

Vintage report

Northern Rhône 2017



As with the south, tricky weather conditions mean the 2017s – particularly the whites – don't live up to the past two vintages. However if you have the patience, you'll be rewarded with some impressive, complex reds. Matt Walls reports

THE NORTHERN RHONE experienced very similar weather conditions to the southern Rhône in the first part of the 2017 growing season (see April 2019 issue or *Decanter Premium* for full report). It got off to an early start, only to be interrupted by a sudden cold snap that slowed down growth.

Syrah is less prone to coulure than Grenache, but nonetheless it affected yields; when the weather warmed up again, instead of concentrating on flowering, the vines focused on vegetative growth. 'They couldn't concentrate on two things at once,' says Michel Chapoutier. White varieties are more susceptible to coulure, so some estates suffered substantial losses.

From mid-May, conditions were very warm and sunny and, like the southern Rhône, extremely dry. Jean Gonon, of Domaine Gonon in St-Joseph, described the 2017 growing season as straightforward with no disease pressure and homogenous ripening across their various parcels.

'We picked all the reds in four days,' he says. 'We were a bit disappointed at the end of picking because of the small harvest due to the dry conditions, but if we had had a normal yield, the grapes would never have got ripe enough.' Gonon ended up with 27hl/ha against an average of 35hl/ha.

There were some benefits to the lack of rain, however. First, it blessed the long >

Vintage verdict

Concentrated, long-lived red wines that are generally very good to excellent in quality; very ripe but not jammy. Apart from a clutch of top performers, the whites can lack precision and focus.

Vineyards in the hills west of Tournon in St-Joseph, the star appellation of 2017



Domaine Georges Vernay in Condrieu lost about half its crop in 2017 due to adverse weather conditions



harvest with healthy conditions, which began early in 2017 – the first whites being brought in at the end of August. Secondly, it resulted in small berries with a large skin-to-juice ratio, meaning concentrated flavour and dense tannins that will make for long-lived reds.

Whereas 2016 in the northern Rhône was the perfect vintage for those looking for detailed, refreshing wines with clear typicity that will drink well straight away, 2017 is more a vintage for the cellar. It demands patience but should reward it amply, with complex wines that will command respect. The style is lush and giving, though occasionally too generous and potent. It is more impressive but less immediate and drinkable than the thirst-quenching 2016s.

Côte-Rôtie performed very well, the best wines on a par with the stellar 2015, with no signs of greenness. Hermitage also performed strongly, with some mighty, sumptuous reds. Cornas too – though some are almost too rich and powerful in 2017. But the star appellation in 2017 is St-Joseph.

Across the northern Rhône, whites are significantly less successful, often lacking acidity and focus, but there are some exceptional wines in a broad, full-bodied style if you buy with care. The best 2017s hit similar heights to the two previous years, albeit in a very different style.

And as with the south, while there are top-value reds and whites to be had, if you want the best wines, look to the best domaines.

AROUND THE REGIONS

Côte-Rôtie

This is another excellent year in Côte-Rôtie – not as consistent as the stellar 2015 vintage,

Decanter Northern Rhône vintage ratings

2017



2016



2015



2014



2013



2012



2011



Photograph: Matt Walls

Stéphane Ogier is a name to seek out in both Côte-Rôtie and Condrieu

2010



2009



2008



but the top wines are stunning and will last even longer. Pierre Rostaing at Domaine Rostaing describes his 2017s as ‘structured and dense, with good concentration – all we needed to make good wines for the cellar’.

Compared to the 2015 vintage, 2017 is just as ripe but more savoury and occasionally a little darker in fruit. Some have been pushed a little too far, with overextraction and overoaking, making certain wines heavy going. Some will drink young but others will close down for a protracted period so, as always, take note of the drinking windows.

Best producers: Domaine Jamet, Domaine Rostaing, Domaine Stéphane Ogier, E Guigal

Condrieu

It was a tough year for Condrieu producers. Domaine Georges Vernay lost about half its crop due to a combination of a cold spring, coulure and drought. Yves Gangloff lost 60%.

The small crop ripened quickly, often with potential alcohol levels running ahead of

phenolic ripeness, the result being that some grapes were picked before the flavours were fully developed, resulting in some wines with unbalanced alcohols.

Most Condrieus are very full-bodied in 2017, some with unconvincing acidity – stylistically similar to 2015. The best are very good, however, combining opulence with focus.

Best producers: Domaine Jamet, Domaine Pierre Gaillard, Domaine Stéphane Ogier

St-Joseph

It's rarely considered the source of the finest wines, but for me this year the star of the vintage in the northern Rhône is St-Joseph.

As Michel Chapoutier says: ‘St-Joseph has the biggest hidden potential in the Rhône Valley.’ It's a large appellation, but there are outcrops of outstanding terroir and very old vines which, in the right hands, can be the source of brilliant wines.

The use of stems appears to be more widespread this year, and when done well can be beneficial to both aroma and structure.

It's also a relatively good bet for white wines in 2017 – they're rich but often display more precision than their neighbours. In a vintage like this, St-Joseph is home to some of the best-value wines in France.

Best producers: Domaine Christophe Pichon, Domaine Nonon, Domaine Guy Farge, Domaine JL Chave, M Chapoutier

Hermitage

After the disastrous hail of 2016, Jean-Louis Chave reports an easier growing season in 2017, resulting in ‘friendly, soft and lush’ wines that he compares to 2007 or 2000.

Michel Chapoutier says he would choose 1995 as a comparison. ➤

2017 is clearly a very good year: tannic and powerful. Excessive oak is still an issue but is gradually becoming less so. The whites are even more rich and lavish than usual in 2017, but where acidity and oak levels are in balance it can work well, resulting in a particularly luxurious style of Hermitage blanc.

Best producers: Domaine JL Chave, Domaine Marc Sorrel, Ferraton Père & Fils, M Chapoutier

Crozes-Hermitage

After the lush 2015s and the sprightly '16s, 2017 is far less consistent in Crozes. The vintage has lent itself to powerful, long-lived, tannic wines and those aren't always characteristics that play to its strengths.

Some producers have harnessed the year to produce striking wines with remarkable depth of fruit and interest. But choose carefully, as there are plenty of overripe, overextracted examples that lack freshness. The reds are better than the whites, which – with some notable exceptions – can verge on being flabby.

Best producers: Domaine Combiér, Domaine Gaylord Machon, Domaine Les 4 Vents, Domaine Les Bruyères

Cornas

It was a very good vintage in Cornas, reminiscent of 2015 or 2009. The wines are

just as concentrated as those years, but with marginally firmer tannins.

Pierre Clape says the growing season was marked by some coulure on the best sites, and the hot, arid conditions led to a very early harvest that ripened 'like a train', jumping from 12.8% potential alcohol one week to 14.5% the next.

Some of the wines are a little heady as a result, but most are also endowed with intense fruit, bright acidity and hefty tannic frames that bring an overall sense of balance.

Best producers: Domaine Alain Voge, Domaine Clape, Domaine Guy Farge

St-Péray

It may be a fairly lavish vintage in St-Péray, but it's also the home of some successful whites for lovers of an unashamedly extravagant style.

The terroir is more favourable for whites than in Crozes, and winemakers here are accustomed to working with full-bodied and generous raw materials.

Inevitably in a vintage like this, some of the wines are heavy and overly viscous, but where winemakers have managed to rein in its worst excesses and retain focus and drinkability, the wines are delicious in an early-drinking style.

Best producers: Domaine Alain Voge, Domaine Bernard Gripa, Domaine François Villard

'2017 is a vintage for the cellar. It demands patience but should reward it amply, with complex wines that will command respect'

Matt Walls

A taste of the top northern Rhône

Wines are listed by commune, from north to south, then by score, then alphabetically by producer. The final alcohols on many wines were not yet determined when tasted in late 2018. Many UK allocations and prices have not been set, so contact specialist merchants for updates.

Côte-Rôtie

① **RED WINE OF THE VINTAGE** **Domaine Jamet, Côte Brune** 99

When this 100% whole-bunch wine is ready it will give you goosebumps! It has the brisk, saline tannins of 2016 and the fruit depth of 2010. There's a remarkable richness to the velvety fruit, and it has the most eye-popping fragrance of violets, juniper, bonfire smoke and burnt herbs. Despite its intensity, nothing is overdone; it's just perfectly balanced, unforced and easy. A work of art, potentially worthy of a 100-point score once bottled. The generic Côte-Rôtie scored 98. **Drink** 2029-2042

RED WINE OF THE VINTAGE **Domaine René Rostaing, Côte Brune** 99

£141.67 (ib) **Justerini & Brooks**
Pierre Rostaing only makes this cuvée in

the best years, most recently in 2013 and 2016. Soaring rose and violet potpourri aromas lead to a medium-bodied palate with beautiful purity of juice – it's at once concentrated but so lifted, and the tannins are very refined yet strong. It has a very long finish with a hint of citrus and menthol freshness, and a gentle mineral undertow. Extraordinary, beautiful and spellbinding. Just 1,000 bottles made. The Côte Blonde scored 97 and La Landonne scored 96. **Drink** 2025-2038

② **Stéphane Ogier, Belle Hélène** 98

POA **H2Vin, Jeroboams, Montrachet Fine Wine**
First made by Stéphane's Ogier's father and named after his mother, this wine uses grapes from the oldest vines of the estate, 100% whole-bunch fermented and aged 24 months in barrel. Full-bodied, rich and

velvety, with an extraordinary tannins. It's saline, with an amazing mineral reach and breadth, finishing dry, savoury and very long. This has such finesse: it's a polished, compelling style. Lancement scored 96 and La Réserve 95. **Drink** 2027-2043

③ **E Guigal, La Turque** 97

POA **Jeroboams**
La Turque is a plot less than 1ha in the Côte Brune, planted by Marcel Guigal in 1980. A deep cave of a wine, with echoing incense, star anise and rose. Lots of toasty oak spice on the long finish. The extraction is pushed as far as it can go, but the wine is balanced with a firm beam of acidity, huge sweetness of fruit, and a thick mass of ripe tannins. It will live longer than La Mouline, but not as long as La Landonne (also 97 points). **Drink** 2027-2039

④ **Tardieu-Laurent, Vieilles Vignes** 96

A blend of three Côte Brune terroirs, La Landonne, Lancement and Chavaroché, that spends 12 months in new and year-old barrels, then a further year in foudre. Gorgeous smoky black olive and charred rosemary nose. Not super concentrated, but so drinkable, dynamic and complex, with an intense lifted freshness, vibrant acid line and fine-grained tannins. **Drink** 2020-2029 **Alc** 13%

⑤ **François & Fils, Rochins** 95

From a lieu-dit on schist soils, this wine is 50% whole-bunch fermented in stainless steel then transferred to barriques, 20% new, for 30 months. Beautifully scented berry fruits and fresh herbs meld with the resinous oak, while the super-fresh, saline palate shows amazing lift and energy, followed by a piercing, focussed, mineral finish. Detailed, drinkable and elegant. **Drink** 2019-2028 **Alc** 14%

⑥ **Delas Frères, La Landonne** 94

£85 **Maisons Marques et Domaines**
Only made in top years. Fermented in concrete then aged 16 months in new and year-old barriques. Dark and brooding with star anise running through the full-bodied sweet damson and berry palate. Concentrated, structured and intense, with cola oak and hefty ripe tannins. Long and fresh. **Drink** 2021-2031 **Alc** 14%

⑦ **TOP VALUE Xavier Gérard** 94

£35.68-£45 **A&B Vintners, Cambridge Wine Merchants**

Xavier Gérard took over this estate from his father François in 2013 and the wines are going from strength to strength. This has lifted herb scents which lead to a balanced palate with fresh acidity and sprightly, textural, savoury tannins. The oak is present but doesn't overwhelm the fruit on the long finish. **Drink** 2020-2029

⑧ **TOP VALUE Benjamin & David Duclaux, La Germiné** 93

£28.75 (ib)-£47.95 **Cambridge Wine Merchants, Lea & Sandeman, Winegrowers Direct**
From 30-year-old vines, the wine (20% whole-bunch fruit) spends 20 months in demi-muids and barriques, 20% new. Rich, fulsome blackberry palate with integrated new oak, good acidity and polished tannins. Needs time for the oak to settle. The Maison Rouge scored 94. **Drink** 2021-2026 **Alc** 13%

⑨ **TOP VALUE Domaine Christophe Pichon, Promesse** 93

From vines up to 55 years old, this spends 13 months in barrel, 75% new. Fresh herbs, violet, black cherry and garrigue nose. The palate shows no heaviness, with good intensity and focus leading to a long, oak-spiced finish. La Comtesse en Côte Blonde scored 94. **Drink** 2020-2027

Condrieu

Domaine Jamet, Vermillon 94

£61 **JN Wine**

No new oak, instead it's part-matured in unlined amphorae, which Jamet believes keeps acidity and tension. Intense apricot and white peach, not too high in alcohol and with a distinct mineral glint. Perhaps a bit too full bodied, but has a lovely intense fruit and remarkably good acidity for the vintage. **Drink** 2018-2020 **Alc** 14%

⑩ **Pierre Gaillard, L'Octroi** 94

£45 **H2Vin**

Mirabelle and Victoria plum scents, joined by lychee and lime blossom. Full-bodied and concentrated, but with nice acidity and freshness. Great fruit persistence leads to a long, tapered, savoury finish. A mineral edge brings real drinkability. Always a Condrieu of great finesse, this is a great option in 2017. **Drink** 2018-2021

⑪ **TOP VALUE Stéphane Ogier, La Combe de Malleval** 94

£33 (ib) **H2Vin, Jeroboams, Montrachet Fine Wine**

There's no Vieilles Vignes de Jacques Vernay this year, so all the fruit went into this cuvée, due to low volumes and the need for acidity in the main blend that the

Vieilles Vignes brings. Sprightly, tangy white peach flavours are full-bodied but not sweet, with keen acidity balancing the richness well. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Alc** 14%

⑫ **TOP VALUE Domaine du Chêne** 93

Super-fresh, aerial jasmine and tarragon notes precede a weighty palate which remains really bright and lifted, leading to a vibrant finish inlaid with clove and cinnamon spice. A very drinkable, oak-aged example. **Drink** 2018-2021

⑬ **TOP VALUE Ferraton Père & Fils, Les Mandouls** 93

Beautiful jasmine aromas, while the palate is full but with energy and minerality that brings freshness on the long finish, even though the acidity is on the low side. Unforced and not overly oaked, this is a success in 2017. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Alc** 13.5%

St-Joseph

⑭ **Domaine Gonon** 95

A fairly straightforward year for the Gonon brothers despite fairly low yields of 28hl/ha. This is rich and generous in fruit and ripe tannins, but equally well built. Beautiful fresh herb aromas and super-fresh, pure blackberries on the palate. Plenty of relief and texture, with crisp acidity and a long, mineral finish. The Les Oliviers white scored 93. **Drink** 2021-2030

⑮ **Domaine Guy Farge, Passion de Terrasses** 95

£26 **The Sampler**
Sourced from vines over a century old, grown on steep granite slopes. The 2017 is hugely powerful, but not from the oak, alcohol or any over-ripeness. It's very ➤



long, with a huge tannic heft that will take time to settle. Narrowly avoids being overextracted and makes a huge impression. Terroir de Granit scored 94. **Drink** 2021-2028 **Alc** 13%

Domaine JL Chave 95

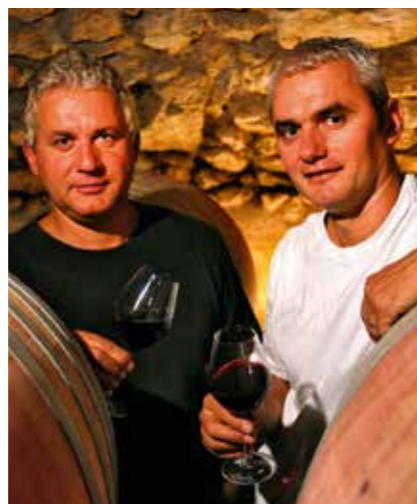
1 barrel-tasted the four main vineyard components: Le Clos is opulently blackberry and velvety – hedonistic in 2017. Challeys, from a granitic hill above Le Clos, is structured and saline with more black olive. Dardouyes contributes lush fruit, spice and spry acidity, while Bachesson has an incredible floral aroma. Overall, a wine rich in fruit but precise, balanced and complex. **Drink** 2019-2027

M Chapoutier, Les Granits 95

£35-£44 **Jeroboams, Lay & Wheeler, Mentzendorff**
Possibly the best vintage of this wine I've ever tasted. High-toned liquorice and charcoal notes plus violets, blackberry and blackcurrant leaf. Beautifully elegant expression in the mouth, with piercing acidity and serrated, saline tannins. It's very long and errs towards overextraction, yet the extraordinary concentration is allied with freshness. **Drink** 2020-2029

TOP VALUE Domaine Christophe Pichon 94

From a 4ha parcel of 35-year-old vines, aged for 12 months in barrels of various ages, including some new. Herbal notes and a hint of pecan. Intense, fresh, aerial expression – really lifted and drinkable but not without depth and concentration. Very well balanced and complex. The estate white scored 91. **Drink** 2019-2028



Above: Joël (left) and Eric Durand

Domaine Michelas-St-Jemms, Ste-Epine 94

£15 (ib) **Montrachet Fine Wine**
Fermented in tronconic wooden vats then aged in older barrels. Lovely density of intense blackberry fruit which caresses your tongue. It lingers thanks to elegant tannins, ripe berry acidity and fine purity and freshness. An extraordinary combination of concentration and elegance. **Drink** 2019-2023 **Alc** 13%

Vignobles Verzier, Empreinte 94

£18.95 **Christopher Piper**
60% whole-bunch fermented with wild yeasts before spending 12 months in large barrels. Gorgeous Provençale herbs are almost minty in their freshness. It's lifted, with no excess weight, oak or extraction. The lovely brisk acidity brings a real burst of aroma and flavour. An elegant, fresh, mineral style. **Drink** 2019-2023 **Alc** 13%

TOP VALUE Domaine Alain Voge, Les Côtes 93

20% whole-bunch fermented in tank, then aged 16 months in barriques with no new oak. Subtle use of stems adds detail but the ripe loganberry and blackberry fruit stays front and centre, with some spicy hints on the finish. Ripe, fresh and balanced, this should please any lover of St-Joseph. **Drink** 2019-2025 **Alc** 13%

Domaine Coursodon, Silice 93

£19 (ib)-£28 **JN Wine, Montrachet Fine Wine**
From various parcels with an average age of 30 years. Fresh, ripe berry juice coats your mouth, but it's balanced by serrated tannins and slightly sharp acidity. Some sweetness of fruit contributes to a polished style that's hard to resist. The Paradis St-Pierre and Olivaie also scored 93. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 14%

Domaine Eric & Joël Durand, Les Coteaux 93

£21.99 **Cambridge Wine Merchants**
Lovely purity – the fruit using the oak for support, not influence. Medium-bodied and fresh with good persistence, refined tannins and no overextraction. Elegant, unforced and very easy to drink with good typicity. The estate white scored 90. **Drink** 2019-2023 **Alc** 13.5%

Vignobles Chirat, Soliste 93

Rounded, concentrated, juicy blackberry fruit – a really vibrant style that works well with the oak, showing the fine winemaking going on here. It finishes long and not too dry, with a touch of vanilla. Well balanced and well structured. The Les Côtes scored 92. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 13.5%

TOP VALUE Pierre Gaillard 91

POA **H2Vin, Jeroboams**
A light-bodied style, with subtle, refined tannins, juicy acidity and remarkable length given the lightness of touch. A harmonious, saline, mineral wine – it's not for long ageing, but for sheer drinkability it's hard to beat. **Drink** 2019-2021

Hermitage

TOP VALUE WHITE WINE OF THE VINTAGE

M Chapoutier, L'Ermite 98
£195-£235 **BI Wines, Jeroboams, Lay & Wheeler, Justerini & Brooks, Mentzendorff**

This lieu-dit wine includes some fruit from pre-phylloxera vines planted in 1860 on 'granilite' soils – granite with a touch of



M Chapoutier is a major land owner on the famous hill of Hermitage, which produced Matt Walls' top white of 2017

calcium. It spends nine months in demi-muids, one-third new. Distinct almond, linden and iris aromas with a mineral edge. Full-bodied and intense, with an electric palate expression – noticeably more acidic, vibrant and less oily than Chapoutier's other white Hermitages this year – it almost fizzes with minerality. The Le Méal white scored 96. **Drink** 2021-2050

Ferraton Père & Fils, Le Reverdy 94

A blend of fruit from 30-year-old vines. It's full and rich, but retains freshness and energy beneath the opulent texture. The oak is well integrated, as is the acidity, which brings vibrancy to the long finish. Good purity and drinkability. The Les Miaux white scored 93. **Drink** 2019-2025

TOP VALUE Tardieu-Laurent 94

This spends a year in barrel then another in foudre. Lovely macadamia and cashew nose, with citrus-spiked nectarine on the palate and subtle popcorn notes on the finish. This has good detail and focus despite the richness and oak, making it a vibrant choice among the 2017 Hermitage Blancs. **Drink** 2019-2024 **Alc** 13.5%

Cave de Tain, Coeur des Siecles 93

One of France's best co-ops, this is Cave de Tain's top white Hermitage, from

80-year-old Marsanne. It's full, rich and flowing, powerful and ripe. The palate is generous and slightly oily in texture, the oak lending cinnamon and clove length and a little sweetness. The Gambert de Loche red scored 92. **Drink** 2019-2028

Domaine JL Chave 98

'Everything was nice', says Jean-Louis Chave about the 2017 growing season. A barrel tasting of key components shows an extraordinary Ermitage of serious acidity and svelte tannins; an opulent, solar Méal; a powerful, lush but stately Beaugues; a fine, red-fruited, finessed Péléal; and a straight, peppery Bessards. The overall impression is a lush, rich, almost jovial style of Hermitage with a good inner spine but generous, velvety, rich black fruit. The white scored 97. **Drink** 2027-2044

Domaine Marc Sorrel, Le Gréal 98

£222 **BI Wines, Cru, Hedonism, L'Assemblage, Lay & Wheeler, The Wine Society, Uncorked**
'It's the best vintage I've ever made,' says Sorrel, and you can see why. It's 100% whole-bunch fruit from lieux-dits Les Greffieux and Le Méal. Resinous rosemary aromas are fresh and vibrant, while the palate is beautifully concentrated with lovely berry acidity. A totally natural and unforced expression of Hermitage with

real length and persistence. It has slightly softer tannins than the 2015, but is just as good. The generic Hermitage scored 96. **Drink** 2027-2045

M Chapoutier, Le Méal 98

£11.17 (ib)-£135 **Bancroft, Jeroboams, Justerini & Brooks, Mentzendorff**
Part of a welcome move away from oak influence in Chapoutier's Hermitages, this will spend 18 months in barriques and demi-muids, 25% new. Distinct blackberry aroma, very ripe and fresh with some spicy reduction. Very concentrated and full-bodied yet not massive, but the effect is nonetheless hugely powerful. It's tannic and highly saline with a very long finish of serrated, mineral tannins. This will be very long lived. The L'Ermite red also scored 98 and Le Pavillon 97. **Drink** 2028-2047

Delas Frères, Les Bessards 97

£80 **Maisons Marques et Domaines**
Fermented in concrete and aged for 14 months in new and year-old barriques, this wine is aerial and lifted with precise and resinous blackberry and cassis fruit. It's not overly full in body, with a bright, vivid and focussed palate showing real drive and thrust. Long and very well balanced. Kapow! The Domaine des Tourettes scored 93. **Drink** 2023-2040 **Alc** 14.5% ➤



Photograph: Wieslaw Jarek/Alamy Stock Photo

Domaine du Colombier 96
 £39.58-£41 (ib) **Davy's, Justerini & Brooks, Tanners**

Juniper and rosemary sit with lifted black cherry and blackberry fruit. The palate is concentrated yet lively, without excess oak or extraction. It buzzes with energy; so lifted and drinkable. Fresh, precise and crisp tannins lead to a long, saline and dynamic finish. A good year for Domaine Colombier. **Drink** 2020-2029 **A/c** 13.5%

TOP VALUE Ferraton Père & Fils, Les Dionnières 96

The oak is robust but doesn't overwhelm the dynamic fruit. Rich plum compote and ripe blackberry on the very thick, intense palate. The extraction has been pushed as far as it can go, but it has bags of energy, freshness and saline drive keeping things drinkable onto a hugely long finish. One of the biggest 2017 Hermitage reds; needs time. Le Méal scored 97. **Drink** 2026-2035

Domaine Yann Chave 94
 £48 (ib)-£75 **Laithwaite's, Montrachet Fine Wine, Winegrowers Direct**

Rich, flowing, dense and ripe. It has muscular tannins with no rough edges, and very pure black berry fruit. The oak is measured, and while this vintage might not promise unending complexity, it's very well balanced and is a relatively unforced, natural expression of Hermitage. **Drink** 2021-2027 **A/c** 13.5%

TOP VALUE Fayolle Fils & Fille, Les Dionnières 94

Fayolle's vines in Dionnières are over 70 years old. This has appealing, gently black fruit aromas tinged with vanilla. In the mouth there's juicy berry acidity, ripe tannins and full-on concentration. The generous oak is well integrated. This is all about elegance and purity rather than complexity and power. **Drink** 2020-2027

Crozes-Hermitage

Domaine Combier 94

Fruit from a blend of different terroirs is destemmed and matured for 12 months in used barrels. It's juicy, open and generous, but also intense – almost eyewatering in fruit and acidity. The tannins are very ripe and pliant, so it should be quite ageworthy once it comes together. This is a Crozes that roars! The Clos des Grives scored 93. **Drink** 2021-2026 **A/c** 13%



Pierre Clape and son Olivier at their eponymous domaine in Cornas

TOP VALUE Domaine Les Bruyères, Georges 94

From 30-year-old vines, this is fermented in raw concrete tanks, then aged for a year in concrete and old barriques. Dynamic, powerful and expressive, with intense ginger and raspberry aromas, serrated tannins and intense blackberry and raspberry fruits. Hold on to your hats! **Drink** 2019-2023 **A/c** 13.5%

Domaine Les 4 Vents, St-Jaimes 93

From a parcel of 50-year-old vines planted by the winemaker's grandfather. This is Deep, lush and really velvety: wine as a smoking jacket! Profound in fruit with a gently wild side to it. Powerful but very drinkable. The generic Crozes also scored 93. **Drink** 2019-2024 **A/c** 13%

Domaine Marc Sorrel 93

£23 **L'Assemblage, Lay & Wheeler, The Wine Society, Uncorked**
 Lovely freshness and vibrancy of peppery black cherry aromas and flavours here. It's not hugely concentrated but has lovely balance and drinkability, with a touch of raspberry on the finish. This comes highly recommended. The white scored 91. **Drink** 2019-2021 **A/c** 12.5%

Cave Olivier Dumaine, Croix de Verre 92

The top cuvée, sourced from 50-year-old vines. There's no new oak and it's classic stuff – boasting a lightness and brightness that some others lack in 2017. It's an elegant, very drinkable style with fresh blackberry and loganberry fruit. The white scored 90. **Drink** 2019-2021 **A/c** 13.5%

TOP VALUE Domaine Aléofane 92

£20.60 **Genesis Wines**
 Organically grown vines with an average age of 50 years. It's full, rich and generous, with a slightly wild edge. There's welcome herbal lift and mineral freshness, both of which help to bring a touch of drinkability to this intense, mouthfilling wine. A strongly characterful Crozes, but not easy drinking. **Drink** 2020-2022 **A/c** 13.5%

Domaine Gaylord Machon, Ghany 92

£10.83 (ib) **Lea & Sandeman**
 Named after Gaylord Machon's oldest son. Soft yet vibrant palate of smoked meats, burnt herbs and forest berries with pliant and succulent tannins. A characterful, drinkable, complex style, if not the most intense. The Lhony also scored 92 and the La Fille dont J'ai Révé white scored 91. **Drink** 2019-2022 **A/c** 13.5%

TOP VALUE Domaine Melody, Friandise 92

POA **Stannary St Wine Co**
 A gorgeously addictive, open and electric black pepper scent. The medium-bodied palate is powerful but with no heaviness; it sings, while piercing acidity helps to balance. A juicy, lip-smackingly fresh style. **Drink** 2019-2021 **A/c** 13%

TOP VALUE Domaine Pradelle, Les Hirondelles 92

Sourced from vines over 30 years old. It's unforced and ungilded, with vibrant but soft dark fruit, blackberry-skin tannins and a long aniseed finish. It's a little loose

but a joyful expression of the terroir. Lip-smacking stuff. **Drink** 2019-2022 **A/c** 12.5%

Cornas

TOP VALUE Domaine Clape 97

A tasting of the main constituent vineyard parts from barrel suggests a potent, ripe, tannic style once complete. The young Reynards is rich in fruit with good acidity, if high in alcohol; Sabarotte is very Cornas – impenetrable, firm and saline; Petit Côte and La Côte are fleshy and rich; the older Reynards admirably complete, with a massive, ripe tannic load. Pierre Clape compares it to the 2009, albeit more structured. **Drink** 2029-2040

Les Vins de Vienne, Les Barcillants 95

£34.99 **Inverarity Morton**
 Vins de Vienne is a partnership between Yves Cuilleron, François Villard and Pierre Gaillard. Here, deep blackberry and blackcurrant leaf notes are peppered with rosemary, thyme, juniper and herbal bitters. Sinewy, grainy tannins run through to a long finish. An unforced, natural 2017 Cornas with no undue extraction, oaking or ambition. **Drink** 2022-2028 **A/c** 13.5%

Domaine Vincent Paris, La Geynale 94

£44-£45 **BI Wines, Christopher Piper**
 This, from century-old Syrah vines, is 100% whole-bunch fermented with wild yeasts, then aged for 16 months in old barrels. Full, rich blackberry and damson flavours, with lovely herbal freshness and complexity, and a peppery lift. Juicy berry acidity and ripe, textured – but not too challenging – tannins. The Granit 60 scored 92. **Drink** 2020-2028 **A/c** 14%

Yves Cuilleron, Lieu-dit Les Côtes 94

£75 **Top Selection**
 Sourced from vines planted in 1911, this is strongly herbal, concentrated, ripe, rich and juicy, but not at all overoaked after its 18 months in barriques. The long and persistent finish is fruity but fairly savoury, and the tannins are well managed and not overly polished, giving relief and texture to the fruit. **Drink** 2020-2028

TOP VALUE Domaine Guy Farge, Harmonie 93

£39 **The Sampler**
 Aged in old 400-litre oak barrels for a year. Detailed and open with a menthol freshness. Extraction and oak are sensitively handled to deliver a delicious,

ready-to-drink Cornas. Thomas Farge's new Reynard cuvée is a stunner at 96 points. **Drink** 2019-2023 **A/c** 13.5%

TOP VALUE Dumien-Serrette, Patou 93

Always a wine of great individuality and finesse, sourced from 80-year-old vines. Purity and depth, with a touch of varnish over expressive red fruits. Brisk acidity as well as fine, dry tannins for structure and freshness. No excesses or artifice here. **Drink** 2019-2028 **A/c** 13%

TOP VALUE Domaine Alain Vogé, Les Chailles 92

Subtle bitter herbs and berry fruit plus a touch of thyme and citrus backed by enjoyably textural tannins. Not the longest finish, but very drinkable and unforced. The Vieilles Vignes is captivating at 96 points. **Drink** 2019-2023 **A/c** 13.5%

St-Péray

Domaine Alain Vogé, Fleur de Crussol 93

Fruit from 80-year-old vines (some of the oldest in St-Péray) is fermented in oak, 30% new. It's a bit of a mouthful: powerful and full-bodied – a fascinating blend of freshness, minerality, oak and richness, this is highly impressive but not an easy-drinking option. **Drink** 2018-2023 **A/c** 14%

TOP VALUE Domaine Bernard Gripa, Les Pins 93

Hand-picked Marsanne and Roussanne grapes fermented (20% in barrel) on lees until malolactic is finished. Subtle candied pear and fresh rhubarb on the full-bodied, very drinkable palate, followed by a long, pure pear finish. The Les Figuiers is even better at 94. **Drink** 2018-2021 **A/c** 13.5%

TOP VALUE François Villard, Version Longue 93

POA **H2Vin**
 Marsanne is wild-yeast fermented and aged for 18 months in barrel, 25% new, with six months' batonnage. Oaky nose, but on the full-bodied palate rich pear and honeysuckle fruit shines through. Long, savoury, textural finish of meadow flowers. Very successful. **Drink** 2018-2022

TOP VALUE Cave de Tain, Grand Classique 91

This co-op's St-Péray can be remarkably good, and great value for white northern Rhône. From 40-year-old vines, this has fresh, intense rhubarb aromas, joined on the palate by good concentration, cut and salinity. Focussed finish of fennel and lime, with integrated oak. **Drink** 2018-2020

Matt Walls is Decanter's Rhône correspondent, a contributing editor and the DWWA Regional Chair for Rhône. He is based in the region, and spent several weeks in late 2018 tasting more than 300 wines for this 2017 Rhône report

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