

# Gigondas

It's time to stop comparisons with that other well-known appellation of the southern Rhône, says Matt Walls. These wines have a unique character of their own



FEW WOULD ARGUE that Châteauneuf-du-Pape is the greatest appellation for red wines in the southern Rhône. But if the remaining crus and villages fought it out for second place, who would win? Gigondas, probably. Stylistically the wines are similar, so it's not surprising that it's often compared to its illustrious neighbour. I bet these constant comparisons drive the proud winemakers of Gigondas nuts. So besides mentioning that Gigondas lies 25km northeast of Châteauneuf and is a third of the size, I'll stop there. Oh, and the grape varieties are very similar. Okay, I'm definitely going to stop now (sorry, Gigondas).

The wines of Gigondas have a distinctive character of their own. These are Grenache-heavy red blends – up to 80% is allowed, along with at least 15% Syrah and/or Mourvèdre (along with any of the other permitted Côtes-du-Rhône varieties except Carignan, but you rarely see them).

If there's one descriptor that sums up the style more than any other for me, it's 'flowing'. The wines are rich in body, silky in feel, and juicy in ripe strawberry, black cherry and damson fruits. They are not robustly tannic, but they are nonetheless big wines, deriving structure and balance from acidity and fragrance.

The flower-strewn, bohemian village of Gigondas is perched high on a hillside among pine, oak and olive trees. Its vineyards surround it, stretching up from the sandy, stony plains right up to the Dentelles de Montmirail, a ridge of jagged teeth that poke through the top of the hill. This is a hot, Mediterranean corner of France, so the cooling influence of altitude is its trump card. Limestone subsoil gives certain wines added freshness.

No wonder some estates are trialling white varieties. 'I'd like Gigondas to become the home of Clairette,' says Louis

*'If there's one word that sums up the Gigondas style more than any other for me, it's "flowing"'*

*These wines were the best of those with UK availability tasted non-blind at a Gigondas tasting in London in November 2014, alongside tastings conducted in the Rhône in 2013 and 2014.*

*For full details of UK stockists, see p87*

Barruol, owner of top estate Château de St-Cosme – 'the potential is great.' I've tasted some promising experiments, but French wine laws are slow to change, so we're unlikely to see any Gigondas Blanc for sale any time soon. Just 1% of the total current production is rosé, but if you want a really exciting one, you're better off looking over the river in Tavel.

The reds, however, can be very good indeed. And good value too; prices typically range from £15 to £25, with just a handful of ambitious bottlings nudging up against the £50 mark. But Grenache is a sensitive grape, and Gigondas is subject to vintage variation. Of the current vintages on the market, the 2010s are superlative, the 2011s are often heavy, whereas the 2012 are fresh and lively. The 2013s are starting to be released (see next month for James Lawther's 2013 Rhône vintage report) and there are some very good wines, but yields were seriously low. Buy in a top vintage like 2010 and the best wines will improve for a decade or more.

Another peculiarity of Grenache is that it rarely becomes fully ripe at less than 14.5% alcohol. So these are potent wines, usually between 14% and 15.5%. Tackling this issue isn't easy, but increasingly growers are accepting this can be a turn-off for many wine lovers and are doing what they can to address it, such as increasing plantings of Syrah or Mourvèdre, planting at higher altitude, selecting north-facing sites, choosing the picking date with care and applying various other viticultural strategies.

Inevitably, particularly in hot vintages like 2003, some of the wines lack structure and tension and can be overtly alcoholic. But with the right concentration of fruit, freshness and acidity, balance can be achieved even at elevated alcohol levels. Drinking at the right temperature helps – about 16°C is ideal, so a little cooler than average for a red wine. Gigondas may still be in Châteauneuf's shadow, but these are wines with their own unique personality, the best of which are well worth seeking out.

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**Domaine La Bouïssière, La Font de Tonin 2012** 18 (93)

£21.83 (ib) **Fine & Rare**  
La Font de Tonin is Bouïssière's special cuvée, made from older vines. Lovely nose with plum and violet alongside sage and thyme. Full-bodied, lovely weight of fruit. Rich, good acidity and long. Great purity. **Drink** 2016-2026 **Alc** 15%



**Domaine du Cayron 2012** 17.75 (92)

£23.70 **Tanners**  
This 16ha property managed by the Faraud family for five generations is now in the hands of three sisters. Characterful, spicy nose of basil, flowers, citrus and juniper. Full and rounded with good cassis and damson fruit. Vibrant acidity and fine tannins. **Drink** 2015-2017 **Alc** 14%



**Mas des Restanques 2010** 17.75 (92)

£21 **Caviste**  
This organic producer was established by Jean-Luc and Josiane Faraud in 2007. Warm garrigue herbs on the nose and a full-bodied palate, thick with blackberry fruits. Good acidity and relatively low alcohol. Long, fruity, intense finish. Very well balanced and pure. **Drink** 2015-2018 **Alc** 14%



**Montirius, Terre des Aînés 2012** 17.5 (91)

£19.95 **Berry Bros & Rudd**  
Biodynamic since 1999. Inviting pool of herbs and blackberry juice backed up by powerful fruity acidity and fine, integrated tannins. Long, fresh and zesty with depth. **Drink** 2015-2022 **Alc** 14.5%



**Domaine des Florets, Les Florets 2012** 17 (90)

£17.99 **Harrogate Fine Wine Co**  
A small 8ha estate. Earthy, herbal nose with good red fruit character. Dense, good tannic structure and all in balance. Impressive stuff, packed with flavour. **Drink** 2015-2018 **Alc** 14.5%



**Domaine Santa Duc, Prestige des Hautes Garrigues 2012** 18 (93)

£39.95 **Berry Bros & Rudd**  
A fifth-generation family estate. Intensely herbal and floral nose: a pot pourri of dried flowers and lavender. Full, sweet berry fruits and very fat in texture. Long, juicy, round, silky – all totally unified. A joy to drink. **Drink** 2015-2020 **Alc** 15%



**Domaine Le Clos des Cazaux, Cuvée La Tour Sarrazine 2012** 17.75 (92)

£10.42 (ib) **Latimer Vintners**  
A family property now in the hands of its fifth generation. Sweet, ripe berry fruits. Very lively and bright with acidity. Powerful and intense with lots of tannins, all nicely balanced. Grippy and enlivening. **Drink** 2015-2021 **Alc** 14.5%



**Domaine du Grapillon d'Or, 1806, 2012** 17.5 (91)

£18.65 **James Nicholson**  
Created in 1806, this property still belongs to the Chauvet family. Aged for 14 months in old oak barrels, this has a perfumed nose and a light herb and cherry-berry palate with fine tannins and bright acidity. **Drink** 2015-2017 **Alc** 14.5%



**Moulin de la Gardette, Tradition 2012** 17.5 (91)

£22.95 **Berry Bros & Rudd**  
A 10ha, organic, family-owned estate. A distinctly spicy style, very fresh, with black cherry and crème de mure. High-toned aromatics. Bright, vibrant and refreshing. **Drink** 2015-2017 **Alc** 14.5%



**Famille Perrin, La Gille 2012** 17 (90)

£19.99 **Cambridge Wine Merchants**  
A blend of two parcels owned by the Perrin family of Château de Beaucastel. A fine, perfumed style with pure strawberry fruit. Refreshing and bright – not too full bodied – with alcohol levels in check. An enjoyably drinkable style. **Drink** 2015-2018 **Alc** 14.5%



**Domaine Brusset, Tradition Le Grand Montmirail 2012** 17.75 (92)

£19.75-£21.99 **AG Wines, Noel Young**  
Family-owned since 1947, Brusset is a reliable producer. A lifted, enticing nose of strawberry, raspberry and damson fruit. Good acidity, with a spicy kick on the finish. Ripe tannins and good freshness. Long. **Drink** 2015-2020 **Alc** 14%



**Domaine Santa Duc, Tradition 2010** 17.75 (92)

£10.83 (ib) **Bordeaux Index**  
Nose of violets, Victoria plums, black cherry and lavender. Full-bodied, bright acidity and lovely freshness, underpinned by supple tannins and intense concentration. Pure and drinkable despite the high alcohol. **Drink** 2015-2020 **Alc** 15.5%



**Domaine St-Gayan, Origine 2010** 17.5 (91)

£19.95 **Roberson**  
Plum, strawberry and other red fruits with a touch of violet. Medium to full-bodied, alcohol in check. Good acidity and fine, ripe tannins. Not showy or big, but balanced and drinkable – some subtlety and elegance. **Drink** 2015-2020 **Alc** 14.5%



**Dauvergne Ranvier, Vin Rare 2010** 17 (90)

£18.50 **Davy's**  
Full-bodied and thick with body and ripe tannins. Powerful and mouthfilling. Very black-fruited for a Gigondas. Serious stuff, with plenty of impact. A very big wine. **Drink** 2016-2022 **Alc** 15%



**Domaine St-Damien, Vieilles Vignes 2012** 16.75 (89)

£12.92 (ib) **Fine & Rare**  
Organic estate. Clean, fresh raspberry and strawberry fruit perfume with hints of fresh sage. Very bright red fruit palate and gentle tannins. Good intensity to start, though not quite as long as others here. **Drink** 2015-2018 **Alc** 15%

## 18 top Gigondas reds to try



**Château de St-Cosme, Le Claux 2012** 18.5 (95)

£45.46 **Cru World Wine**  
Louis Barruol's single-vineyard wines are among the best in Gigondas. Expressive, vivid, detailed nose of raspberry, juniper and rose. Gorgeous strawberry and damson fruit on the palate. Very fine, elegant, long and balanced. Exceptional, and deserves its price tag. **Drink** 2017-2030 **Alc** 14.5%



**Domaine Raspail-Ay 2012** 18.25 (94)

£13.25 (in bond) **Fine & Rare**  
Family-owned since 1850, this estate makes one red and one rosé. Full and flowing with a good foundation of acidity and a fine lattice of tannin. Long, pure, refreshing and bright. Quintessential Gigondas. **Drink** 2015-2022 **Alc** 14%



**Domaine des Bosquets, Le Lieu Dit 2012** 18 (93)

£26.46 **Jeroboams**  
The lieu dit 'des Bosquets' has been planted with vines since 1376. This one is from almost entirely old-vine Grenache, grown on sand, giving pure, perfumed, wild strawberry fruit. The long finish buzzes with refreshing acidity and fresh herbs. Lovely balance. **Drink** 2015-2019 **Alc** 15%