

Forbes

Rhône Valley White Wines - Unknown Treasures



France's Rhône Valley is home to a marvelous array of red wines, ranging from the everyday Côtes-du-Rhône to the well-known Châteauneuf-du-Pape to some of the world's most renowned red wines, namely Hermitage and Côte-Rotie; these last two, also among the longest lived of all wines.

Yet, few people think much about the white wines of the Rhône Valley; given that there are so many other excellent whites from other regions in France, such as Burgundy (think Puligny-Montrachet and Corton-Charlemagne, just to name two), Alsace and the Loire Valley, that's understandable. But skipping over Rhône whites would be a disappointment for any wine lover who is enthusiastic about some of the most distinctive wines from this lovely area of France.

Let's look a few of the key Rhône whites, with notes on some current releases:

Châteauneuf-du-Pape Blanc - The most famous red of the southern Rhône Valley, Châteauneuf-du-Pape is one of the world's most distinctive wines, as it can contain as many as 18 different varietals (this as of the regulations set in 2009, before that, the number of allowed varietals was 13). It is the red Châteauneuf-du-Pape that dominates production here in the Vaucluse department of France (the capital here is Avignon, where the "new chateau" or residence of the Pope was established for a brief period in the 1300s), as only one of every 16 bottles of Châteauneuf-du-Pape is white.

Clearly Châteauneuf-du-Pape Blanc is not often seen on wine lists or retail shelves; while understandable, it is a shame, given the quality of the best examples. For this wine, six white varieties are allowed, including Grenache Blanc, Roussanne and Clairette. Most examples are oak-aged, and the finest are full-bodied whites with impressive complexity and the structure to age for more than a decade.

Saintes Pierres de Nalys Châteauneuf-du-Pape Blanc 2019 - A blend of 40% Roussanne, 40% Grenache Blanc, 18% Clairette and 2% Picopoul and Piacardan. Bright, medium intense yellow; aromas of white peach, candle wax, pineapple and orange peel. Medium-full with excellent concentration. Beautifully structured with a rich mid-palate, there is impressive ripeness, excellent persistence and lively acidity. Wonderfully complex, this is a vibrant wine with outstanding typicity. Enjoyable now, but greater complexities will emerge with another 3-5 years of aging; peak in 6-8 years. (94)