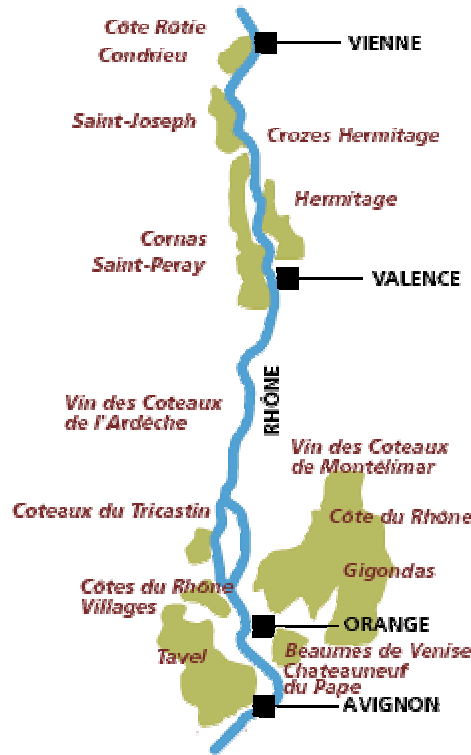




Hi everyone,

Northern Rhône – Part Two



When you drive from Lyon, follow the expressway of N7 direction to Avignon, after turning into N86, passing Ampuis of Côte Rôtie. You will arrive in **Condrieu**, a village that is dedicated in the production of solely one wine that comes from a single variety - Viognier. This most cherished grape of Rhône found at it's best at this tinny, tucked away village that once, a strange-looking, yellow-skinned Chinese show up, trying to answer nature's call. He was denied.

Viognier, this highly aromatic, distinctive (once you are accustomed to their aromas. you can almost effortlessly pick up this grape variety in blind) white variety has overtime become the most fashionable grape that's found not just at home in Condrieu, but also flourished in area like California, Australia, New Zealand, Chile, South African...etc. Like Syrah, Viognier was believed to be first brought up in the Rhône valley by the Creek sailors between 600 and 400 B.C. Before the popularity of this white variety. It was once widely grown in southern farmland of Lyon and northern Rhône centuries ago. However, due to it's low vigor and prone for diseases like powdery mildew. The production in those areas were slowly declining and until 1968, it was just 14 hectare or 35 acres left, with mostly found in northern Rhône, **Condrieu** and **Château Grillet** (an 8.4 acres appellation and among the smaller in Rhône). Since the 70s, the production and price have gradually risen with many vineyards reconstructed and some of the finest vineyards located in the steep hill, often with granitic slopes and topsoil like *arzelle* (decomposed rock, granite, mica, shist, and some clay) that's traditionally known as the best soil were all

replanted. Today, the total area planted with vine is 110 hectares, or 270 acres (equivalent of 500,000 bottles per annum). Despite the production increased, the challenge in cultivating this fragile grape variety in this area, which Viognier is susceptible for mildew attack; sensitive to strong wind due to weak flowering; soil erosion due to heavy rain. The average yield in the area remained notoriously low and also explains why, Condrieu is relatively expensive for a wine that's meant to be drunk young.

The extraordinary challenge posed in cultivating and vinifying Viognier however, comes with big rewards. Fewer people could resist the hauntingly sweet, exotic fragrance of apricots, peaches, honeysuckle combined in a textured, viscous, full body palate and endless persist of length of such rich fruitiness. Like Pinot Noir for burgundy, I rarely encounter a better viognier made outside Condrieu (Euro-beautiful syndrome?), especially in the hands of such great master like **Georges Vernay, André Perret, Yves Culleron**. Most new world's Viognier frequently tasted too heady, with obvious alcohol and frightfully low acidity that came across flabby and cloying. They lack the freshness and delineation posed by Condrieu and the skilful woods handling (one-third new oak) of those gentlemen along with Marcel Guigal that give the wine the necessary balance and definition. For me, Condrieu is Viognier, but, the reversal is not true.

27 bts. 2004 **André Perret** Condrieu “Clos Chansons” at 75.00 each (rated by Parker's 92 points)

22 bts. 2004 **André Perret** Condrieu "Coteaux de Chery" at 78.00 each (rated by Parker's 94 points)

Unlike Condrieu, which was just a short drive from Côte Rôtie. The *département* of **St. Joseph** is far more extended, some 40 miles long. Making them the longer appellation of northern Rhône. There is a total of 640 hectares (1581 acres) under vine, which explains the huge quality variable in this vast, confusing area that stretch from south of **Condrieu** to the doorstep of **Cornas**.

St. Joseph was originally based on a single hillside - a south-east-facing terraces between Tournon (opposite Crozes-Hermitage) and Mauves that was established in 1956. Six communes of the west bank of Rhône between Glun and Vion of total 100 hectares (247 acres) were added. Further expansion of 25 communes run from south of Valence all the way up to Condrieu were all included in St. Joseph in 1969. Many of those newly planted vineyards are from flat, fertile, alluvial soil and the wine deserves nothing more than a Côte du Rhône *village cru* quality. To many growers, the finest St. Joseph came from the original granite steep hillside vineyards. **Syrah** account for 90% of the production here with small amount of St. Joseph white that made from **Marsanne** and **Rousanne** grapes. The wine of St. Joseph is regarded as France's most delightfully rich, fruity, perfumed and early accessible reds.

36 bts. 2004 **André Perret** Saint Joseph at 45.00 each

35 bts. 2004 **André Perret** Saint Joseph Les Grisières Vieilles Vignes at 55.00 each

Jancis Robinson called **Cornas** a wine of positive "antediluvian" (check your dictionary on the meaning). Indeed, everything about Cornas, is ancient. Cornas is believed to be among the oldest vineyard sites of France with historical track of 2,000 years ago. It was also known as one of the favorite wine of king Charlemagne, which he has visited this tiny (94 hectares), most southernly town of Northern Rhône in A.D. 840 and tipped his goblet to the local growers.

Enjoying the similar steep terraces vineyard like **Côte Rôtie** and **Hermitage** (slopes reach 800 feet in height with gradient of 45°), however, Cornas never enjoy the similar glamorous status like the later two. Is easy to compare both Hermitage and Cornas as they share many things in common like, both are made from 100% Syrah, coming from soil of granite, limestone...etc. However, Cornas despite being denser, more masculine, more structured, more robust. It never age or develop the same way as a great Hermitage does. Some pointed out, it was due to the ancient winemaking philosophy employed by many of the producers here. Other, simply blame on the weather, where the temperature here are much higher than in Hermitage, especially encourage by the destructive Mistral winds, which further exacerbate the heat during summertime.

The finest Cornas vineyards lies on those steep, terraced vineyards behind the village. **Reynard**, which co-owned by August Clape, Thierry Allemand, Alain Voge, Robert Michel and **La Côte**, owned by August Clape & Thierry Allemand are among the two most famous. In the south, toward the direction of St.-Péray were the slopes are still relatively steep and soil similar to the former two, vineyard such as La Combe, Sabarotte, Les Côtes and Champelrose are also worth notice.

My personal favorite of Cornas are those made by **Thierry Allemand**. Thierry Allemand, along with Pierre-Marie Clape, Jean-Luc Colombo, Jacques Lemencier are among the new generation winemakers here. Allemand owned the finest vineyard of the northern section of **Chaillots** and **Reynard**, the steep, superb vineyard that lies behind the village. Allemand's style is very focus, often with the fruit brightness and sappiness that call in mind of those from Burgundy. However, the distinct peppery note intertwined with smoky, meaty, chewy palate that is so distinctly - syrah. His **Reynard** is generally denser, more accessible and pliant. His **Les Chaillots** on the other hand shown more elegant and finesse, with better precision and better lift on the palate. Les Chaillots also come across more formidable, less showy, with more noticeable tannin at their youth. His regular Cornas came from the blend of both vineyards.

59 bts. 2002 Thierry Allemand Cornas at 89.00 each (rated by Tanzer's 87 points)

48 bts. 2005 August et Pierre-Marie Clape Syrah "Le Vin des Amis" at 45.00 each

60 bts. 2004 August et Pierre-Marie Clape Côte du Rhône at 68.00 each (rated by Tanzer's 87-89 points)
36 bts. 2004 August et Pierre-Marie Clape Cornas Renaissance at 88.00 each (rated by Tanzer's 89-91 points)
120 bts. 2004 August et Pierre-Marie Clape Cornas at 125.00 each (rated by Tanzer's 91-93 points)

Northern Rhône – Part Three If I have to name ten of the most memorable wines I had in my

life. **Jaboulet's Hermitage La Chapelle 1961** is definitely one of them. This wine has evolved very slowly and one could easily mistake it for a ten-year old claret. One interesting aspect for Hermitage, as they aged, they shed away their early sturdy personality, turning into more delicate, ethereal that has much in common with a well cellaring top Bordeaux. The greatest wine connoisseur of all time, **Thomas Jefferson** once describe Hermitage as, "wine of full body, dark purple hue, with exclusive perfume that's compared to that of raspberry". In the early nineteenth century, Hermitage was in fact among the most expensive red wine of France, with price fetching higher than those of Lafite-Rothschild and Haut-Brion.



Jancis Robinson once called Hermitage, the cradle of syrah. Indeed, syrah is the sole contributor for Hermitage, where vineyards lie within the Tain L'Hermitage, across the river Tournon sur Rhône, separated by the bridges of Pont M. Séguin and Pont G. Tournon, overlooking the opposite side of St.-Joseph. Hermitage hills, where the southerly exposition vineyards begin, has a historic track record of some 500 B.C. where Greeks were believed to be the first to bring vines to Hermitage. The famous stone chapel that is owned by **Paul Jaboulet Aîné** was said to be built by Gaspard de Stérimberg (Jaboulet named their white Hermitage after himself - Chevalier de Stérimberg), a crusader in the thirteenth century. Despite legends have several explanation on how the name Hermitage is derived? However, the local believed, a hermit (french for *ermite*), which referred to Stérimberg that sought refuge on Hermitage hills and lived in self-imposed solitude was the answer to the myth. **Michel Chapoutier** has approved this theory and named his finest luxury cuvées Ermitage, l'Ermite.

Hermitage hills consist of 132 hectares (326 acres) of vines in a south facing bank of granite. The southern exposition combines heat-retaining granite soil that helps promote the ripening of grape. Like many of the northern Rhône vineyards. The finest of all lies on the steeper, most significant gradient terraced vineyard, where *lieux-dits* of **Les Bessards** is found. The sandy gravel over granite soil of Les Bessards produced some of the most intense, powerful wine of Hermitage. Both Chapoutier (Le Pavillon) and Chave's Hermitage sourced their fruits here. **Le Méal**, which is made known by Chapoutier, where he made a 100% Syrah red Hermitage and his Marsanne, cuvée de L'Orée, also the key component that contributes the great Jaboulet's La Chapelle. Wine here tend to be more fragrant, fruity and supple, which largely credit to it's limestone, large rocks soils. **L'Hermitte**, with vineyard located at the highest elevation is virtually owned exclusively by Gérard Chave. The unique iron-rich soil produced the richest and most concentrated wine of the area. However, Chave retain a sense of elegance and finesse in his Hermitage. Since 1996, Chapoutier also produced his single-vineyard Hermitage, cuvée l'Hermitte here. The clay predominate **Les Diognières** and **Les Greffieux** are also worth noticing. **Guigal** made his red Hermitage out from Les Diognières, while **Marc Sorrel** blend some of Les Greffieux to his famous Le Gréal.

Gérard Chave, in his 70s, is today assisted by his equally talented son, Jean-Louis. In the mind of Chave, new oak barrel not only changed the character of the wine, but disguised its identity of his Hermitage. His winemaking approach is very traditional. For his white Hermitage, which was a blend of 85% Marsanne and 15% Roussanne is vinified only with indigenous yeast. Fermentation is slow and long, and in some vintage, it can take up to a yeast to complete the fermentation. Chave is not a believer of bâtonnage, which he claimed that, lees stirring only further oxidises his wine but does not improve the texture. Chave red Hermitage is a result of blending of several *lieux-dits* parcels. Each parcel is treated and vinified separately. After 14-18 months of aging in old wooden *foudres*. He then decided which goes into the final blend. Chave owned some of the oldest most precious vineyard in Hermitage hills. His 5-acre parcel of Les Bessards is already 90-year-old along with his 60-year-old Le Méal. Chave Hermitage is consistently rated

among the greatest wine of the appellation. In the recent interview, Jean-Louis Chave sum up how one could expect from his Hermitage. "Hermitage is not necessary a big wine. What is more important is that the fruit is ripe and the elements are in balance. We're looking for finesse rather than power".

18	2002 Jean Louis Chave Hermitage Blanc	RP 90	195
6	2001 Jean Louis Chave Hermitage Blanc	RP 92-94	245
6	2000 Jean Louis Chave Hermitage Blanc	RP 95	230
6	1999 Jean Louis Chave Hermitage Blanc	RP 94	230
5	1998 Jean Louis Chave Hermitage Blanc	RP 92	205
6	1995 Jean Louis Chave Hermitage Blanc	RP 94	210
18	2002 Jean Louis Chave Hermitage	RP 91-94	195
6	2001 Jean Louis Chave Hermitage	RP 91-95	285
16	2000 Jean Louis Chave Hermitage	RP 96	355
6	1999 Jean Louis Chave Hermitage	RP 96	355
1	1998 Jean Louis Chave Hermitage	RP 93	295
6	1997 Jean Louis Chave Hermitage	RP 94	265
6	1995 Jean Louis Chave Hermitage	RP 95	300

Paul Jaboulet Aîné, the late Gérard Jaboulot, whom I have the privilege to make acquaintance with was in fact, the best ambassador for Rhône Valley. Interestingly, my very first bottle of Rhône Valley wine came from this historical family, which was founded in the 19th century. Today, the firm has no longer in the hand of Jaboulot but rather been acquired by Frey family of Château La Lagune. Jaboulet's La Chapelle is fruit sourced from Le Méal and Les Bessards, with an average vine age of 50 year-old. 100% destemmed with a long maceration of 21 days, and up to 30-38 days in great years. After fermentation, the wine is aged in burgundy, François Frères barrels (but rarely new) for 12-14 months. Anyone who has the privilege to taste his 1961, 1978 & 1990 will be in no doubt about their high quality in this film. In fact, during my previous 1961 tasting. La Chapelle's 61 was among the crowd favorite.

15	2001 Paul Jaboulet-Anné Hermitage La Chapelle	WS 97	160
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Michel Chapoutier reminded me a lot like Marcel Guigal. Both are considered the modernist in the region; both utilizing more new wood aging than their neighbors; Both are strong believers of single-vineyard bottling. However, Chapoutier with his biodynamic farming approach, making him constantly in the lamplight as one of the most controversial wine figure in Rhône Valley. However, no one should be doubtful about his effort on revamping the quality of his family film and his burgundian-like approached (open-top fermenter, indigenous yeast, 100% destemmed, aging in small troncais barrel, vinify parcel-by-parcel) has increasingly place him among the very best maker of Rhône Valley by such influential critics like Parker, Tanzer and Wine Spectator.

1	2001 Chapoutier Côte Rôtie Cuvée La Mordorée	RP 100	550
24	1989 Chapoutier Côte Rôtie Cuvée La Mordorée		450
34	2000 Chapoutier Ermitage Le Pavillon	RP 98	245
6	1995 Chapoutier Ermitage Le Pavillon	RP 99	425
2	1990 Chapoutier Ermitage Le Pavillon	RP 100	700
15	1989 Chapoutier Ermitage Le Pavillon	RP 100	650

Prices are per bottle value and are subjected to 5% GST charges.

P.S. Last, don't miss our coming year-end warehouse sale, which we begin from November 17 till November 25, 2006. More than 800 labels and up to 30% or more discount on our regular prices.

All prices quoted for per bottle in Singapore dollar. Prices indicated "in red" are inclusive of 5% GST.
Free delivery for purchases of S\$350 and above, otherwise S\$15 per delivery will apply.

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