

• by Andrew Jefford

## Jefford on Monday: Briskness in the air

My tasting year got off to a catapult start back in January. Here's the first raw note of 2015.



*Dentelles de Montmirail mountains in Gigondas, credit: Christophe Grilhe*

I decided to spend most of two days at the **Rhone Decouvertes Avignon** event in March 2015 (complete with a Mistral so strong it blew away the lunch tent) tasting Gigondas.

Wow: how this appellation has advanced in the last decade, and what a special place it seems to be! These aren't, yet, the most consistent wines of the Rhone; out of the 110 or so wines tasted, I gave scores of 16.5 or more to 29 of them (the score doesn't matter other than as a general benchmark for desirability). Briskly, though - briskness is in the air in Gigondas - here are the two reasons why I think this is a wine place we should all take more seriously.

First, because it lies close to Chateauneuf du Pape, uses the same mix of principal grape varieties, and yet smells and tastes utterly and comprehensively different to Chateauneuf. Obviously there are physical contrasts: a big mix of soils (red clay in some places, and blue marl in others; elsewhere sandy, or with limestone pebble detritus), and often a higher altitude, with a higher percentage of northern expositions, and the jagged limestone cliffs of the **Dentelles de Montmirail** towering over all. There are bigger diurnal temperature differences here in summer than at Chateauneuf. Yet it's also testament to something the French still seem to do more successfully than any other wine nation, which is to vinify in a manner which allows difference to come into being, and to be expressed with maximum force and pungency. There seems to be no desire to force wines to conform to anything other than what we might call their genetic destiny, no matter how singular nature's efforts might be. And nature can be almost troublingly articulate here.

Is this, indeed, the French appellation with more 'sense of terroir' to it than any other? If you love red wines whose aromas and flavours begin with fruit, but then lift off allusively in other aromatic directions, take a good look at Gigondas. It does this supremely well. Sometimes almost to excess; a glassful can be so stuffed with apothecary plants and bushes that it finishes almost medicinally. I'm not a fan of acid for its own sake, but the flavour-saturated, spring-heeled, energetic Gigondas acidity is compelling. And there are plenty of different ways of embodying this potential here, from the near-Burgundian finesse of the true mountain **Grenache** style to something much chewier and denser from lower-lying, old-vine Grenache, from **Syrah** and from **Mourvedre**.

In the right hands, 2013 can be a very successful vintage here, and it would be immoral to write more without signaling just how astonishingly good are the 2013 wines from **Louis Barruol** at **Ch de Ste Cosme**. Barruol is a wine craftsman who never seems to stop improving, and his commitment to fruit sorting and to whole-bunch fermentations, stems and all, mean that these are wines which don't just glide beautifully past you in dreamlike serenity, but which catch you and tumble you and leave you moved and disturbed in equal measure.

The range had just been bottled, but they were all showing splendidly, from the fruit-splashed and flower-flayed Gigondas via the fragrant but rich **Valbelle**, the supremely sensual **Claux**, the thundering yet almost elegant **Hominis Fides** and the darker and more brooding **Le Poste**, the only wine of the quintet to seem closed at this stage. (Barruol harvested his entire crop in three days in 2013, between the 15th and 18th of October.)

Read more at <http://www.decanter.com/news/blogs/expert/588160/jefford-on-monday-briskness-in-the-air#l9WW1ymmbeptMyeT.99>