

Robb Report

From Cornas to Hermitage, 11 Outstanding Northern Rhone Reds to Drink Right Now

While grapes have been grown on the Rhône River's steep slopes since the times of the Greeks and Romans, the modern era of winemaking in the area dates to the 18th century. Wine barrels from here were first marked "CDR" for Côte du Rhône, meaning the right bank of the river, as far back as 1737. Over 100 years later, the same initials were used to designate wines from the left bank as well, but this time they stood for the plural Côtes du Rhône.

The entire Rhône Valley features hot sunny days that help grapes to fully ripen as well as rocky soils that retain intense heat through the day and into the night. The northern Rhône is known for its bold Syrah-based reds from the Hermitage, Crozes-Hermitage, Cornas, Côte-Rôtie and St. Joseph appellations, while its neighbor to south is famous for its Grenache-based wines.

Wine from Hermitage may have up to 15 percent Roussanne and Marsanne, both white varieties, blended in, while St. Joseph can have 10 percent of these two grapes added. The Cornas appellation only permits wine to be made with 100 percent Syrah, and Côte-Rôtie may include up to 20 percent Viognier, which is also white. The addition of these local white varieties softens Syrah's tannins and adds floral notes to the bouquet.

Expect full-on flavors of blackberry, plum, black cherry and cassis with touches of spice like clove, black pepper and star anise, earthy notes of saddle leather, truffle and black olive, and a hint of flowers. You will find strong tannins, both oak derived and from the grape itself and bold acidity. While wines from the northern Rhône will gracefully age in your cellar for up to 50 years, the best drinking window for these is eight to 12 years. Here are 11 to snap up now.

E. Guigal 2016 Hermitage Rhone Valley France



One of the best-known names in the region, Guigal never disappoints Rhone Valley lovers with wines at many price points in their extensive portfolio. This well-priced wine has aromas of cherry and blueberry and a touch of black pepper. In the mouth the ripe fruit flavors shine through with a hint of dried lavender in the finish.

BUY NOW: \$83