The Rhone Valley

The Northern Rhône, occupies a narrow band of vineyards along the river from Vienne to Valence. The vineyards of the Southern Rhône, spread outward between Montélimar and Avignon. These two separate stretches are often considered collectively, the Northern and Southern Rhône are climatically and viticulturally distinct. The Southern Rhône was the first quality region in France to be struck by phylloxera in 1863. During the decades of replanting following the epidemic, the growers of Châteauneuf-du-Pape introduced a set of rules for production. These rules became the prototype for the Appellation Contrôlée system, and in 1936 Châteauneuf-du-Pape became the first AOC in France.

The Northern Rhône

Climate & Soils

The Northern Rhône has a continental climate and experiences greater seasonal temperature differences than the Southern Rhône. The cold Mistral wind, blows down from the Massif Central and affects the Northern Rhône in winter and spring. The wind is occasionally strong enough to strip the vines but it dries the vineyards, preventing diseases such as mildew from taking hold. Granitic and schistous soils are found in the north with the steeply sloped vineyards of Côte-Rôtie and Hermitage carved out of this rock. The topsoil throughout the Northern Rhône is prone to erosion, which is reduced by the construction of terraces. Near the commune of Condrieu, the topsoil is powdery, decomposed mica, known locally as arzelle. The soils become heavier with clay in the southern section of St-Joseph, Crozes-Hermitage and St-Péray.

Grape Varietals

Syrah  The wines are full-bodied, with smoke, game, grilled meat, olive, lavender, and pepper. The wines are traditionally fermented and aged in large oak foudres, (some producers are now experimenting with new barriques.) Some appellations allow a small percentage of white grapes to be blended, and often fermented together with Syrah.

Cornas, is 100% Syrah

Côte-Rôtie, up to 20% Viognier may be added.

Hermitage - Crozes-Hermitage, a total of 15% Marsanne & Roussanne may be added

St-Joseph producers may add up to 10% Marsanne and Roussanne. Co-fermentation with white grapes has the advantage of stabilizing red wine colour and moderating tannins. Generally, a smaller percentage of white grapes than the allowable maximums are used,

Côte-Rôtie, A red wine only appellation. The district has some of France’s steepest vineyards. On parts of the slope, the gradient is 55° or more. Côte-Rôtie, has a southeasterly aspect behind the town of Ampuis. The two slopes nearest Ampuis, Côte Brune and Côte Blonde are the most renown of the appellation’s terroir. La Mouline & La Landonne, are top cru wines from this appellation.
Hermitage, The south-facing hill of Hermitage behind the village of Tain-l’Hermitage “La Chapelle”, is named for a small hillside chapel that stands within the climat of L’Hermite. Other important climats of Hermitage include le Méal, les Bessards, Gréffieux, Beaume and Péléat. Behind the hill of Hermitage are the vineyards of Crozes-Hermitage. The red wines of Crozes-Hermitage are generally lighter and less ageworthy, although the better wines can approach Hermitage in quality.

Cornas, A red wine only appellation, the smallest red wine appellation of the Northern Rhône, (Hermitage produces less wine.) The wines are traditionally rustic, and slow to develop in the bottle. The appellation is shielded from the Mistral and has the warmest vineyards in the Northern Rhône. The land is divided between 4 lieux-dits: La Côte, Les Chaillot, Les Reynards, and Les Mazards.

St-Joseph. The appellation’s borders have been enlarged from the original delimited area near the commune of Tournon-sur-Rhône, (opposite the hill of Hermitage.) The Appellation extends from Condrieu in the north to St-Péray in the south. St-Joseph provides a basic level of quality in the Northern Rhône.

St-Joseph, Crozes-Hermitage and Hermitage also produce small amounts of white wines, from the Marsanne and Roussanne grapes. Hermitage, producers occasionally produce a vin de paille.

St Peray Situated near Valence, produces white wines from Marsanne and Roussanne which may be made in méthode traditionnelle mousseux style. the Roussanne adds acidity and waxy minerality to Marsanne’s oily texture and almond character.

Condrieu a white wine appellation for the Viognier grape.(less than 200 hectares) Viognier wines have honey, floral aromas and peach / Apricot characteristics. Chateau Grillet is a monopole within Condrieu.

Four minor appellations lie on the Drôme River.
Coteaux de Die - Cremant de Die White wines based wholly and partially, respectively, on Clairette.

Clairette de Die produces sparkling wines by two methods: Méthode Traditionnelle and Méthode Dioise Ancestrale. This is a traditional process of sparkling wine production. The wine is bottled without dosage before fermentation has been completed. Fermentation continues in the bottle & eventually the wines are disgorged into pressurized tanks and rebottled without liqueur d’expédition. A minimum 35 grams per litre residual sugar remains, giving a demi-sec finish. The wine is produced from a minimum 75% Muscat à Petit Grains + Clairette

Méthode Traditionnelle wines are produced from 100% Clairette brut in style, with a maximum 15 grams per litre of RS after dosage.

Chatillon en Diois produces Gamay-based reds and rosés and whites based on Aligoté and Chardonnay.
Southern Rhône

The Southern Rhône accounts for about 95% of all wine produced in the Rhône Valley and is principally a red wine area. Wines from the southern appellations are generally blends. Grenache is the most-planted red grape. Mouvèdre and Syrah, add structure and depth of colour to blends. Cinsault provides finesse and freshness, and is often utilized for rosé wines as well. The plantings of Carignan are declining.

The climate of the Southern Rhône is Mediterranean; the landscape is much flatter. Strong Mistral winds blow regularly down the valley and vines are trained low in bush form to protect them. There are a range of alluvial soils over limestone subsoil. Sand, gravel, and clay and larger stones called galets have been deposited These store heat, releasing it to warm the vines at night.

Châteauneuf-du-Pape

Châteauneuf-du-Pape has over 3000 ha of delimited land The soil of the appellation is varied, galets; pockets of alluvial sediment gravel, calcareous clay, and sand.

Both red and white wines are produced. Grenache is generally the principal variety in red wine blends. (Château de Beaucastel is dominated by Mouvèdre and is blended from every authorised variety. Château Rayas often releases their Châteauneuf-du-Pape Rouge as a 100% varietal Grenache.) each producer's assemblage is critical to the style

At 12.5%, the required minimum alcoholic strength is the highest in France for dry AOC wine. Additionally, AOC regulations require that producers declassify or discard at least 2% of harvested grapes (le rapé) a process to safeguard against under-ripeness.

A papal crest embossed on the shoulder of the bottle defines all estate-bottled wines.

Traditional producers use old oak foudres for extended aging, and some may even bottle a vintage from cask as it is sold, creating great variation in individual bottlings of the same wine. Carbonic maceration, barrique aging and new vinification techniques are being developed

Châteauneuf-du-Pape Varietals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variety</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grenache</td>
<td>Bourboulenc</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mourvèdre</td>
<td>Clairette / Clairette rosé</td>
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<tr>
<td>Syrah</td>
<td>Roussanne</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cinsault</td>
<td>Vaccarese</td>
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<tr>
<td>Picpoul</td>
<td>Picardin (blanc, gris, noir)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Terret noir</td>
<td>Muscardin</td>
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<td>Counoise</td>
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Côtes du Rhône more than two-thirds of the Rhône Valley’s wines are released as Côtes du Rhône It is the basic appellation for wines from the entire Rhône Valley. The Appellation covers Northern Rhône but is principally sourced from the south. Most of the wine is red, although whites and rosés are permitted.

Côtes du Rhône Villages 18 communes may append their names to the appellation. Grenache, (min 40% except in N Rhone - Syrah) Mourvèdre, and Syrah are the principal red grapes with up to 30% total of approved S Rhone varietals.
White grapes: Bourboulenc, Clairette, Grenache blanc, Roussanne, Marsane, Viognier + up to 20% Ugni blanc and/or Picpoul

Côtes du Rhône-Villages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chusclan (Red / Rosé)</th>
<th>St-Pantaleon-les-vignes (Red / White / Rosé)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Laudun (Red / White / Rosé)</td>
<td>St-Gervais (Red / White / Rosé)</td>
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<td>Massif d'Uchaux (Red only)</td>
<td>St-Maurice (Red / White / Rosé)</td>
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<td>Plan de Dieu (Red only)</td>
<td>Sablet (Red / White / Rosé)</td>
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<td>Puyméras (Red only)</td>
<td>Séguret (Red / White / Rosé)</td>
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<td>Roaix (Red / White / Rosé)</td>
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<td>Rousset les vignes (Red / White / Rosé)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rocheude (Red / White / Rosé)</td>
<td>Visan (Red / White / Rosé)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cairanne (Red / White / Rosé)</td>
<td>Gadagne (Red only)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gigondas red and rosé wines The red wines contain a minimum 50% Grenache, and a minimum 15% combined Syrah and Mourvèdre. Other Rhône grape varietals, excluding Carignan are permitted up to a maximum 10% of the total blend. The wines are similar in style to Châteauneuf-du-Pape. 12.5% minimum alcohol requirement for red wines.

Vacqueyras wines are usually red, (a small amount of white and rosé wine is produced.) A minimum 50% Grenache is required for the red wines. 12.5% minimum alcohol requirement for red wines.

Beaumes de Venise producing red wines based on a minimum 50% Grenache.

Vinsobres Red & Rose wines based on Grenache (50%) + min 20% Mouvedre & Syrah
Cairanne AOC in 2009 Minimum 50% Grenache + 25-50% Syrah + other CdR red & white -max 10%) grapes

Lirac Spread over four communes, wines similar to the Côtes du Rhône-Villages wines, and are made in red, white, and rosé versions. Grenache Noir and Blanc are the principal red varietals white wines are principally Clairette and Bourboulenc.

Tavel is the only communal appellation in France exclusively for rosé wines. The wines contain a maximum 60% Grenache, and have a maximum alcohol content of 13.5%. They are always made in a dry style.

Grignan les Adhémar (Formerly Coteaux du Tricastin) best known for red wines from Grenache & Syrah (80% max either singularly or combined) + other CdR varietals

White wines from Roussanne, Marsanne & Viognier, Grenache blanc, Clairette & Bourboulenc A small amount of rosé is also produced (Some sold as Nouveau)
Côtes du Luberon  Red / Rosé wines from a blend with min 60% total of Grenache & Syrah (min 10%) Other permitted varietals: Movèdre, Cinsault, Carignan, Counoise, Pinot noir, Gamay & Picpoul

Côtes du Ventoux Chalky subsoils on the lower slopes of Mt. Ventoux Fresh fruity lighter style red / Rosé wines from Grenache, Syrah, Cinsault & Mouvedre with up to 20% total of Picpoul Counoise, Clairette, Bourboulenc & Grenache blanc. A small amount of white wines made from Clairette & Bourboulenc Some primeur/ Nouveau wines sold (3rd Thursday November)

Côtes du Vivarais Across the river from Grignan les Adhemar. Three villages (cru) may add their names to the AC - Orgnac, St Montant, St Remèze. Best known for red / Rosé wines from Syrah -( min 40% ) & Grenache (min30%) + Cinsault & Carignan. No single varietal can account for more than 75% of the total (80% for Rosé) White wines from Clairette, Grenache & Marsanne

Coteaux de Pierrevert Rosé wines from Carignan, Cinsault & Mouvedre are the better wines from this district. Red & white wines are produced but lack quality.

Costières de Nîmes Formerly considered an appellation of Languedoc, oversight of the Costières de Nîmes AOP was transferred to officials of the Rhône Valley in 2004. Red white & Rosé

Clairette de Bellegarde a single-commune appellation within Costières de Nîmes, produces white wines from the Clairette grape.

Vins doux naturels, White, red, and rosé wines which retain natural grape sugar through mutage. Grape spirit is added to slow and finally halt the natural fermentation at a natural alcoholic strength of between 5-10%abv. The finished wines must have a minimum of 15% and a maximum of 21.5% alcohol (RS. min 45gr / ltr)

Rasteau VDN wines may be white or red, and the appellation stipulates a minimum 90% Grenache. (Noir, gris, blanc) The communes of Rasteau, Cairanne, and Sablet are eligible for the Rasteau AOP. The wines undergo at least one year of maturation prior to release: they may not be released until September 1 of the year following the harvest. "Hors d'age" indicates a maturation of at least five years. The wines may also be rancio, a maderized style in which the wine is left in open barrels, exposed to sunlight and temperature. Dry, unfortified red, white & rosé may be produced as Rasteau AOC, Red wines are notable. Produced from a minimum 50% Grenache + a minimum of 20% Mouvedre & Syrah + other CdR red varietals

Muscat de Beaumes de Venise VDN The vines are grown on the slopes around the foot of the Dentelles de Montmirail, in the communes of Beaumes-de-Venise and Aubignan, 90% of the appellation's wine is produced by the co-operative, Vignerons de Beaumes-de-Venise. The wine is produced from the Muscat de Frontignan and must contain a minimum alcohol level of 15% (See also notes on South of France)