

By James Molesworth



■ From the Feb 28, 2021, issue

The Rhône Valley covers a large and diverse swath of eastern France, starting just south of Lyon and running down to Avignon, yet it is one of the most consistent winegrowing regions in the world. Save for a very rare rain-plagued harvest, the valley benefits from near-constant sunny and dry conditions in summer that are ideal for growing grapes.

The 2018 growing season, however, was no walk in the park. Early-season rains led to severe mildew pressures through the start of summer, before the more typical weather pattern finally kicked in, yielding the beneficial conditions vintners needed to ripen their crop.

In the end, producers in both the northern and southern portions of the region delivered another outstanding group of wines. The Syrah-based reds of the north and the Grenache-based reds of the south each offer velvety, low-acid profiles, with ripe, stylish fruit, while the whites are juicy and opulent.

"2018 is a vintage I would love to have times three in my cellar, but I would not like to live it again in terms of viticulture, stress and intensity of labor," says Victor Coulon of Domaine de Beaufort in Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

The 2018 vintage isn't a *vin de garde* in the mold of recent benchmarks such as 2016 (for the south), 2015 (for the north) and 2010 (for both), but it is a very solid and consistent year, ready to be enjoyed in the near- to medium-term. Overall, I rate 2018 at 92 points on *Wine Spectator's* 100-point scale for both the north and south.

## James Molesworth's Recommended Wines From the Rhône Valley

### Top 2018 Other Southern Rhône

Wine	Score	Price
<b>MONTIRIUS</b>		
Gigondas Confidential 2018	93	\$59
<b>MONTIRIUS</b>		
Vacqueyras Le Clos 2018	93	\$35



## TASTE WITH AWARD WINNING SOMMS

Beyond Châteauneuf, there are a number of outstanding Southern Rhône wines to be found. Look for the Montirius Vacqueyras Le Clos 2018 (93, \$35), from a well-respected, biodynamically farmed estate; the Famille Perrin Gigondas La Gille 2018 (93, \$39), from the owners of Château de Beaucastel; and the Louis & Cherry Barruol Vinsobres Château de Rouanne 2018 (91, \$30), from an estate recently acquired by Château de St.-Cosme owner Barruol that is already on an ascendant track in terms of quality.