

## Southern Rhône 2020: full report and top scoring wines

The vintage conditions and resulting wine style largely echoed those of the Northern Rhône in 2020, with wines being fairly accessible with young and white wines being particularly exceptional.



Some vintages, such as 2016 and 2018, produce one style of wine in the **Southern Rhône** and a very different one in the **Northern Rhône**. In 2020, however, that's not the case – both the north and the south experienced similarly hot, dry growing conditions, resulting in a comparable style. 'Much more finesse and elegance than 2019,' according to Frédéric Férigoule of Domaine le Sang des Cailloux.

Here, as in the Northern Rhône, the year got off to an early start. Flowering and fruit set went well and after generous rains in April and May, the vines endured a hot, very dry summer.

The west bank was hit by frost, then hail, but the rest of the Southern Rhône had a stress-free year. ‘There was nothing to do!’ says Julien Barrot of Domaine la Barroche.

From tasting the wines, it would appear that drought-related blockages in ripening were more widespread in the Southern Rhône than the north. This is something of a mixed blessing. Generally speaking, alcohols are lower than recent years and the wines have a fresh, elegant profile. Others have a green streak and lack tannin and depth.

But if you buy with care, there are plenty of wines with energy and verve that will offer balanced and refreshing early drinking. Red wines from soils with plenty of water-retaining clay fared relatively well. Old vines, with extensive root networks, also managed to sustain themselves better throughout the summer.

‘All varieties did well this year,’ according to Jacky Bernard, President of AOC Vacqueyras, which was a particularly reliable appellation this year.

**Mourvèdre** performed strongly throughout the south, providing valuable concentration and structure. Along with Mourvèdre, César Perrin at Château de Beaucastel was particularly pleased with the quality of the Roussanne in Châteauneuf-du-Pape. And Vincent Avril of Clos des Papes was impressed by the Bourboulenc and Piquepoul Blanc.

White wines in the Southern Rhône are exceptional this year – don’t miss out. Given the relatively fine tannic structures, I would expect this to be a vintage to enjoy young, but as Férigoule points out, ‘marathon runners aren’t big, muscular guys... for me, the important thing is the balance – and they have balance’.



## Château de Nalys, Grand Vin, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, 2020

The oak is present and integrated but not excessive and it doesn't rub out the fine definition and terroir expression. Long and straight, this is bold but drinkable, with a good sense of fluidity and freshness to the wine, but enough salt and extract to age well. The wines from Nalys are improving quickly, which is not surprising given the quality of the terroir: Bois Sénéchaux, la Crau and Grand Pierre. Fermented and aged in a variety of sizes of oak barrel, including 18% new oak.

Drinking Window 2023 – 2032

Points 95



## Rotem & Mounir Saouma, Amphore Bigot, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, 2020

An experiment 'to see how people made wine in antiquity,' says Mounier Saouma. From lieu-dit Bois de la Ville, made in unwaxed clay amphora, whole clusters spending 12 months inside, then pressed to stainless steel for four months before bottling. Very cloudy, yet to be settled, it possesses liquorice and cherry, extraordinary tension, intensity, incredible freshness and texture. An early stage to make a judgement on the wine, but this looks very interesting indeed.

Drinking Window 2023 – 2033

Points 97