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—LOUIS BARRUOL—

La Roquette, Domaine des Sénéchaux, Tardieu-Laurent and Domaine du Vieux Télégraphe made excellent whites as well.

Also of interest are the late-release wines from Rotem & Mounir Saouma. Owner and winemaker Mounir Saouma practices extended *élevage* on both his reds and his whites, sourced from a handful of vineyard acres located mostly in the sandy soils of the Pignan *lieu-dit*. The Châteauneuf-du-Pape Arioso 2010 (96, \$249) and Châteauneuf-du-Pape White Magis 2011 (96, \$122) are stunning and thoroughly distinctive wines. (For more on Saouma and his nascent Châteauneuf-du-Pape domaine, see "Experimental by Design" page 91.)

Outside of Châteauneuf, the Southern Rhône logged a very consistent performance in 2012. Gigondas also offers wines of classic and outstanding quality, with serious aging potential. Here, Louis Barruol once again sets the bar, leading the way with his Château de St.-Cosme Gigondas Le Poste 2012 (96, \$123), a laser of a wine with a stunningly pure beam of cassis, raspberry and blackberry that has cut and drive, flanked by notes of chalk and iron.

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Domaine des Bosquets' Gigondas Le Lieu Dit 2012 (94, \$50) is also beautiful, a single-vineyard bottling that showcases a very silky texture and alluring notes of cherry confiture, blueberry reduction and bergamot all mixed together. Pierre Amadieu, Dauvergne Ranvier, Gabriel Meffre and Domaine Les Pallières are other Gigondas producers to look for.

Neighboring Vacqueyras is also worth exploring. The wines are generally fleshier and more rounded than Gigondas, with more immediate appeal than long-term cellaring potential. They also offer very good value. The Domaine de la Charbonnière Vacqueyras 2012 (89, \$28) and Pierre Amadieu Vacqueyras La Grangelière 2012 (88, \$25) are ideal examples.

There are also scads of values from villages such as Cairanne, Rasteau and Vinsobres, as well as from the larger Côtes du Rhône appellation. The Domaine Alary Côtes du Rhône-Villages Cairanne Vieilles Vignes 2012 (89, \$20), Domaine de Beurenard Rasteau 2012 (89, \$22) and Domaine Constant-Duquesnoy Vinsobres 2012 (90, \$25) provide mouthfilling fruit offset by vibrant, racy



Gigondas-based vintner Louis Barruol of Château de St.-Cosme continues to show the heights of quality this appellation is capable of, producing six outstanding reds in 2012, including three rated classic.

finishes; all are approachable now but will cellar nicely for a few years. Overall, there are nearly 125 Southern Rhône wines from the 2012 vintage costing \$20 or less per bottle while scoring 85 points or higher.

THE NORTHERN RHÔNE

The 2012 vintage in the Northern Rhône is equally as good as 2011, though notably different in style. In the former vintage, the wines are marked by their tannins, giving the impression of a lively, briary feel. In 2012, however, the wines are just as concentrated, but more supple in feel, with the tannins polished and buried while the acidity shines through on the finish, a function of the vintage's cooler nights.

"2011 got off to a quick start but then cooled down, so the maturity went very slowly and the tannins are more present than in 2012," says Pierre-Jean Villa, whose nascent eponymous domaine continues