweeps along with agreeable energy as it goes. Jasmine tea and floral notes lift the mid-palate. Liquorice notes in the ripe tannins on the finish. **Drink 2014-2023 Alc 14.5%**



Domaine des Chanssaud 17 (90) JLL 17.5 AS 17 MW 16.5

£26 Peter Watts

Subdued, savoury, dark plum nose with a peppery edge. Fine cedar oak sits well with herbal notes. Has traditional inner core: a good Grenache heart that plays to the vintage's strength. Plum fruit occupies the centre ground. Terroir-faithful. **Drink 2016-2019 Alc 14.5%**

Recommended 15-16.75pts (83-89pts)

Wine	Score	JLL	AS	MW	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Château des Fines Roches	16.75 (89)	17.25	16.5	16.75	Sweet liquorice and dark chocolate nose. Pleasant, underlying earth and garrigue. Ripe, juicy fruit persisting with structured tannins and fresh acidity.	14.5%	2014-2021	£23	Nicolas
Château Sixtine	16.75 (89)	17.5	17	16	Broad bouquet of warm blackberry fruit. Rich, spicy mid-palate of ripe generous fruit. Warm, spicy alcohol is absorbed beautifully by luscious fruit.	15.5%	2015-2030	£30 (2010)	Lalthwaite's Wine
Domaine de la Mordorée, La Reine des Bois	16.75 (89)	17.25	17	16	Ripe, savoury, spiced plum and fresh earth. Enjoyable potential. Refreshing on the palate with nice acidity. Ends in orderly, compact manner.	15%	2014-2024	£39.75-£42	A&B Vintners, H2Vin, Lea & Sandeman, Millésima
Domaine Giraud	16.75 (89)	16.5	17.5	16.5	Ripe nose, forward dense plum and dark cherry. Lots of fruit to support the high alcohol. Shows real typicity, appealing. Enjoy with dark meat.	15%	2014-2024	£25.95-£36.95	Atlas Fine Wines, Berry Bros & Rudd, Fine & Rare, Lay & Wheeler, Gauntleys, Nebuchadnezzar, Tanners, Uncorked
M Chapoutier, La Bernardine	16.75 (89)	16.25	17.25	16.5	Attractive herbal nose. Voluptuous palate with generous red plums and raspberry cheesecake. A touch of acidity enlivens it. True Châteauneuf.	15%	2014-2019	£22.50-£30	Hermitage Cellars, Millésima, Partridge's of Sloane Square
Ogier, Clos de l'Oratoire des Papes	16.75 (89)	16.5	17	16.5	Dark plum and cherry with savoury oak, earth and herb tones. Soft, rounded palate with delicate oak and hints of liquorice with integrated tannins. Long.	15%	2014-2025	£19.99-£24	Majestic, Sainsbury's
Alain Jaume & Fils, Domaine Grand Veneur	16.5 (88)	16.5	17.5	15.5	Forward plum and savoury spice. Big wine but enough structure to support. Hints of cedar and tobacco add complexity. A classic example.	15%	2014-2023	£21-£27.50	Bibendum, Big Red Wine, Earle Wines, St Andrews Wine Co
Domaine Albin Jacumin, La Bégude des Papes	16.5 (88)	16.75	16.75	16.25	Gamey, cooked plum nose. Palate of blackberry, close-knit tannins and a few sparks of freshness. Buy with confidence and it will be enjoyable to many.	14.5%	2014-2023	£29	Amathus
Domaine de Cristia	16.5 (88)	17	16	16.5	Ripe berry and plum nose with sweet meat, liquorice and spiced new oak. Palate shows red fruit with a fine-tuned pick up of tannin. Garrigue finish.	15%	2014-2023	£19-£23	Bancroft, Big Red Wine
Domaine de l'Arnesque, Cuvée Capelane	16.5 (88)	17.25	16.5	16	Savoury, ripe plums and peppery spice mix, subtle earthy notes, liquorice and cedar oak. Fresh acidity keeps it lively. Rustic notes add to the attractiveness.	15%	2014-2023	£20.99 (2009)	Fine Wines Direct
Domaine de St-Paul	16.5 (88)	16.75	17	15.5	Brioche and raisin nose. Ripe, spiced fruit palate with earth persisting. Medium, dry tannins convey with fresh acidity.	14.5%	2014-2022	£18.34	Millésima
Famille Bréchet, Château de Vaudieu	16.5 (88)	17	16.75	15.75	Savoury, ripe, spiced plum, dried meats and herbs with cedar oak nose. High alcohol feels lower due to the opulent fruit. Big, rich, satisfying. A bonny glass.	15%	2014-2024	£33.99	Liberty Wines, Swig
Bosquet des Papes, Cuvée Tradition	16.25 (87)	17	15.5	16	Mellow garrigue herb nose and cooked plum fruit. Unctuous, ripe, spiced plum fruit core, well structured, creamy tannins with firm, lingering finish.	14.5%	2014-2024	£24-£26.75	H2Vin, Montrachet Fine Wine, OW Loeb
Château de Ruth, Cuvée Emile	16.25 (87)	15.5	16.5	16.75	Spiced herb and flint nose. Moderate acidity with ripe red fruit compote. Balanced and stylish. Almost New World in its style and very attractive.	14%	2014-2022	N/A UK	www.chateauruth.com
Cuvée des Sommeliers	16.25 (87)	17	16	15.5	Rich, ripe fruit nose with chocolate and blackcurrant pastilles. Palate of plump black jam and prune fruits that linger well. Good texture. Genuine.	14%	2014-2026	N/A UK	+33 4 90 83 74 33
Domaine de Fontavin, Cuvée Tradition	16.25 (87)	15.75	16.5	16.5	Fat, and nearly opulent. Full, dense, dark fruit palate, good acidity and tannin structure with savoury freshness on the lingering finish.	15%	2014-2020	£23.49	General Wine Co
Domaine de Nalys	16.25 (87)	16.75	15.5	16.5	Beef stock, stewed fruit and chocolate aroma. Bright, spiced plums and dark cherry core with fresh acidity and structured tannins with good length.	14.5%	2014-2022	£20-£24	Anthony Byrne, Hayward Bros, From Vineyards Direct
Domaine des Saumades	16.25 (87)	16	16.75	15.75	Pronounced, dark, dense plums and spice, fresh hay scents and molasses. A hearty style with a handsome coat of red fruits. Sturdy finish; needs time.	14.5%	2014-2020	£21	Christopher Keiller
Domaine des Sénéchaux	16.25 (87)	17	15.5	16.5	Smoky, brooding nose with compact, ripe berry fruit. Good fruit intensity and persistence, lifting acidity with crunch and well-structured tannins.	15%	2014-2024	£30	Averys, Berry Bros & Rudd
Domaine La Barroche, Signature	16.25 (87)	16	17	15.5	Savoury, spiced dark fruit, meat and cedar oak nose. Orange chocolate on the initial palate. Spicy alcohol but generous ripe fruit to support firm tannins.	15%	2014-2022	£30-£34.50	Gauntleys, Stone Vine & Sun
Domaine L'Or de Line	16.25 (87)	17	16	15.5	Mixed spice and cooked berry nose. A hint of Turkish Delight on the palate with sweet, ripe cherry fruit and rose petals. Elegant tannins and fresh acidity.	14%	2014-2020	£20	Nethergate Wines
Domaine Serguier	16.25 (87)	17.25	16.25	15.5	Savoury, ripe plums and spice with pleasant garrigue notes. The palate is dense, its tannins granular. Four-square now but refined fruit promises well.	15%	2014-2025	N/A UK	www.domaine-serguier.com
Famille Quiot, Domaine du Vieux Lazaret	16.25 (87)	16.5	15.5	16.5	Red cherry liqueur aroma with a denser, more meaty inside note. Unctuous, rich fruit palate with dried, sweet spiced meats. Coolness of acidity brings lift.	14.5%	2014-2025	£19.95-£24	PLB, Whitebridge Wines
Gabriel Meffre, St-Théodorice	16.25 (87)	15.5	17	16.5	Spiced, mineral bouquet with red berry fruit inside. Not upfront but elegant and sophisticated. This wine has been well crafted and deserves recognition.	14.5%	2014-2025	£18.99	Guy Anderson
Gonnet Père & Fils, Domaine Font de Michelle	16.25 (87)	16.75	16.5	15.5	Attractive, ripe, rich Christmas cake with spice. Herbal resin notes with slight dusty edge. Dark plum and pepper palate with subtle fruit persistence.	14.5%	2014-2021	£25.99-£27.55	Haynes Hanson & Clark, Waitrose
Le Clos du Caillou	16.25 (87)	16	16.75	16.25	Fruit-driven palate with fresh acidity sits well with structured tannins. Needs game dishes. Ends on a round curve of smoky, tangy berry fruit and tar.	15%	2014-2023	£26.75	H2Vin
Château Capucine	16 (86)	17	15.75	15	Attractive, fragrant garrigue notes with savoury, toasty oak. A good heart of richness with thyme and flint. Garrigue touches along the late stages.	15%	2014-2022	£25-£40	Big Red Wine, Orso Wines

Châteauneuf-du-Pape 2011

Recommended (continued) 15-16.75pts (83-89pts)

Wine	Score	JLL	AS	MW	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Clos des Papes	16 (86)	16.75	16.25	15	Ripe, forward, plum, cherry-spiced nose with fragrant cedar oak. Upfront and attractive with subtle earthiness. Rich mid-palate with generous alcohol.	15%	2014-2021	£47.40	Goedhuis
Clos du Mont-Olivet	16 (86)	17	16	15.25	Liqueur fruit aroma, warmth and sweet ripeness. Black pepper on the palate and with moderate alcohol. Leaner than some but showing typicity.	14.5%	2014-2024	£22-£32	Fine & Rare, Lay & Wheeler
Domaine La Consonnière	16 (86)	16.5	15.75	16	Peppery nose with floral and mint tones. Palate of fluid plum, spiced fruit and toffee-oak. Balanced, with the fruit offering pleasure.	15%	2014-2022	N/A UK	www.domainelaconsonniere.fr
Domaine Pierre Usséglio & Fils	16 (86)	15.25	16.5	16.5	Dark plum, herbs and hints of pine resin. Juicy palate with ripe redcurrants and delicate oak giving a sweetness. Tannins soft and well integrated.	14.5%	2014-2020	£22-£24	Berry Bros & Rudd, Fine & Rare, Gauntleys, In Vino Veritas, Uncorked
Famille Perrin, Les Sinards	16 (86)	16.75	15.5	15.5	Ripe, dense plum and dark cherry fruit with nutty mushroom and savoury oak. Fruit brighter than some, and well textured. Sensible, harmonious 2011.	14.5%	2014-2019	£21.99	Sainsbury's
Meyblum & Fils	16 (86)	16.5	16.25	15	Oily, blackberry nose with a resin note. Restrained overall with firm, grippy finish but appears to hold back from showing its potential. Needs time.	14.5%	2014-2021	N/A UK	www.meyblum.com
Tardieu-Laurent	16 (86)	16.75	15.5	15.75	Black, smoky cherry nose. The palate has sound black fruit with liberal spice to pep it up. Creamy tannins persist with good acidity and freshness on finish.	14.5%	2014-2022	£24.17-£41.50	Corney & Barrow, Millésima
Vignobles David, Les Masques	16 (86)	15.5	16.75	15.75	Fresh bouquet, extols black berry fruits with a liquorice, tar, nutty oak snap. An ambitious wine with ripe fruit, lashings of oak and juicy tannins.	14%	2014-2024	N/A UK	www.vignobles-david.fr
Château Jas de Bressy	15.75 (85+)	15.75	16	15.5	Ripe, round, peppery plum nose with herbs and dried meats. Swish, new-wave Châteauneuf. Powerful finish. Not reached a settled stage yet.	15%	2014-2024	N/A UK	www.vmb.fr
Château Mont-Redon	15.75 (85+)	16	16.25	15	Liquorice and black fruit nose, dark spice and a hint of herbs. More feminine style with moderate alcohol and fresh acidity.	14.5%	2014-2020	£20.90 (2010)	Justerini & Brooks
Domaine de Beurenard	15.75 (85+)	16.25	16.25	15	Spiced plum nose with cedar oak, liquorice and a menthol edge. Needs time to integrate but a classic example and well made in a tricky vintage.	15%	2014-2025	£24-£26	Berkman, Fine & Rare, In Vino Veritas
Domaine du Pegau, Cuvée Réserve	15.75 (85+)	16.25	15	16	Savoury, medicinal, animal notes - a tiny bit of Brett. The palate offers simmered, mulled red fruits with oaking evident toward the finish.	14%	2014-2025	£29-£42	widely available
Domaine La Roquette, Piedlong	15.75 (85+)	16.5	15.5	15.5	Mulled blackberry, prune, cinnamon and cocoa nose. Dark fruit concentration again on palate with firmness in tannins and warmth on finish.	14.5%	2014-2026	£32.95	Berry Bros & Rudd
La Fagotière, Piedlong	15.75 (85+)	16	16	15	Restrained dark berry and plum with a nettle edge. Palate of blackberry fruit, and a clear tang on the finish. A little resinous. Still juvenile.	15%	2014-2026	N/A UK	www.lafagotiere.com
La Tour Coste, Les Pialons	15.75 (85+)	16	16.25	15	Fresh nose lifted by new oak. Gentle earth and soft garrigue notes. Upfront, juicy berry palate. Lean, drying tannin finish with acidity bringing freshness.	14.5%	2014-2021	N/A UK	www.pointdecollection.com
Lavau	15.75 (85+)	16.5	15.25	15.5	Dense, glossy plum nose with new oak. Dried meat and garrigue underlay. Typical Châteauneuf roundness, just an inflexion of oak and dryness there.	14%	2014-2022	£20	Boutinot
Louis Bernard, Les Galets du Haut	15.75 (85+)	16	15.75	15.5	Subdued, ripe blackberry fruit with balancing earth notes. Palate of red fruit with snap of liquorice, spice. This is a safe bet; has the fluid fruit of 2011.	14.5%	2014-2029	£30	Bibendum
Mas de Boislaizon	15.75 (85+)	16.5	15.5	15.5	Sweet blackberry aroma and a trace of brioche. Concentrated palate with plums, liquorice and spicy oak. Firm grip from tannins with warmth on finish.	15%	2014-2021	£18	Winegrowers Direct
Château Beauchêne, Grande Réserve	15.5 (85)	15.25	15.75	15.25	Rich nose of white truffle chocolate. Palate is ripe and floral - Grenache leads well, with just a hint of oak. Rosehip fruit with soft, delicate tannins.	14%	2014-2021	£33	Corney & Barrow
Château de la Gardine	15.5 (85)	16.5	14.5	15.75	Ripe berry and plum nose with earth and savoury cedar oak. The palate is a tight-knit with compact, dark berry fruit which carries elegance.	15%	2014-2024	£30-£35	Gerrard Seel
Château La Nerthe	15.5 (85)	16	16	14.5	Overt, sweet vanilla oak nose dominating ripe fruit. Modern Châteauneuf. Its heart holds a smooth ball of fruit with intensity added by the Mourvèdre.	14.5%	2015-2023	£28-£29	Berry Bros & Rudd, Fine & Rare
Domaine Chante Cigale	15.5 (85)	15.75	16	14.5	Pork scratchings, red berry jam and smoky restraint on the nose. The palate offers a liquid red fruit flavour, with increased grip towards the finish.	15%	2014-2019	£21.99-£23.50	Widely available via UK agent Boutinot
Domaine de la Charbonnière	15.5 (85)	14.25	15.5	16.5	Strawberry jam and mulled spice nose. Ripe berry palate with savoury aspect conveyed by drying tannins and fresh acidity. Touch of warmth on end.	15%	2014-2018	£18-£23	Christopher Keiller, Farr Vintners
Domaine des 3 Cellier, Alchimie	15.5 (85)	15.25	15	16	Attractive cinnamon nose with ripe, soft, juicy fruit. Palate shows roundness of Grenache-inspired fruit. Easy-drinking, true and traditional in its approach.	14.5%	2014-2020	£19.99	Castelneau Wine Agency
Domaine La Mereuille, Tradition	15.5 (85)	16	14.75	16	Pronounced, attractive, rich, ripe nose with dense, spiced plums, nuts and chocolate. Unctuous, full and dense. A modern style that's easy to like.	14%	2014-2025	N/A UK	www.domainelamereuille.com
Domaine Mathieu	15.5 (85)	15.75	14.5	16	Developing plum nose with spiced meats, liquorice, earth, florals and cedar oak. The palate has a sinewy texture and straight tannins, not all integrated.	15%	2014-2021	£23.20	Vinothentic
Domaine Pontifical	15.5 (85)	16	15	15.25	Open fruit nose with plum and spiced oak. Herbal edge enhances the subdued expression. Broad palate with a tang of pine. Fine acidity on finish.	14.5%	2014-2021	£20	Hourier Wines
Domaine Roche-Audran,	15.5 (85)	16.5	15	14.75	Rich, ripe, peppery nose slightly oxidative but showing rusticity. Leads from the front. Sense of place in this; mineral notes help its breeze.	15%	2014-2024	£35 (2010)	Borough Wine
Domaine St-Préfert	15.5 (85)	15.25	16	15.25	Soft bouquet that is on the back foot now; has a withdrawn nature. The palate bustles around some gritty tannins, has a chiselled profile and a snap of spice.	13.5%	2014-2022	£33.95	A&B Vintners, Berry Bros & Rudd
Montagne Vieille	15.5 (85)	15.5	15.75	15	Slightly medicinal fruit with sweet cough mixture and violet candies. The palate is chunky, bearing a firm line of tannin in its black berry fruit.	13.5%	2014-2022	N/A UK	+33 6 75 74 62 34
Val de Garrigue, Cuvée Pape Jean XX	15.5 (85)	15.25	16.5	14.5	Savoury nose of spiced plum, rose and nutty oak. Grenache-based, with a tang from slightly limited fruit ripeness. Flinty, dusty aftertaste.	14.5%	2014-2021	£26.99	Oxford Wine Co
Brotte, Domaine Barville	15.25 (84)	15.25	16	14.25	Ambitious, with lashings of creamy oak. Palate is full of Christmas spices, raisins, liqueur plums and pepper. Compressed and rather plastered together.	14.5%	2014-2024	£31.29 (2010)	Wine Palate
Chapelle St-Théodorice, La Guigasse	15.25 (84)	15	16.5	14.5	Peppery, green aromas, unconvincing ripeness, a few floral wafts, liquorice and flint. Savoury, spiced fruit palate with slightly brittle, drying tannins.	14.5%	2014-2015	POA	Bancroft
Château de Manissy	15.25 (84)	15.75	15	15	Ripe red plums with tiramisu notes and sweet spice. Palate has oaky tar notes and the black cherry fruit is direct. Has a fruit coulis style.	14.5%	2014-2020	POA	Club Vin Bio
Château Maucoil	15.25 (84)	15.25	15.75	14.75	Subdued expression of ripe fruit and earth with cedar oak coming to the fore. Modest mid-palate but elegant and sophisticated. A little warm on the finish.	15%	2014-2021	£29.99	McKinley Vintners
Château Mongin	15.25 (84)	15.5	15.75	14.75	Herbal nose with attractive cigar box notes. The fruit on the palate is subjugated by the oak. A little rustic for some, but appealing acidity.	14.5%	2014-2026	N/A UK	www.chateaumongin.com
Clos-St-Michel	15.25 (84)	15.5	16	14	Upfront bouquet of crème de cassis, smoky bacon, red meat and a pepper note. Mass appeal with its easy-drinking, approachable style.	14.5%	2014-2018	£17.99	Ocado
Domaine du Grand Tinel	15.25 (84)	14.25	16.5	15	Creamy oak nose with ripe mulberries and liquorice. Palate holds a compact, brief display of cherry, liqueur red fruit. Grippy, slightly drying tannins.	15%	2014-2021	£18.34-£32	Hallgarten Druitt, Millésima, Swig

Châteauneuf-du-Pape 2011

Recommended (continued) 15–16.75pts (83–89pts)

Wine	Score	JLL	AS	MW	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Domaine Giulliani	15.25 (84)	14.25	15.5	16	Generous, savoury, ripe plum fruit palate with creamy vanilla. Liquorice, dark chocolate truffle, subtle meat and earth tones. Engaging earth notes.	14.5%	2014-2023	N/A UK	+33 4 90 33 14 69
Domaine La Boutinière	15.25 (84)	15.25	14.5	16	Thyme, vegetal, raisin and menthol notes with some lurking blackberry fruit. The palate has a stylish moment halfway, where the fruit runs freely.	14.5%	2014-2021	£20.18	Christopher Keiller
Domaine La Millière, Vieilles Vignes	15.25 (84)	16.5	14	15.5	Sweet spice nose with cooked damsons. Subdued fruit expression on palate with savoury, drying tannins. Acidity is fair and brings freshness to palate.	14%	2014-2021	£25–£37 (2010)	Christopher Keiller, Fine & Rare, Seckford
Grandes Serres, La Cour des Papes	15.25 (84)	15.25	15.5	15	Coffee bean aroma. Creamy vanilla mid-palate with date, prune and tar notes. Well balanced and integrated. Not too ambitious but has mass appeal.	16%	2014-2020	N/A UK	+33 4 90 83 72 22
Mouriesse Vinum, Pierre d'Ambre	15.25 (84)	15.75	14.5	15.25	Herb, resin and plum nose with spiced oak. Dried meats and earth with liquorice base. Fresh acidity from the Syrah but a little confectioned on the finish.	15%	2014-2023	N/A UK	www.mouriesse-vinum.com
Arnoux & Fils	15 (83)	15.75	15	14.5	Spiced blackberry fruit with a garrigue presence. Savoury note. Brittle fruit palate – lean with raw tannin structure dominating the palate and finish.	14%	2014-2019	£22	Soho Wine Supply
Château Cabrières	15 (83)	14.75	14.5	16	Fragrant, spiced dark fruits with notable stalky and garrigue tones. The palate lacks a real centre, and this isn't a wine for the long haul.	14.5%	2014-2022	£25	Wine Story
Château Mont-Thabor	15 (83)	14.5	15	15.25	Gentle peony flower and red jam nose. Tight-knit palate shows strictness towards the smoky, dark finish. Chiselled aftertaste, a bit on the stretch.	15.5%	2014-2022	£30	Halifax Wine Co
Domaine Comte de Lauze	15 (83)	15.25	15.25	14.5	Herbal cedar and tobacco aroma. Spiced debut, with hints of leather, brewed coffee and red stone fruit. Ends a little short. Food will help this.	14.7%	2014-2020	N/A UK	www.comtedelauze.com
Domaine du Banneret	15 (83)	15.5	14.5	15	Fragrant, menthol and mint nose with savoury, ripe, spiced dark fruit. Has a ripe, oily southern richness. This is robust and wild, with tannins to stimulate.	14.5%	2014-2025	£45.99	The Winery
Domaine Lou Fréjau	15 (83)	16	14.75	14.5	Overt pepper and spiced dried meats with a pine resin and cornichon nose. The cool fruit continues on the palate, with marked peppery tannins.	13.5%	2014-2019	N/A UK	www.domaineloufrejau.com
La Bastide St-Dominique	15 (83)	14.5	15.5	15	Lifted, ripe, savoury plum, berry and spice. The palate has brief hints of plum which taper off. New oak influence with spiced meats, herbs and liquorice.	15%	2014-2023	£24.50	Exel Wines
Ravoire et Fils, Olivier Ravoire	15 (83)	15.25	15	14.75	Ripe, open, classic old-school oxidative element. Meaty, earthy notes with nutty oak. Oak gives this a dry feel; not sure the fruit is up to the oak.	14.5%	2014-2020	£18.99	Les Producteurs & Vignerons de France

Fair 13–14.75

■ **Domaine du Vieux Telegraphe** 14.75 (82) ■ **Domaine Jean Royer, Cuvée Tradition** 14.75 (82) ■ **Domaine Pierre André** 14.75 (82) ■ **Jean-Luc Colombo, Les Bartavelles** 14.75 (82) ■ **Château Fargueiroi** 14.5 (81) ■ **Domaine de Panisse, Confiance Vigneronne** 14.5 (81) ■ **Cellier des Princes** 14.25 (80+) ■ **Château Simian, Le Traversier** 14.25 (80+) ■ **Domaine Moulin** 14.25 (80+) ■ **Clefs des Papes** 14 (80) ■ **Domaine Charvin** 14 (80) ■ **Domaine de la Roncière** 14 (80) ■ **Domaine Julien**

Masquin, Montplaisir 14 (80) ■ **Domaine Tour St-Michel, Cuvée des Deux Sœurs** 14 (80) ■ **Vignobles Mayard, Domaine du Père Pape** 14 (80) ■ **Domaine Paul Autard** 13.5 (78) ■ **La Célestière, La Croze** 13.25 (77)

Poor 11–12.75pts

■ **Domaine de la Janasse** 12.75 (75+) ■ **Domaine les Girard du Boucou** 12.5 (75) ■ **Château Husson, Les Saumades** 12.25 (74)

Faulty wines

■ **Domaine Bois de Boursan** (excessive Brett) ■ **Domaine de Pignan** (oxidised) ■ **Roger Sabon, Les Olivets** (excessive Brett)

For full UK stockist details, see p88

My top three

John Livingstone-Learmonth

■ **Domaine Roger Perrin** No apologies: I've recommended this wine before. In our blind tasting, it showed that Châteauneuf can be drinkable and fun. All the more credit since owner Luc Perrin died and the estate is now run by his sister Véronique and her son Xavier. **18.75/20 (95+/100)** Drink 2014-2023

■ **Vidal-Fleury** This Guigal-owned merchant from the northern Rhône has struggled to carve out a clear identity in the market, but efforts have been made to reduce the duration of the wines' maturation in cask, and to brighten its fruit. Fresh, toe-tapping, 85% Grenache. **17.75 (92)** Drink 2015-2025

■ **Domaine de l'Arnesque, Cuvée Capelane** A domaine that split into two recently. Cleaner, improved ageing since 2008 a factor. An 80% Grenache wine from 1.8ha on sandy soils in the northwest of the appellation. It has gained body in the past 15 months, and is a very solid, genuinely deep 2011. **17.25 (90+)** Drink 2014-2023

My top three

Annette Scarfe MW

■ **Domaine Roger Perrin** For a classic benchmark Châteauneuf, try this! Genuinely classic style, sophisticated but not showy. Opulent red fruit with creamy caramel, firm but ripe tannins and an enticing palate. Drinking beautifully now but one of the wines in the tasting that would keep for a while. **18.5/20 (95/100)** Drink 2014-2023

■ **Domaine de la Mordorée, La Reine des Bois** A delicious wine, elegant yet powerful. Initially restrained on the nose, the palate exudes ripe juicy fruit with fresh acidity and minerality. Drinking well now but fresh acidity, abundant fruit and tannins will ensure it's enjoyable in the next decade. **17 (90)** Drink 2014-2024

■ **Domaine Lafond, Roc Epine** I loved everything about this wine: plenty of fruit and a mouthfilling mid-palate with exotic spice on the finish. Modest alcohol for the region and well balanced and elegant. Every sip makes you want to go back for more – enjoy! **17 (90)** Drink 2014-2021

My top three

Matt Wilkin MS

■ **Domaine Roger Perrin** The standout wine of the tasting. I love its balance between fragrant spiced fruits, earthy tones and dashing cedar oak contours. It bears all the fingerprints of Châteauneuf-du-Pape with very good length and great lift on the finish to boot. Delicious! **18.5/20 (95/100)** Drink 2014-2023

■ **Clos St-Pierre, Urbi** A wine with classic Châteauneuf scope. Restrained and refined while also being generous and precise. So fragrant and attractive, bearing all the hallmarks of the region's opulent character. This has not only savoury approachability but a creamy tannin structure, good acidity and balanced alcohol. **17 (90)** Drink 2014-2021

■ **Domaine de St-Siffrein** Very good example of what to seek out in 2011. Quintessential ripe plums, savoury oak and cold meat notes which show very well among the subtly scented wild herb tones. Generous and fresh, which makes it easy to approach early, but this will also age well. **17 (90)** Drink 2014-2023

NB: the tasters' top wines are not necessarily their top-scoring, rather those which, on learning the wines' identity, they feel are the most notable given their provenance, price or other factors

Expert summary:

John Livingstone-Learmonth

Stick to the less expensive wines and drink them up in the short term and you'll enjoy the benefits of the tricky 2011 vintage



2011 is a flattering vintage, but one that lacks real frame and balance. That is the harsh truth of this year. It is why I advise consumers to buy the good value, less expensive wines for relatively early drinking.

The rapid advance of some wines' colours (already to a ruby-brick top rim after barely two years) is a definite warning signal about the vintage.

The best wines finish with a cool, inviting, aniseed-style influence, with growers commenting that this year the choice lay between going for elegance, finesse and acidity – almost a Burgundian style; or to go for over-ripeness, more density, sweetness and alcohol. The former favours regular drinking from the start, the latter requires cellaring and time for a thickening and integration of the wine to occur.

New oak or accentuated oak application jarred in several cases this year, while another issue lay in the use of Syrah, whose ripening after the late August heatwave accelerated towards jamminess and a gloopy presence in the wines.

The contrast of the vintage lay within the Domaine des Chanssaud, for instance, whose Grenache content was down from around 70% to nearer 50% this year, and the Syrah up to above 20%: the plum-inspired Grenache provided a good heart, while the Syrah could have been crisper. The net result, though, demonstrated the triumph of good blending – the wine has expressed its terroir and was a deserving Highly Recommended winner along with its four peers. Meanwhile, Domaine Roger Perrin's wine was a worthy Outstanding: it's a true benchmark for 2011.

The other genuine wines that caught my attention this year were not always those that reached out to my fellow judges on the day: the traditional, robust Clos du Mont-Olivet, Domaine L'Or de Line with its proper fullness, Bosquet des Papes with its garrigue herbs and Cuvée des Sommeliers with its serene aroma and plump fruit, for instance.

My buying would concentrate on wines such as the above – none of which lie in the Prestige, high-priced category – while other sure bets include the improving Domaine de Cristia, the clear-fruited Domaine de la Mordorée, La Reine des Bois, the inviting Domaine des Sénéchaux, the tight, elegant Château de la Gardine and the dashing, modern Château Sixtine. **D**

John Livingstone-Learmonth is DWWA Regional Chair for Rhône and an honorary citizen of the village of Châteauneuf-du-Pape

'The rapid advance of some wines' colours is a definite warning signal about the vintage'

CHÂTEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE



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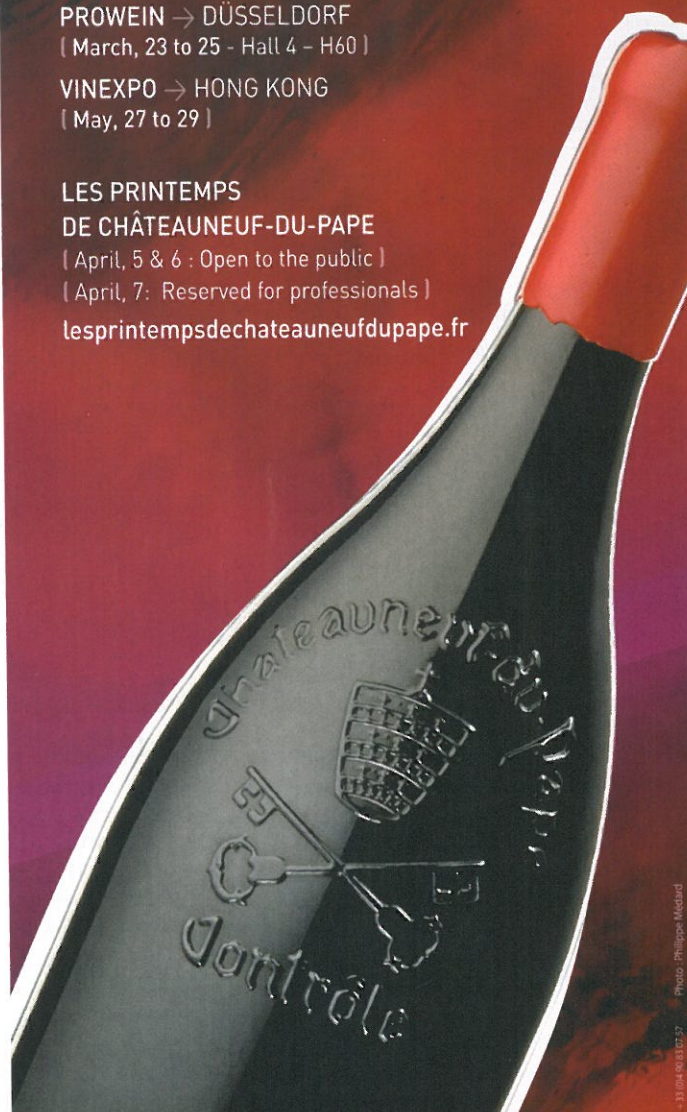
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Fédération des Syndicats de Producteurs
12 AV. LOUIS PASTEUR - BP 12 - F 84231 CHÂTEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE CEDEX
T. + 33 (0) 4 90 83 72 21 - F. + 33 (0) 4 90 83 70 01
federation@chateauneuf.com - www.chateauneuf.com

VINADEA Maison des Vins OPEN 7/7
8 RUE MARÉCHAL FOCH - BP 68 - F 84232 CHÂTEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE CEDEX
T./F. : + 33 (0) 4 90 83 70 69
vinadea@chateauneuf.com - www.vinadea.com