

Côtes du Rhône-Villages crus

With 18 villages in this appellation, it pays to know the ones to watch, especially with the diverse 2011 and 2012 vintages on the shelf. John Livingstone-Learmonth reports

COTES DU RHONE-VILLAGES sits between grassroots Côtes du Rhône and appellations such as Châteauneuf-du-Pape and Rasteau. As such, it acts as a youth academy for the southern Rhône: 18 villages, all trying to become a full appellation, which brings higher prices and supposedly improved wines. But villages travel at different speeds. So here we shine a spotlight on the most notable of the 18, the emphasis naturally falling on those on the rise.

At the top is Cairanne, due to reach its own cru status in 2014. Miles ahead, its wines are big and bold. It holds all the elements for a successful future, backed by several dozen domaines ranging from the inspired to the competent.

Among the front runners to take over from Cairanne are Séguret, Visan, Sablet and Plan de Dieu. Led by Domaine de Mourchon, Séguret combines wine made from altitude with those from the plain, and can also call on the authentic, engaging wines of Domaine Jean David, the honest virtues of Château La Courançonne, and the sleek offerings from Domaines de Cabasse and de l'Amauve.

Visan has been perked up by the younger generation in the past 10 years. Northerly and later ripening, its wines were often a little reedy, with alcohol pushing ahead of content. More punctilious vineyard care and better judged vinifications mean that estates such as Domaines de Coste Chaude, La Florane, the organic La Fourmente, Montmartel, Vignoble Art Mas and the dynamic Roche-Audran all offer good drinking, often with well woven local character.

Know your names

Sablet is frustrating. Hit a good one, and you can have fun, but quality is inconsistent and shouldn't be. Domaines de Boissan, Chamfort, Les Goubert at Gigondas, Pasquiers and Piaugier lead the way here. Plan de Dieu's punchy, windy venue is home to chunky wines from estates such as Les Aphillanthes, Durieu, Espigouette, Pasquiers and merchants such as Ughetto-Audoain, Ferraton and Gabriel Meffre.

Across the River Ouvèze from Sablet, Roaix also makes good, but limited amounts of red wine, with Domaine Pique-Basse a favourite. Deserving greater attention is Massif d'Uchaux – quality winemaking, coolly fruited wines and serious domaines such as La Cabotte, Cros de la Mûre, Renjarde and the Châteaux d'Hugues and St-Estève. Also underestimated is St-Maurice down the road from Vinsobres – the co-operative is sound, and the Domaines Viret and Echevin are very good.

Valréas is stirring. Part of the Enclave des Papes and home to red-fruited, spiced wines, for many years the most interesting source has been Domaine du Val des Rois, but now there are purposeful newcomers, such as Mas de Ste Croix, Clos Bellane and Domaines Grande Bellane and du Séminaire. The best of the Gard *département* comes from the old established villages of Chusclan – supple reds, frisky, clear rosés – and Laudun – very good whites, especially at Domaine Pélaquié, suave reds.

For excitement and discoveries, I recommend the crus of the Côtes du Rhône-Villages; importers can choose from a large field, so what is exported usually has merit.

John Livingstone-Learmonth is the DWWA Regional Chair for Rhône and publisher of www.drinkrhone.com



Côtes du Rhône-Villages	
1 Cairanne	10 Rousset-les-Vignes
2 Chusclan	11 Sablet
3 Gadagne	12 St-Gervais
4 Laudun	13 St-Pantaléon
5 Massif d'Uchaux	14 St-Maurice
6 Plan de Dieu	15 Séguret
7 Puyméras	16 Signargues
8 Roaix	17 Valréas
9 Rochegude	18 Visan

CdR-Villages: know your vintages

2012 Very good. Free-flowing, lively fruit in the best, their freshness adding appeal. A life of up to eight years for the best wines. Great choice at Cairanne.

2011 Good, sometimes very good. Forward, flashy fruit, but alcohol can be high, balance imperfect. Drink young.

2010 Excellent. Balance, depth, longevity, power. A true southern vintage, with notable wines from Cairanne, Massif d'Uchaux, Plan de Dieu and the best domaines.

2009 Good, sometimes very good. A year with deep sun and compact depth in many wines. Drink with country foods and full-flavoured dishes. Note Cairanne, Roaix and Séguret.

2008 Modest. Light wines, just a few showing amiable features now.

2007 Good, some very good. High alcohol and power in these concentrated wines, from a windswept late season. Dark juice; fire in the wines. Rasteau, Cairanne best. Drink until 2018.

Côtes du Rhône-Villages: the facts

Villages Cairanne, Chusclan, Gadagne, Laudun, Massif d'Uchaux, Plan de Dieu, Puyméras, Roaix, Rochegude, Rousset-les-Vignes, Sablet, St-Gervais, St-Pantaléon, St-Maurice, Séguret, Signargues, Valréas, Visan
Vineyard area 5,822 hectares
Largest villages Cairanne 956ha; Plan de Dieu 935ha; Signargues 484ha; Laudun 475ha

Smallest village St-Pantaléon 25ha
Production 185,000 hectolitres
Maximum yield 41 hl/ha
By colour red 95.1%, white 3.4%, rosé 1.5%
Varieties allowed Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre, Cinsault, Carignan, minor red varieties such as Counoise, and white varieties permitted at up to 10% ➤

The results

Unsurprisingly, the 2012 vintage trumped 2011 and the star named village of Cairanne took the bulk of the plaudits. But high alcohol and the lack of village individuality were serious concerns. Tina Gellie reports

WHILE THIS WAS a solid result, said our judges, the crux was whether consumers would understand – or care – about the difference between one Côte du Rhône named village and another. ‘At a pinch they might know their Gigondas from their Rasteau from their Vacqueyras, but will they know their Vinsobres from their Visan?’ asked Simon Field MW.

Matt Walls agreed: ‘If readers come away from this knowing a few village names that overperformed, they can find real value when browsing a wine list or a merchant’s shelf. Cairanne, Sablet and Massif d’Uchaux are villages to keep in mind.’ Marcel Orford Williams, however, still felt the producer name was more of a guarantee of quality, with the village co-ops in particular offering great value for standard wine, and a few key names ‘producing the cream’.

Explaining where these wines stood in the scheme of the Côtes du Rhône, Field said: ‘Châteauneuf-du-Pape is still top, but maybe falling off its perch a bit because of high prices, over-extraction, high alcohol etc. Below that are the former villages that are now appellations in their own right, such as Rasteau, Vinsobres and Beaugues de Venise, which are really building their reputation. At the bottom is a huge swathe of generic Côtes du Rhône and Côtes du Rhône-

‘I expected it, but Cairanne really stood head and shoulders above the rest’ **Matt Walls**

Villages (multi-village). There’s great value to be had here; it’s the go-to appellation for most consumers. And just above are these wines that we are tasting from the lesser-known villages. These could be forgotten, unless they can show their own individual personality.’

And overwhelmingly showing the most personality was Cairanne, which is set to get its own appellation status this year. ‘It was the standout,’ said Walls. ‘I expected that to be the case, but it really stood head and shoulders above the rest.’ Field said prices were increasing in this top village, but it still represented great value. Both he and Field also marked out Sablet for ‘interesting aromatics and great finesse’ (Field) and an ‘expressive character; fresher, lighter in alcohol and more drinkable’ (Walls).

As for other villages, Walls was disappointed with Plan de Dieu. ‘Some wines were over the top, both in 2012 and

The scores

100 wines tasted

1

Outstanding

3

Highly recommended

73

Recommended

20

Fair

3

Poor

0

Faulty

The tasters’ verdicts

Simon Field MW



Field joined Berry Bros & Rudd in 1998. In addition to being the wine buyer for Germany, Spain and fortified wines, Field is also responsible for South America, England and Rhône. He gained his Master of Wine qualification in October 2002.

Field’s verdict

‘The villages of the southern Rhône have enjoyed real commercial success over the past decade, from the well-priced anonymity of generic Côtes du Rhône appellation all

the way up to the grandeur of Châteauneuf-du-Pape and, increasingly, Gigondas. Indeed the swelling ranks of villages which have, somewhat paradoxically, escaped from a ‘village’ nomenclature have helped to build the reputation of names which are now well known, such as Rasteau, Vacqueyras and Beaugues-de-Venise. There is a danger, however, that these names will overshadow those other, less well-known examples and that while, in deference to a Burgundian template, connoisseurs are increasingly captivated by the inherent differences between, say, Vinsobres and Rasteau, there may be less residual energy to rehearse the finer points of the nuances which separate Chusclan and Signargues, for example.

‘These results were quite mixed, because while we were able to identify a handful of excellent examples and a sprinkling of very good wines, the task of identifying distinctive village characteristics was tricky, beyond easy platitudes praising the aromas of Sablet perhaps, or blaming the awkward style of some of the wines from Plan de Dieu. Two clear facts emerged, however: the superiority of 2012 as a vintage, and the good showing of Cairanne, which had five wines in the top 20 and took the two top spots.’

Marcel Orford-Williams



Orford-Williams joined The Wine Society as a buyer in 1986, where he has become a specialist for Alsace, Champagne and Southern France, including the Rhône, Languedoc-Roussillon, Beaujolais and the Southwest. In recognition of his services to French wine, Orford-Williams was made Chevalier de l’Ordre du Mérite Agricole.

Orford-Williams’s verdict

‘Côtes du Rhône-Villages have won plenty of friends over the past 10 years or so. And

rightly so, as they represent authenticity, generosity and great value.

‘These wines are not without ambition and are far removed from the simpler styles of generic Côtes du Rhône. Many are still at a stage when they can develop further; indeed, I felt a good many needed keeping for at least another year. Traditionally, most of these wines would be aged in tank, yet there were many examples with evidence of barrel ageing.

‘The creation of the new crus (Rasteau and Vinsobres) and new villages are widening our horizons in the Rhône, certainly beyond the tried and tested. Moreover, the success of so many estates encourages others to start up, maybe leave the cooperatives of times past. Suddenly we can taste from a profusion of new names in Laudun, Visan or Plan de Dieu, and very good they were too. Cairanne deserves its impending promotion to AC status, such was the consistent quality from this favourite village.’

2011. It’s not always the case, but seemed to be in these vintages.’ He also praised Massif d’Uchaux in 2012 for ‘expressive fruit and unusually good balance’ and Laudun for its minerality and freshness. In the ‘hit and miss’ category, Field cited Valréas, Visan and Chusclan which were variable in quality with undefined personalities, though felt they performed better in 2011.

As expected given the comparative vintage conditions, 2012 was the clear winner, with more concentration and charm, better balance, more defined fruit and fresher acidity. However, Orford Williams was disappointed that the wines weren’t as good as they could have been. ‘Phenolic ripeness came early in 2012 so I was surprised by the number of wines that were 15% – why did they wait so long to pick their Grenache?’

High alcohol is often a charge levelled at Côtes du Rhône, especially with Grenache, and that was again the case here. Orford Williams said the biggest culprits came from the 2011s but even so he said they showed ‘better than I thought they would for such an awkward vintage’.

Field and Orford Williams felt the lack of more high-scoring wines could be put down to the fact that both vintages, particularly the better-quality 2012s, were not ready for drinking. ‘The 2011s were a bit iffy and not very expressive now, but in a year or two may be super. The 2012s have more lift, so give them two to three years to shine.’

Entry criteria:
producers and UK agents were invited to submit red Côtes du Rhône-Village cru wines from 2011 and 2012. Two wines per producer were permitted.

Outstanding 18.5–20pts (95–100pts)



Domaine Les Grands Bois, Cuvée Maximilien, Cairanne 2012

Decanter average score: 18.5/20pts (95/100pts)

Individual judges’ scores: Simon Field MW 18.5 Marcel Orford-Williams 18.5 Matt Walls 18.5

£11.95 From Vineyards Direct

The combination of wine roots and food roots works well: take Mireille Farjon, whose great grandfather Albert founded Grands Bois at Ste-Cécile-les-Vignes in 1920, and Marc Besnardeau, a Parisian restaurateur. Since 1997, they have started to bottle, built a new cellar and have bought vineyards at Cairanne and Rasteau. The couple set their stall on making local, natural wine, and this heart-on-the-sleeve approach brings a genuine ring to their cuvées. Cuvée Maximilien cleverly captures the sage maturity of 30-year-old Grenache with the racy fruit of Mourvèdre and Syrah planted in 2000. The delightful 2012 is a wine ideal for fun bistrot drinking.

Simon Field MW Very youthful colour cedes to a playful raspberry coulis nose. The palate is in equally good humour and attracts with its balanced juxtaposition of fruit and spice.

Marcel Orford-Williams Lovely, sweet, ripe fruit on the nose and palate. This wine has real balance and a lovely long finish.

Matt Walls Bright, fresh, pure black fruits. Peppery and expressive with vivid aromatics of violets. Full bodied, weighty palate but has lift on the finish. Juicy, intense and long. Exceptional.

Drink 2014-2019 Alcohol 14.5%

Highly Recommended 17–18.25pts (90–94pts)



Domaine Les Grands Bois, Cuvée Eloïse, Cairanne 2011 18 (93)

SF 18 MOW 18 MW 18

£15.17 Gauntleys

Earthy, violets and black fruits – Mourvèdre is very much in evidence here. The oak is well managed, balancing with thick, ripe tannins, a full body and lots of acidity. A bit of a monster, but juicy and fun. **Drink** 2015-2020 **Alc** 15% ➤

Highly Recommended (continued) 17-18.25pts (90-94pts)



Domaine La Cabotte, Gabriel, Massif d'Uchaux 2012 17.25 (90+)
SF 17 MOW 17 MW 18

POA Aveyrs
Interesting and intense nose of smoke, cloves and very ripe plums. This is a serious wine with big structure and great balance. Intense and long with a good few years ahead of it.
Drink 2015-2019 Alc 14%



Domaine Michel Mourier, 2M, Sablet 2012 17.25 (90+)
SF 17 MOW 17 MW 17.5

£13 Charles Hawkins
Aromas of garrigue and thyme evoke images of verdant hills. Delicious red fruits with plenty of freshness that flows right into the length. This could only be from the Côte du Rhône.
Drink 2014-2017 Alc 13.5%

If readers come away from this knowing a few village names that overperformed, they can find real value'
Matt Walls

Recommended 15-16.75pts (83-89pts)

Wine	Score	SF	MOW	MW	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Brotte, Château de Bord, La Croix de Frégère, Laudun 2011	16.75 (89)	16.5	18	16	Bright red fruits under a layer of oak. Needs time but this is a serious wine with firm natural acidity and an attractive black fruit profile.	14.5%	2015-2017	£12	Stewart Wines
Cave Les Coteaux du Rhône, Arbouse, Massif d'Uchaux 2012	16.75 (89)	16	16.5	17.5	A dense nose with some bramble fruits. The palate has black fruit grip and firm, rather stern tannins. Succulent, powerful and gutsy.	14.5%	2014-2018	£8.99	Hawkeshead, Merchant Vintners, Slurp
Celier des Dauphins, Massif d'Uchaux 2012	16.75 (89)	16.5	17	16.5	Bright, fresh red fruits. Medium to full bodied, expressive and well made. This is ripe but has freshness too. Very fresh aromatics.	13.5%	2015-2017	£8.79	Dedicated Wines, Waitrose
Domaine Brusset, Les Chabrières, Vieilles Vignes, Cairanne 2012	16.75 (89)	16.5	16	17.5	Youthful complexion and temperament, this wine has chewy tannins, blue and black fruit and hints of violet and laurel on the palate. Needs some time.	14%	2015-2018	£15	Big Red Wine Co
Domaine Roche-Audran, Visan 2012	16.75 (89)	17.5	16.5	16.5	Hedgerow nose with hints of clove and white pepper. Not hugely complex but well balanced and nicely judged, with a long finish.	14%	2015-2018	£11.50	Christopher Piper
Clos Bellane, Les Echals, Valréas 2011	16.5 (88)	17	16	16.5	Juniper and cola oak aromas and dark cherry fruit. The palate is quite rich and powerful with cherry and plum fruit. Quite a plush wine; very impressive.	14.5%	2015-2018	£17	Oddbins
Domaine de Boissan, Cuvée Clemence, Sablet 2012	16.5 (88)	16	17	16.75	Dense, dark, brooding black fruits with some spice. The palate is chewy and rather dense, but has good length of flavour. Stylish.	13.5%	2015-2018	£22	Portal Dingwall & Norris
Famille Perrin, Peyre Blanche, Cairanne 2011	16.5 (88)	16	17	16.5	Black fruit nose but lacks some definition. Oak maturation certainly makes itself felt but this is overcome by an attractive red fruit character.	14.5%	2015-2019	£10.83-£12.99	Berry Bros & Rudd, Cambridge Wines, Millésima
Laudun Chusclan Vignerons, Clos de Taman, Laudun 2012	16.5 (88)	16	17	16.75	Blueberry fruit on the nose, then a lively but honest Grenache character to the palate. Very classic Laudun. Delightfully drinkable and very well balanced.	14.5%	2014-2016	£12	Enotria
Alain Boisson, Domaine Cros de Romet, Cairanne 2012	16.25 (87)	16	16	17	Attractive, soft spice aromas lead to the palate which is generously fruity and pleasingly straightforward. Intense, juicy and vibrant.	15%	2014-2018	£28	Charles Mitchell
Château Courac, Laudun 2012	16.25 (87)	16.5	16	16	Aromatic with parma violet, wood smoke and damson fruit notes. Full bodied and long with some minerality on finish. Modern style with balanced acidity.	14%	2015-2018	POA	The Wine Society
Château Simian, Jocundaz, Massif d'Uchaux 2012	16.25 (87)	16	16.5	16.5	Attractive, high-toned strawberry and raspberry nose overlaid with dried herbs. The palate is forward, with hedgerow charm and a peppery finish.	14.5%	2014-2016	£17.49	Essentially Wine
Chauvin, Domaine le Souverain, Réserve, Sablet 2012	16.25 (87)	16	15.5	17.5	Distinct black pepper nose; high toned, aromatic, expressive and fresh. The palate has a floral personality and is suitably lifted and charming.	14.5%	2015-2017	£12	Drinks of France
Domaine Alary, L'Estévenas, Cairanne 2011	16.25 (87)	17	17	14.5	Tapenade richness, which recalls the northern Rhône. The palate has poise and elegance with hints of blueberry and violet to underline it.	14.5%	2015-2018	£13.50	H2Vin, Bancroft Wines
Domaine Brusset, Les Travers, Cairanne 2012	16.25 (87)	17	15	16.5	Nose of crushed raspberry, sweet spices and forest floor. Juicy, soft, velour-textured black fruits. Fine structure though not without weight and balance.	13.5%	2014-2017	£11-£14.65	Big Red Wine Co, Carruthers & Kent, Great Western Wine, Totnes Wine Co, Winedirect
Domaine de Coste Chaude, La Rocaille, Visan 2011	16.25 (87)	16	17.5	15.5	Loganberry, peat and damson on the nose. Full, juicy and rounded fruit palate. The alcohol shows a bit, but is still succulent. All in all, most agreeable.	14.5%	2014-2016	£13	James Nicholson
Domaine des Auzières, Roaix 2012	16.25 (87)	16	16	17	A nose of cherry and tapenade and a full-bodied, finely formed mid-palate. Lots of concentration and intensity, and firm acidity to back it up.	15%	2015-2018	£9.90	Drinks of France
Domaine du Séminaire, Valréas 2012	16.25 (87)	15	16.5	17	Lovely herbal fruit nose. Powerful, juicy, long and complex - a real mouthful. The finish has some grip and will need some time.	14.5%	2015-2018	POA	The Wine Society
Domaine Martin, Plan de Dieu 2011	16.25 (87)	15	17	16.5	Jammy black fruits and spice. Dry, savoury and harmonious with intense concentration and body, but lots of acidity to back it up.	14%	2014-2017	£9.99-£11.99	Laithwaite's, Voddens Vintages
Ferraton Père & Fis, Plan de Dieu 2012	16.25 (87)	15	15.5	15	Stewed blackberry fruit aromas with a slight reduction. This is echoed on the palate, which has high acidity and concentration of fruit.	14%	2014-2017	POA	Aveyrs
Gabriel Meffre, Saint-Mapalis, Plan de Dieu 2012	16.25 (87)	17	16	15.5	Full, fat and intense strawberry fruit. An appealing palate where the alcohol is finely defined and the structure generous and yet not overworked.	14%	2015-2018	£9.99	Guy Anderson
Laudun Chusclan Vignerons, Les Genêts, Chusclan 2012	16.25 (87)	15.5	16.5	16.5	Bright, defined fruits and a touch of spice. The palate is nicely balanced but not excessive, with hints of pepper on the finish.	14%	2014-2017	£11.95	Coe Vintners, Enotria
Le Gravillas, Plan de Dieu 2012	16.25 (87)	16.5	16.5	16	A nose of spice, pepper and hints of cured ham. Full bodied and rich, but not without freshness. This has fruit, fat and a sense of place.	14%	2015-2019	POA	Charles Mitchell
Pierre-Henri Morel, Signargues 2012	16.25 (87)	16	17	16	Elegant Grenache fruit shines through despite the high alcohol level. Dark chocolate tones: sweet and ripe with good length and a sense of purpose.	14.5%	2015-2018	£14.50	The Wine Treasury
Bonpas, Grande Exception, Plan de Dieu 2011	16 (86)	15.5	17	15.5	Aromas of griotte cherries and damson, then a palate which has hints of cinnamon and spice to support its natural fruity charm.	14.5%	2015-2020	£11.99	Bibendum

Recommended (continued) 15-16.75pts (83-89pts)

Wine	Score	SF	MOW	MW	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Château Quilex, Gagne 2012	16 (86)	15.5	16	16.5	Nose a little reserved, with subtle notes of scrub and hedgerow in the background. Straight and spicy, fresh and drinkable; a big wine.	14.5%	2014-2017	£16	The Sampler
Domaine Alary, Cairanne 2012	16 (86)	16	16	16	Smoky and rustic, with a touch of farmyard. The palate combines black tea, liquorice and blueberry fruit, and clearly has a lot to give.	14.5%	2014-2018	£12.50	H2Vin, Bancroft Wines
Domaine de Mourchon, Tradition, Séguret 2011	16 (86)	16	16	16	Spicy, bitter chocolate nose. The palate is powerful and forward with tannic depth and no shortage of self-belief. Needs some time.	14.5%	2015-2019	£14	Aveyrs
Domaine la Cabotte, Garance, Massif d'Uchaux 2012	16 (86)	16.5	15.5	16	Slightly closed, with a hint of juniper and bay leaf. The palate has complexity, but without excessive weight. Finely wrought tannins complete the picture	14%	2014-2017	POA	Aveyrs
Domaine Philippe Plantevin, l'Aglañé, Visan 2011	16 (86)	15.5	17	15.5	Aromatic crème de cassis notes and a feast of mocha and ripe fruit. Lots of presence and life here. Good fruit and great length.	14.5%	2015-2017	POA	La Cave de Bruno
Ravoire & Fils, Olivier Ravoire, Plan de Dieu 2012	16 (86)	17	15.5	15.5	Attractive strawberry and plum nose with notes of graphite and herbs. The palate wears its alcohol well - it has poise, length and elegance.	15%	2015-2018	£10.99	Les Producteurs & Vignerons de France
Boutinot, Fide et Arte, Les Six, Cairanne 2011	15.75 (85+)	15	16.5	15.5	Spicy layer of oak lending juniper and cola notes to the fruit. The oak is well managed but needs a year or so for integration to feel the real finesse.	14.5%	2015-2018	£20	Boutinot
Brotte, Domaine Grosset, Cairanne 2012	15.75 (85+)	16	15	16	Lacking a touch of ripeness but the palate has lovely texture. An extra dimension of liquorice and clove flavours adds an interesting counterpoint.	14.5%	2015-2018	£14.99	Majestic
Camille Cayran, La Réserve, Cairanne 2012	15.75 (85+)	15	15.5	16.5	Concentrated nose which marries fruit and spice. Well-balanced, with zingy minerality and a spicy finish. Lively and very drinkable.	13.5%	2014-2017	£10.49	Carruthers & Kent, Liberty Wines, Slurp
Camille Cayran, La Réserve, Plan de Dieu 2012	15.75 (85+)	16	16.5	14.5	Lifted damson fruits and liquorice on the nose. Very ripe and full bodied, with full tannic support and finely poised acidity. Complete.	15%	2015-2019	£9.49	Liberty Wines, Slurp
Clos Bellane, Valréas 2012	15.75 (85+)	15.5	15	16.5	Spicy Syrah nose, which is not giving much away right now. The palate is soft and attractive, but is a little lacking in focus.	14.5%	2014-2017	£13	Oddbins
Domaine Clavel, Syrius, St-Gervais 2012	15.75 (85+)	15.5	17	15	Interesting herbal aromatics, with hints of laurel and graphite behind it. Juicy and appealing if a touch flabby. Sweet, mouthfilling and rich.	14.5%	2014-2016	£9.16	Stephan Gallice
Domaine de Coste Chaude, L'Argentière, Visan 2011	15.75 (85+)	15	16.5	15.5	Very fine, savoury fruit. The palate is correct though a bit clod-hopping, but good fun nevertheless. Decent length of spicy fruit.	14.5%	2015-2018	£14	James Nicholson
Domaine de la Garance, Séguret 2012	15.75 (85+)	16.5	16.5	14.5	A nose of fennel and heather - its capacity to intrigue is underlined by the palate which has firm acidity, subtle tannins and elegant fruit.	15%	2015-2018	£15	The Vintner, The Winery
Domaine de Mourchon, Grande Réserve, Séguret 2011	15.75 (85+)	15.5	17	14.5	Aromas of violet and wood smoke. The palate has depth and resonance - dense and fabulously mighty!	15.5%	2015-2019	£18	Aveyrs
Domaine du Trapadis, Cairanne 2012	15.75 (85+)	15.5	16	15.5	Attractive hedgerow fruit on the nose, which is also captured on the palate. Bright and simple but still with some charm	14%	2014-2017	POA	Vine Trail
Domaine Grès-St-Vincent, Signargues 2012	15.75 (85+)	16.5	16	14.5	Attractive aromas of red fruit, with lavender and hints of liquorice behind. Full, soft and lush in texture - a bit flabby.	14.5%	2014-2018	£9.50-£13.90	Stone Vine & Sun, Wine Story
Domaine Roche-Audran, Marius, Le Père Mayeux, Visan 2011	15.75 (85+)	15	16.5	16	Strawberries, herbs and slightly stewed fruits on the nose. Very Grenache in character, though slightly lacking in structure.	14.5%	2015-2017	£12.90	Christopher Piper
Jean-Luc Colombo, Les Laurons, Séguret 2012	15.75 (85+)	15.5	16.5	15.5	Savoury black olive nose. Juicy, broad and full bodied with good acidity and structure. Slight oxidation undermines otherwise nice forward fruits.	14%	2015-2017	£14	Cellar Vie
Le Gravillas, Sablet 2012	15.75 (85+)	16	15	16	Seductive aromas of black tea and hedgerow. The palate is approachable with red berry fruit and good acidity.	14.5%	2014-2016	POA	Charles Mitchell
M Chapoutier, Signargues 2012	15.75 (85+)	15	16.5	15.5	Hints of herbs and roasted meat add interest to the nose. The palate reinforces the floral element, although dries a little at the end.	14.5%	2014-2017	£9-£10	Exel Wines, Mentzendorff
Maison Bouachon, Les Parvalonnes, Plan de Dieu 2011	15.75 (85+)	16	15	16	Simple red fruit character with a little spice on the back. Juicy, slick and full bodied with lots of acidity and bite.	N/A	2014-2017	POA	Matthew Clark
Ogier, Plan de Dieu 2011	15.75 (85+)	15	17	15	Gorgeous, ripe red and black fruit aromas. A full-bodied, quite powerful example, with lingering fruit, balancing acidity and tannins.	N/A	2015-2019	£14	Cellar Vie
Caves St-Pierre, Signargues 2012	15.5 (85)	16	14.5	16	Rich Grenache fruit with hints of spice and cardamom behind the berries. Fair length, balanced acidity and plenty of energy.	N/A	2014-2018	£11.99	Laytons
Château St-Jean, Plan de Dieu 2011	15.5 (85)	14	15.5	16.75	Spicy, earthy, savoury nose with some fine fruit. This has good complexity and interest with some weight to it	14.5%	2014-2018	£9.50-£11.99	Aveyrs, The Wine Society, From Vineyards Direct
Domaine Les Aphillanthes, Cuvée des Galets, Plan de Dieu 2011	15.5 (85)	15	15	16.5	Liquorice, herbal bitters and blackberry fruit aromas. Juicy palate with high acidity but is essentially balanced overall.	15%	2014-2017	£18.30	Dynamic Vines
Domaine Les Goubert, Sablet 2011	15.5 (85)	15	16	15.5	Appealing plum and damson nose with cinnamon spice. Very soft and full, but with good acidity holding it together.	14%	2015-2018	£13.99	Albert Ann
Domaine Les Hautes Cances, Col du Débat, Cairanne 2011	15.5 (85)	14.5	15	17	Nose of graphite, ripe plum, fig and a touch of vanilla. Some dark chocolate on the palate, which is a little clumsy. Quite a hedonistic wine.	14.5%	2015-2017	£21	OW Loeb
Domaine Les Hautes Cances, Cuvée Tradition, Cairanne 2011	15.5 (85)	15	15	16.5	Powerful, slightly cooked aroma, with hints of lavender and bacon rind. The palate impresses with its weight and texture. Mature now so drink up.	14.5%	2015-2017	£13	OW Loeb
Réserve des Hospitaliers, Cairanne 2011	15.5 (85)	15	16.5	15	Rich colour and an oaky nose underline the manipulation here, which guarantees structure but overwhelms. A bit hard going.	14%	2015-2019	£9.99-£10.49	Boutinot, Waitrose
Vidal-Fleury, Cairanne 2011	15.5 (85)	15	16.5	15	Pleasant damson and blueberry fruit. Intense attack of high acidity but with lots of concentration and some slightly raw tannins.	14%	2014-2019	£12-£14 (2010)	Oddbins, Peckhams
Chauvin, Domaine Le Souverain, Classic, Séguret 2011	15.25 (84)	15.5	16	14.5	A gentle, gamey nose, with plum and clove in the background. The palate has sweetness and maturity with a clean, refreshing finish.	14.5%	2014-2018	£12	Drinks of France
Domaine Cros de la Mûre, Massif d'Uchaux 2011	15.25 (84)	13.5	16	16	The rich colour heralds a nose of wood smoke and peat with some mellow fruit. Harmonious palate if just a little hot on finish.	14.5%	2015-2017	£16-£18.95	Berry Bros & Rudd, The Wine Society
Domaine de l'Amave, Réserve, Séguret 2011	15.25 (84)	15	16	15	Intense, high-toned lavender and black fruit aromas. A modern style with lots of concentration and intensity.	14.5%	2015-2018	£17.95	Earle Wines
Domaine de Verquière, Sablet 2011	15.25 (84)	14	16.5	15.5	Bright fruitiness with a hint of spice and leather. Succulent palate though the alcohol shows a bit. Good length with a mineral finish.	14.5%	2014-2019	POA	M&M Personal Vintners
Domaine des Amadiou, Cuvée Vieilles Vignes, Cairanne 2011	15.25 (84)	14.5	16	15	Black cherry and plum sauce notes. Fresh, spicy and very drinkable and vivid on the palate. Lots of tannins - a bit drying - but nonetheless pleasurable.	14%	2015-2018	£12.95	Stone Vine & Sun

Recommended (continued) 15-16.75pts (83-89pts)

Wine	Score SF	MOW	MW	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Domaine des Auzières, Réserve, Roaix 2011	15.25 (84)	14.5	15	16.5	Hedonistic oak dominates the nose and palate with aromas of fruit cake, chocolate and black cherry. Very full and rather rustic.	15%	2015-2019	£10.95 Drinks of France
Domaine Philippe Plantevin, La Daurelle, Cairanne 2011	15.25 (84)	14.5	17	14.5	Stewed plum, damson and cooked meats. Has evolved quickly and has a slightly caramelised character which may limit its appeal.	15.5%	2014-2019	£13.95 La Cave de Bruno
Famille Quiot, Château du Trignon, Sablet 2011	15.25 (84)	15.5	16.5	14	Plenty of dark fruit here with a hint of spice. The palate is both youthful and complete, though lacks a bit of charm.	14.5%	2015-2019	POA PLB
La Bastide St-Vincent, Florentin, Plan de Dieu 2012	15.25 (84)	15	15.5	15.5	Jammy black fruits and herbs. A big-boned but generous wine, with powerful tannins, yet has balance and freshness.	14.5%	2015-2019	£13 Fields Morris & Verdin
Les Vignerons de Roaix-Séguret, La Porte des Vents, Séguret 2012	15.25 (84)	16.5	15	14.5	An expensive nose of plums and griotte cherries. The palate is rich, and has poise and concentration; a nice example from a most beautiful village.	14%	2015-2018	POA Bottle Green
Michel & Stéphane Ogier d'Ampuis, Le Temps est Venu, Plan de Dieu 2011	15.25 (84)	14	15.5	16	Earthy and spicy currant aromas. The palate is a bit rustic and disjointed but has good length and is somewhat hedonistic.	14%	2014-2017	£11.95 Berry Bros & Rudd, Montravel Fine Wine
Michel Collomb, Clos d'Alzan, Signargues 2011	15.25 (84)	15.5	14	16	Slightly closed with black fruits and herbal hints. The palate is a little drying, but generally the oak is cleverly integrated and adds to the ensemble.	14%	2014-2016	£10.65 Vineyards Direct
Philippe Cartoux, Domaine des Espiers, Sablet 2011	15.25 (84)	13.5	16	16.5	Dark fruit overlaid with a touch of menthol and oak spice; quite enticing. The palate is starting to show signs of ageing but has good acidity.	14.5%	2014-2019	£12.95 Stone Vine & Sun
Rémy Ferbras, Le Mistral, Plan de Dieu 2011	15.25 (84)	15	15	16	Mellow and relaxed with slightly jammy fruits. Good acidity holding it together with fair length. Lacks a little in long-term structural potential.	14.5%	2014-2016	£9.99 Laurence Hayward
Vignerons Terres d'Avignon, Château Grand Dignitaire, Gadagne 2012	15.25 (84)	14.5	15.5	16	A smoky nose that is a touch closed. The palate is vibrant with smooth and mellow fruit. The alcohol is quite marked.	15%	2014-2017	£15 The Sampler
Château St-Estève d'Uchaux, Vieilles Vignes, Massif d'Uchaux 2011	15 (83)	15	14	16	An oaky, indulgent nose with hints of leather and herbs. Very drinkable with decent length - pretty serious and tannic.	14.5%	2015-2018	£12.95 The Wine Society
Domaine La Florane, Visan 2012	15 (83)	15	16	14	Nose of red berries and undergrowth - indicative of oak, but not too excessive. The finish has a nice peppery touch.	14%	2015-2018	£10 Gauntleys

Fair 13-14.75pts (76-82pts)
 ■ Château Signac, Cuvée Combe d'Enfer, Chusclan 2012 14.75 (82) ■ Domaine de la Renjarde, Massif d'Uchaux 2011 14.75 (82) ■ Domaine de L'Echevin, St-Maurice 2012 14.75 (82) ■ Domaine La Romance, Chusclan 2012 14.75 (82) ■ Domaine Pique-Basse, L'as du Pique, Roaix 2012 14.75 (82) ■ Domaine Richaud, Cairanne 2011 14.75 (82) ■ Domaine Rose-Dieu, Plan de Dieu 2012 14.75 (82) ■ Famille Quiot, Château du Trignon, Plan de Dieu 2011 14.75 (82) ■ Les Vignerons du Castelas, Domaine du Fournier, Signargues 2012

14.75 (82) ■ Paul Jaboulet Aîné, De Père en Filles, Plan de Dieu 2011 14.75 (82) ■ Domaine des Pasquiers, Sablet 2011 14.5 (81) ■ Les Vignerons de Roquemaure, Les Barryes, Laudun 2011 14.5 (81) ■ Vignobles de Balma Venitia, Terrasse Pavée, Séguret 2012 14.5 (81) ■ Domaine de la Présidente, Grands Classiques, Cairanne 2012 14.25 (80+) ■ Les Vignerons de Roaix-Séguret, Domaine Canta Granouiaio, Séguret 2012 14.25 (80+) ■ Vignobles La Coterie, Cuvée Ferdinand De Laye, Visan 2012 14.25 (80+) ■ Vignerons Propriétés Associés, Domaine Allégret, Laudun 2011 14 (80) ■ Château

Signac, Cuvée Terra Amata, Chusclan 2011 13.75 (79) ■ Ravoire & Fils, Olivier Ravoire, Cairanne 2011 13.5 (78) ■ Vignobles La Coterie, Anvis, Visan 2012 12.75 (75+)

Poor 11-12.75pts (70-75+pts)
 ■ Vignobles de Balma Venitia, Porte St-Martin, Visan 2012 11.75 (72) ■ Christophe Coste, Domaine Charité, Cayenne, Signargues 2011 11 (70) ■ Domaine des Pasquiers, Plan de Dieu 2011 11 (70)

For full UK stockist details, see p100

Expert summary: John Livingstone-Learmonth

Without Cairanne, the depth of this tasting would wither. Even so, there were good performances from a few co-ops as well as some less well-known cru names



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GOOD QUALITY, LOW-PRICE wines can be found across the Côtes du Rhône-Villages, especially if a canny importer has strayed off the main drag of high-profile villages. Hence Massif d'Uchaux did well, even if it isn't easy to sell. Here the flagship domaine La Cabotte was closely accompanied in the ratings by two merchant wines from Cave Les Coteaux, Arbouse and the vast Cellier des Dauphins, both great value.

Co-operatives are losing members who prefer to bottle their own wine or to sell their crop to a high-profile domaine in a partnership venture. Thus it is good to see that Laudun's combined cave of Laudun Chusclan, with great experience at the helm, showed well. Laudun's reputation was also upheld by Château Courac and Brotte's Château de Bord.

The tasting also pointed to steady progress at Visan and at Valréas, even if the roster of names at the latter is limited. But underneath the ratings and names lurk challenges.

The first is Life After Cairanne - beyond its promotion in 2014. Take Cairanne away, and the depth of the tasting sheet withers radically. At least 2015 is likely to see a valid newcomer in the shape of Ste-Cécile-les-Vignes - sound wines and domaines, and sizeable vineyards.

Another concern is frustration about villages such as Signargues, which is hard to sell - the name hasn't caught on. This means that growers elect to produce more wine -

52 hectolitres a hectare - as Côtes du Rhône against 41 hl/ha of Signargues. Even at a lower price, they're more profitable. Hence the name stands still. Most trustworthy here are good merchants such as Pierre-Henri Morel and Gonnet from Domaine Font de Michelle at Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

Then there are the villages short on vineyards and domaines whose marketing savvy is limited. Here falls Puyméras, Rochegude, Rousset and St-Gervais. Their soils are sound, and a few domaines stand out (Ste-Anne at St-Gervais is one) but their profile is low and unlikely to rise.

By vintage, it was no surprise to find 2012 preferred, although it was also the more submitted. Good 2011s are real sit-down wines, whereas the more linear features of the 2012s render them more able to after work enjoyment.

High-profile names which did not make the grade here included Marcel Richaud at Cairanne, Château Signac (Chusclan), Domaine Pique-Basse (Roaix) and Domaine L'Echevin (St-Maurice). Usually names of confident quality. **D**

'Good 2011s are real sit-down wines, whereas the linear 2012s better suit after-work enjoyment'

My top three
Simon Field MW

■ **Domaine Les Grands Bois, Cuvée Maximilien, Cairanne 2012** Cairanne to me is all about purity and supple ripe fruit. If you want density and complexity, go a little further up the hill to Gigondas, but here ripeness is all. This example exudes unoaked charm, with a strong performance by Mourvèdre adding interest and weight at the back of the palate. **18.5/20 (95/100)** Drink 2014-2019

■ **Domaine Roche-Audran, Visan 2012** The appeal in this wine resides in relative simplicity, with unoaked Grenache dancing an elegant pas-de-deux with Syrah. The latter proves very well suited to this village, the wines of which are supple, charming and often underestimated. **17.5 (91)** Drink 2015-2018

■ **Clos Bellane, Les Echals, Valreas 2011** Honourable mention to perhaps my favourite of the 2011s; perhaps a little overworked on the oak but a fascinating and ambitious statement of what can be done with Syrah in this relatively northerly village. **17 (90)** Drink 2015-2018

My top three
Marcel Orford-Williams

■ **Domaine Alary, L'Estévenas, Cairanne 2011** What the Rhône does best is produce good, mouthfilling reds that are satisfying and that make the simplest, hearty food, complete. This is Domaine Alary. **17/20 (90/100)** Drink 2015-2018

■ **Domaine Les Grands Bois, Cuvée Maximilien, Cairanne 2012** It's often the case that the top cuvée is little more than a more concentrated version of the basic with a little wood. Not so here. The top wine had sophistication far removed from mere Côtes du Rhône. There was oak but it was well managed and added something. This was an outstanding example of what Cairanne should be. **18.5 (95)** Drink 2014-2019

■ **Domaine La Cabotte, Gabriel, Massif d'Uchaux 2012** Massif d'Uchaux deserves to be much better known; wines like this should help. What a delight to taste a 2012 that tasted of this lovely vintage: fruity and generous, but with that wonderful sense of freshness. **17 (90)** Drink 2015-2019

My top three
Matt Walls

■ **Domaine Les Grands Bois, Cuvée Maximilien, Cairanne 2012** This established, family-owned estate has succeeded in crystallising everything that's positive about the 2012 vintage in Cairanne in this cuvée. Incredibly vibrant aromatics backed up with concentrated dark fruit flavour and a juicy, lifted finish. **18.5 (95)** Drink 2014-2019

■ **Domaine La Cabotte, Gabriel, Massif d'Uchaux 2012** This biodynamic estate belongs to the family that owns Domaine d'Ardhuy in Burgundy. A great choice if you're looking for something powerful but fresh. It's intense but balanced, with thick damson and plum fruits framed by some well judged oak. **18 (93)** Drink 2015-2019

■ **Domaine Michel Mourier, 2M, Sablet 2012** A small, relatively young estate but with real potential going by the quality of this wine. Beautifully fresh, lively and aromatic, its freshness is accentuated by the relatively low alcohol level (13.5%). **17.5 (91)** Drink 2014-2017

NB: the tasters' top wines are not necessarily their top-scoring, rather those which, on learning the wines' identity, they feel are the most notable given their provenance, price or other factors

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