



## My Favorite Wine—Southern Rhône

HAVE BEEN FORTUNATE to have had many of the finest vintages of the world's greatest wines. As a result, I find it difficult to pick my favorite wine. This article will focus on the Southern Rhône and I will feature other favorites of mine from the other most famous wine regions in future articles.

My long affair with Rhône wines began with this wine, Château du Beaucastel Châteauneuf-du-Pape Rouge 1969. The background of this wine dates back to 1308 when the Roman Catholic Church decided to have two Popes with the second one to be based in Avignon, France. Pope Clement V enjoyed Avignon and the mission flourished. One day he commented to some listeners that he was happy, but if he had a summer palace a la Gondolfo outside Rome, he would be happier. So it came to be that the Châteauneuf-du-Pape (New

Castle of the Pope) was built in 1317–1333 and became the namesake of the most famous wines from the Southern Rhône.

Château de Beaucastel dates back to 1549. It was acquired by the Perrin family in the early 20th century and has been one of the best producers since the 1950s. It is generally considered the most popular top end Châteauneuf-du-Pape producer by Americans and its website is most often the most accessed wine website worldwide.

Beaucastel is one of the most respected wines of France, much less of the Rhône. It owes some of its fame and high-quality status to the fact that it uses all 13 allowed varietals in the final blend. Due to annual climate effects on different varietals, some vintages exhibit slightly different characteristics due to the change in the blend. Regardless of the vintage however, there is a significant 35%

of Mourvèdre in the blend. This is a much higher percentage than other producers' wines and this grape, which happens to be one of my favorites, is one of the 'secrets' to this domain's success. Mourvèdre is high in tannins with wild game or earthy overtones and has soft red fruit flavors. In essence, it blends wonderfully with the other permitted varietals while providing the 'backbone' of the wine.

Once I discovered Château du Beaucastel, I have bought most vintages and certainly all highly rated ones. I can say that I have never been disappointed upon opening any bottle. I have been fortunate to have had most of the highest-rated wines from Italy and France and no producer is more consistent. Recent exceptional vintages include 2009, 2010, 2015, and 2016, 2018, and 2019. These vintages will reward proper cellaring for one to three decades.



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These wines are majestic and pair best with beef (Steak au Poivre), rack of lamb, spicy pork, venison, and other wild game, and are perfect with vegetarian fare. I often say that is I could find more vegetarian dishes that go as well with Châteauneuf-du-Pape as ratatouille, I would eat less meat.

Prices for Beaucastel range from \$65 to \$100 depending on the vintage and retailer. If you can't find Beaucastel, other favorite producers include Pegau, Clos des Papes, Vieux Telegraphe, Le Clos du Caillou, Henri Bonneau and Fils, Rayas, and Vieux Donjon.

As a footnote to this article, there are two other specialty wines from this producer. Continuing with red, it is a special cuvee Châteauneuf-du-Pape named “Hommage à Jacques Perrin”. It was first produced in 1989 and as in all subsequent great vintages, contains a generous (70%) or so of Mourvèdre. This is always in the top wines of the vintages. It must be tasted and smelled in order to believe something could be this good. It is very hard to find and somewhat expensive (\$400).

The other wine is my favorite white wine. It is made entirely from Roussanne grapes which were planted in 1909. The vines produce a very small crop each year and the wine is very hard to find. Although somewhat expensive (\$150-\$175), I think it is a mission worth undertaking to get a bottle. Historically, all of the production went to the top restaurants in the world. In an interview 10 years ago, Robert Parker stated that it was the greatest wine he had ever had but noted that no one including himself was able to buy the wine. Diligent hunters on the internet can now find the occasional bottle. Please note that this wine drinks best in the first five years of life, goes into a “dumb” stage for the next 10 years, and emerges in majestic form. Happy hunting! A Votre Santé! U



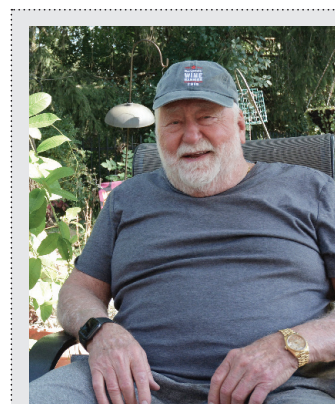
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Barrington resident Jim Bryant is pursuing his passion and love of wine as an international wine consultant. This follows a 30-year career in senior financial and general management positions at two Fortune 100 companies. He is the owner of James R. Bryant L.L.C.; contact him at [profwino@comcast.net](mailto:profwino@comcast.net).