

## France, Rhône Valley: 2007 Southern Rhône –

### Living Up to the Hype at Age Ten?

“This is a truly historic and profoundly great vintage.”

– Robert M. Parker, Jr., October 2009, *The Wine Advocate*

“The wines offer up sweet fruit, amazing purity and seamless personalities. Even the inexpensive Côtes du Rhône possess a sweetness and texture that’s hard to find in other vintages.”

– Jeb Dunnuck, August 2009, *The Rhône Report*

“It is the vintage of my lifetime for this region, and I don’t say that lightly. These 2007s will also be very long-lived given their extraordinary balance.”

– Robert M. Parker, Jr., October 2008, *The Wine Advocate*

“...the sweetness, purity and freshness present in the 2007s make everything else seem a little less glamorous.”

– Jeb Dunnuck, August 2009, *The Rhône Report*

#### The 2007 Southern Rhône

I still vividly remember tasting these wines in their infancy, both from barrel, and then from bottle the following year. While they showed a huge amount of fruit, concentration and textural richness, they also possessed singular aromatics (which is one of the hallmarks of the vintage), incredible complexity and a purity of fruit that was hard to believe. I purchased as much as I could afford, and have consistently drunk these wines on a weekly basis over the past 7-8 years. Like every vintage, there’s been subtle ups and downs, yet the purity of fruit, decadent richness, and seamlessness I first saw in these wines has always been present. Most importantly, they have rarely failed to deliver pleasure. Thus, I was thrilled to spend multiple days in the Southern Rhône in October of 2016 to retaste these wines in mass, and see where the vintage ended up as a whole, and if the wines had lived up to the early hype. I’m happy to report that this was easily the greatest ten-year retrospective I’ve done to date. Along with 1989, 1990, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2003 (some), 2005 (some) and 2010, the 2007 vintage is unquestionably one of the greatest ever for the Southern Rhône Valley. In addition, what sets this vintage apart is not only the quality found at the top addresses, but the wealth of incredible wines found throughout the region.

#### The Vintage

The 2007 vintage saw flowering occur in early May with a relatively rainy first part of the growing season. This was critical for avoiding water stress later in the year. From late June up until the harvest, the weather was extremely dry and saw relatively cool temperatures. Per the weather station in Carpentras (which lies just to the east of Châteauneuf du Pape), this was the driest vintage in the last 20+ years with only 35 millimeters of rain registered between June 16th and September 15th. The average daily high temperature recorded at the weather station in

Orange, France, from May 1st through Oct 1st was 80.3 degrees Fahrenheit (26.83 Celsius). Compare this to 83.3 in 2006 (very hot July but cooler Aug/Sep), 81.5 in 2005 and 81.4 in 2004 (2003 saw an incredible average high in the upper 80s).

There are a couple points I want to stress about the 2007 growing season:

1. This was a *cooler* than normal vintage that featured warm days and cool nights.
2. There were no heat spikes, with only 34 days above 86 degrees Fahrenheit (30 Celsius). If you limit the dates to the most significant months of July and August, the vintage becomes even more singular when compared to other great vintages.
3. This was one of the driest vintages since 1871.
4. This was an exceptionally sunny vintage that, per Harry Karis's *The Châteauneuf du Pape Wine Book*, recorded 2,958.3 hours of sunshine. This is only behind 1989 and 2005, and in the same ballpark as 2010.
5. The 2007 vintage saw more mistral days than any recent top vintage aside from 2001 and 1990.
6. Like in 1990, yields were healthy (yields are still some of the lowest in France), allowing for a long and even growing season, with plenty of hang time and incredible phenolic ripeness.

These all contributed to what is truly a great, great vintage.

### **What You Need to Know**

Now at age ten, the wines are still exuberant and youthful, with huge aromatics, and their baby fat just barely starting to give way to more nuance and elegance. These are still big, rich and undeniably sexy wines that deliver the goods on both the hedonistic and intellectual fronts. In addition to their incredible aromatics, the wines possess sensational mid-palate depth, huge concentration and perfectly ripe, sweet tannin that are so well integrated and polished they're barely noticeable unless you hunt for them. The clear majority offer pleasure today, and will continue drinking nicely for another decade. The top cuvées will rival the 1978s, which even today show remarkable purity and sweetness of fruit.

While I consider 2010 on the same qualitative level, the style is completely different and the 2007s possess a broader, more expansive and sexy style. I often say the 2010s are more classic and age-worthy, yet will never deliver the sheer hedonistic pleasure of the 2007s. It's also worth noting that in most head to head tastings between the 2007s and 2010s, I almost always prefer the 2007s. I'm certainly looking forward to additional research on this front.

Lastly, don't make the mistake of forcing every wine/vintage to fit some rigid, preconceived mold. These 2007s are a raw, unmanipulated expression of this vintage and incredible region. The vast majority are aged only in concrete tanks or neutral, larger oak foudre, and are as natural as they come. They have lived up to the hype and are some of the most incredible wines in the wine world today.

### **A Note About These Reviews**

These wines were tasted in October 2016 in the Southern Rhône. This is important as while I have had incredible success from my personal cellar, I find much more variability from wines sourced at later dates in the United States. In addition, the 2007 Domaine la Barroche Châteauneuf du Pape Pure and 2007 Domain Olivier Hillaire Châteauneuf du Pape les Petits Pieds d'Armand (I've poured out more than one undrinkable bottle of this) are known to have refermentation issues. Provenance is critical with these wines.

While I normally do individual articles for Châteauneuf du Pape, Vacqueyras and Gigondas, I added the appellations of Cairanne and Rasteau to this retrospective and opted to include all the wines in a single article.

\*As a postscript, Robert Parker wanted to add the following comments:

“In my 39 years of tasting, three vintages stand out for their greatness and singularity, and where I put my money where my mouth was. 1982 Bordeaux, 1990 Barolo and Barbaresco, and 2007 Châteauneuf-du-Pape. I bought as much of these vintages as I could afford, and have been continually pleased with that decision. While only about 25% of my original purchases of 1982s and 1990s remain, 50% or more of the Chateauneufs remain, even though we drink them all too frequently. If there has been any revelation, it is how slowly the big 1982 Medocs and 1990 Barolos have aged, and how steady and reassuringly the greatest 2007 Chateauneufs have evolved. That said, these vintages were characterized by great opulence and plush textures that often hid significant structure and tannin. So even if some wines are still young adolescents, they provide profound drinking.” – Robert M. Parker, Jr.

**89**

**2007 Domaine les  
Teyssonnières Gigondas**

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Chocolate, roasted herbs and mole-like characteristics emerge from the 2007 Gigondas (80/20 Grenache and Syrah), and it's a rich, full-bodied, mouthful of a Gigondas to drink over the coming 4-5 years.

**- Jeb Dunnuck (January, 2017)**

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**91**

**2007 Domaine les  
Teyssonnières Gigondas  
Cuvée Franck Alexandre**

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More fresh and elegant than the classic cuvée, with notes of spring flowers, black raspberries, black cherries and sappy herbs, the 2007 Gigondas Cuvée Franck Alexandre is still young and vibrant on the palate, with integrated acidity and ultra fine tannin. Drink it anytime over the coming decade.

**- Jeb Dunnuck (January, 2017)**

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