

Vintage report

# Southern Rhône 2016

Ideal growing conditions have delivered one of the best vintages of the past decade. Matt Walls takes a closer look at each appellation and recommends some exceptional wines

BEFORE ARRIVING IN the Rhône in October 2017 to taste the 2016 vintage, I had an inkling it was going to be special.

I've since tasted nearly 1,500 wines and it's clear this is a very good year in the northern Rhône – but truly great in the south.

Conditions were ideal in the southern Rhône – hot and dry, but without extremes, and a long growing season. The resulting wines have it all: ripeness, concentration, freshness, acidity and plenty of firm, ripe tannins.

Many of the whites had already been picked by the time welcome rain and cooler conditions arrived on 15 September. The harvest for red varieties began on 12 September and lasted into October. Those who waited until after the rain had several weeks of warm, dry weather and could pick each parcel and variety at perfect ripeness. For Jacky Bernard of Domaine la Ligière and president of AC Vacqueyras, 'it was an exceptional year: lovely quality, healthy, no rot, no degradation, no dried grapes'.

One potential challenge that producers face in hot, dry years with generous yields is achieving full ripeness, which can lead to green flavours and astringent tannins. This wasn't a problem in 2016. Rodolphe des Pins of Château de Montfaucon in Lirac was 'amazed by the softness of the tannins', and during harvest noted 'lots of berries, not much juice, but amazing balance'. This concentration has led to notably high acidity in the wines. This component, along with intensity of ripe, >

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Matt Walls

Photograph: Mike Prior. With thanks to Hadonism Wines (www.hadonism.co.uk), Pierre Hourlier Wines (www.hourlierwines.co.uk) & Handford Wines (www.handford.wine) for the loan of the bottles



## A selection of top southern Rhône

*Wines (red unless otherwise stated) are listed by appellation, from north to south, then by score, then alphabetically by producer. Prices, stockists and alcohols are given where possible. Full tasting notes on [Decanter.com/premium](http://Decanter.com/premium)*

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### Vinsobres

**Famille Perrin, Les Hauts de Julien 94**

£16.50 (1b)–£23.6 Big Red Wine, Farr Vintners, Goedhuls & Co, Tanners  
 Concentrated palate of vibrant herbal black fruit, with integrated oak adding complexity and spice. Good tannic grip and fine acidity. A punchy beast. **Drink** 2019–2026

**Domaine de Montine 92**

£10.54 Christopher Piper  
**TOP VALUE** Blackberry, plum and spice nose. Fresh, textured palate. Excellent concentration and freshness with ripe acidity. **Drink** 2018–2021

**Domaine l'Ancienne Ecole, L'Essentiel 92**

**NEWCOMER** Bright black cherry and aniseed. Full-bodied, plush texture, raked up by sharp tannins. Saline finish. **Drink** 2019–2021 **Alc** 14%

### Rasteau

**Domaine la Soumade, Cuvée Confiance 94**

£17 Christopher Piper  
 Violet, liquorice, blackberry and raspberry leaf. A smooth, seamless palate of real intensity, tannins are present and ripe but imperceptibly fine. Gently vibrant. **Drink** 2018–2022 **Alc** 14.4%

**Domaine la Collière, La Fontaine 93**

**TOP VALUE** Menthol, resin and oak with bright plum fruit. Fresh, not overextracted, with lovely acidity and fresh, sprightly tannins. Saline, snappy, balanced and fresh. **Drink** 2018–2022

### Cairanne

**Domaine des Amadieu, Vieilles Vignes 94**

£10 (1b) Stone Vine & Sun  
**TOP VALUE** Tapenade, rosemary and crème de mure nose. Concentrated but lifted berry fruit palate and a long finish. Yves-Jean Houser has a magic touch. **Drink** 2018–2022 **Alc** 14%

**Domaine Alary, La Brunote 93**

£15.75 H2Vin  
**TOP VALUE** Smoked herbs, fig and berry fruits. Concentrated palate with no heaviness. Vibrant juicy berry fruit, brisk acidity and textured, fine tannins. Enlivening. **Drink** 2018–2022 >