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2012 and 2011 Chateauneuf du Pape, Gigondas and Vacqueyras

Josh Raynolds

Following the universal success of the 2010s in the southern Rhone Valley and the sometimes-as-stellar 2009s, 2011 was predestined to land in their shadows unless the vintage turned out perfectly. And it didn't. Follow that up with a very good and often outstanding vintage in 2012 and the die was cast for '11, which plays nicely into the hand of wine lovers who buy what's in the glass instead of the number on the label because this is a vintage that's sure to be offered at very thin margins. Couple that with the fact that many producers decided to forgo making special cuvees from their top sites or oldest vines, opting instead to blend their best fruit into their entry-level bottlings, and the stage is set for some serious values.

Things got off to a promising start in 2011, with conditions warm and dry into the spring. Unfortunately, the ongoing coulure problem (the failure of fruit to develop after flowering) ensured a short crop yet again, which understandably set growers on edge for the rest of the season. Weather turned cold in July, which slowed down the maturation and ratcheted tensions even higher, but warm, often hot conditions commenced in August and were only slowed down by early September rains, after which normal weather conditions prevailed all the way through late October. Quality is widely variable across the region, based on what I tasted last year and this November, so careful buying will be necessary (for the first time since 2008). That said, 2011 produced more consistently successful wines than '08, with generally deeper and more intense fruit character and less herbacity and acidity. As a rule the '11s are more harmonious, generous and round than their '08 counterparts and will provide plenty of immediate mass appeal.

In fact, Julien Barrot, of Domaine La Barroche in Chateauneuf-du-Pape, compares the texture and tannic structure of his 2011s to those of his '09s, pointing out that in both vintages he was able to harvest well into October and that in both years "fruit ripeness and tannins were in harmony." In his case the ripeness of 2011 means wines that check in at over 17% alcohol, at least in the Pure bottling. On the other hand, producers whose wines rely heavily on the late-ripening syrah and mourvedre, like Chateau de Beaucastel, made wines with ripe tannins at lower alcohol levels. Marc Perrin told me that given the recent short grenache crops, his ancestors were looking pretty smart for their relatively intensive planting of mourvedre. That thought was echoed by Vincent Avril as well, who opined that "the whole point of using all of the allowed grapes was to avoid falling prey to problems of monoculture."

Despite what the labels might say, always keep in mind that labeling laws in France allow for an over/under on the declared alcohol level of the wine. So plenty of 2011s, despite being labelled as carrying 14.5% alcohol, may actually clock in at as high as 16%--that's 32 proof, by the way--which hardly implies weak-kneed character. In short, this is by no means a vintage to shun, but it's also no 2010 or 2009, or, it appears, 2012, a year in which precious few producers swung and missed. If you choose carefully, plenty of delicious, fruit-forward and accessible wines can be found, and market realities suggest that they'll be available at extremely attractive prices.

The classic, juicy 2012s. *After the stress of 2011, growers caught a break, in terms of climate if not yield, in 2012. As I mentioned earlier, coulure reduced the grenache crop by as much as 60%, which is an economic disaster for a region that depends so heavily on the variety for the majority of its wines. Most producers I visited reported overall production to be off by as much as 50%, and Vincent Avril quipped sardonically that "maybe we need to come up with a new definition of "normal" for yields because this is getting to be sadly consistent." The upside was the fact that heavy rains at the end of 2011 (almost three times normal for the period) had replenished water tables--a very good thing as the months of June and July of 2012 were hot and extremely dry. Moreover, the 2011 growing season was followed by a brutally cold winter in which many old as well as young vines died, especially in the higher altitudes of*

Gigondas and Vacqueyras. The hot summer of '12 ensured optimal ripeness of the fruit, and rains returned in August to revive the vines, followed by the reliable mistral, which kept the vineyards dry through a harvest that lasted until late October.

So there are plenty of ripe, fleshy, powerful wines to be found from 2012, and overall quality is a step up from 2011, for sure. In fact, many producers told me that alcohol and pH levels often approach those of the opulent 2007s, but tannins are higher and, in most cases, so are acidity levels. It does not appear that the wines have quite the lushness of the '09s or the powerful tannic structure of the '10s, which, in the opinion of producers like Thierry Sabon of Clos du Mont-Olivet, Louis Barruol of Saint-Cosme and Isabel Ferrando of Saint-Prefert, makes the '12s "classic" and "balanced."

Final judgment on the 2012s will obviously be reserved for next year but, based on the fairly sizable number of "little" finished 2012 Rhones that I have tried at this point, it appears to be a vintage that will appeal to those who like to drink their wines on the young side or with a few years of bottle age. My hunch is that they're not built for long-term aging, like the 2010s and 2005s, but that they will have better legs than the 2007s and, perhaps, most 2009s.

Featured Producers

Domaine la Barroche

Julien Barrot has been focused on making only two bottlings for a few years now--Signature, which is a grenache-dominant blend, and Pure, his flagship wine, from the estate's oldest grenache vines in the Grande Pierre *lieu-dit*. The latter vines are now over 115 years old, making them some of the most ancient of the entire region. He admitted that he is naturally inclined to experiment and that it's hard for him to resist the temptation to do multiple *cuvees*, "but it's more important to maintain consistency and stability than to be all over the place, as fun as that might be." Barrot's sister Laetitia is now firmly in charge of administrative work at the family domain, which in France is a particularly onerous endeavor, and thus Julien has more time to devote to vineyard and cellar work. The result has been a subtle shift to more elegance in the Barroche wines, a conscious move that Julien attributes to stricter attention to retaining acidity in the grapes and to gentler extraction. That said, these are still wines that typically carry lofty alcohol levels. "Chateauneuf is considered elegant among wines of the south," Julien observed, "but even the most feminine Chateauneuf is always going to have power and weight, even in years like 2011, so working the wines too much can push them away from elegance."

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Signature (65% grenache, with syrah, mourvedre and cinsault): Bright ruby. Candied red fruits, spicecake and minerals on the highly perfumed nose, with an exotic blood orange nuance in the background. Juicy and precise, displaying very good clarity and lift to its sappy raspberry and cherry flavors. Darker in tone on the finish, clinging with impressive tenacity and appealing sweetness. **91-93**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Pure (all grenache, from vines planted in the late 1890s; raised entirely in *foudres*): Deep ruby. Highly perfumed, vibrant aromas of black raspberry, floral oils, minerals and Asian spices. Juicy, precise and energetic, displaying a suave blend of power and finesse. Packs a serious punch but comes off as lithe. Sharply focused red berry, spicecake and mineral flavors linger on the sappy, persistent finish. **93-95**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Signature Vivid ruby. Dark berry and floral scents show very good clarity and spicy lift. Offers gently sweet black and blue fruit flavors that spread out with air, picking up subtle anise and saffron nuances and a hint of white pepper. Lingers with very good energy and spiciness and gentle tannic grip. This should be very drinkable in a couple of years, or even now if you give it some aeration. **91**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Pure Bright purple. Room-filling aromas of black and blue fruit liqueur, sandalwood, licorice and candied lavender. Sweet, deeply concentrated and expansive, offering palate-coating blueberry, cherry compote and spicecake flavors and an intense floral pastille quality. Shows striking power on the sappy, penetrating finish, which is firmed by chewy but harmonious tannins. This bruiser weighs in at over 17% alcohol: consider yourself fairly warned.

93

(David Bowler Wine, www.bowlerwine.com; The Sorting Table, www.thesortingtable.com)

Chateau de Beaucastel

"It's been a good thing that we're so obsessed with mourvedre because relying on grenache for the last few years has been a real pain for people," Marc Perrin told me when we sat down to taste the new Beaucastel releases in November. He noted that underripe grapes were a serious problem in 2011, so fastidious sorting was mandatory. "Now I know how zinfandel growers must feel about having to deal with irregular ripeness within individual clusters," he added. Needless to say, yields were down sharply in '11 (50% less than in 2010 here) but the resulting wines show very good depth and flavor intensity. As for 2012, Perrin calls it "a vintage of balance and fruit intensity, such that the wines can be drunk young, but they will also age because there aren't hard tannins that need time to fade into the background."

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Brilliant ruby. Powerful aromas of candied blackberry, blueberry and licorice, with suggestions of lavender and cracked pepper. Lush, intensely flavored and supple in texture, offering spicy dark berry and cherry compote and olive tapenade flavors complicated by a subtle floral nuance. Finishes sappy and very long, with resonating spiciness, a hint of licorice and chewy, slow-building tannins. **92-94**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Hommage A Jacques Perrin Inky ruby. Heady cherry and blackcurrant scents are complicated by smoky herbs, pipe tobacco, potpourri and dusty minerals. Broad and pliant, offering palate-staining dark berry preserve flavors given lift and bite by a spicecake quality. Sweet and velvety on the relentless finish, which leaves candied cherry and mineral notes behind. **94-96**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$99) Deep ruby. Dark berries, dried cherry, anise and lavender on the highly perfumed nose. Offers intense cassis and bitter cherry flavors with sexy floral pastille and spicecake nuances. Aeration brings out a smoky quality that carries through the long, smooth, gently tannic finish. There's 40% mourvedre here but I wouldn't have guessed it based on this wine's forward, voluptuous character. **92**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Hommage A Jacques Perrin (\$233) Saturated ruby. Heady, expansive aromas of black and blue fruit liqueur, potpourri and incense, with smoky Indian spices emerging with air. Juicy, strikingly intense blackberry and blueberry flavors are complicated by notes of minerals and candied violet, with a subtle peppery quality adding bite. Velvety tannins give shape to the extremely long, spicy, penetrating finish, with the floral note echoing. This stunning, palate-staining wine gets my vote as the best Chateauneuf of its vintage. **95**

(Vineyard Brands, www.vineyardbrands.com)

Domaine Henri Bonneau

When I asked Henri Bonneau about the ageworthiness of most modern-day Chateauneufs, he commented that "many wines today are bottled much younger than was the tradition when I was learning, with a lot more reduction than before." That gives a lot of primary "obvious" fruit, he said, which is good for people who like to drink their Chateauneuf when it's young. "But what about after the wine has been in bottle for a while? Will it have the texture of a wine that slowly took on oxygen during *élevage*, will it have as much complexity?" That led to talk about the tannic structure of wines that are rushed too quickly into bottle (which means pretty much every red wine in the world, measured by the Bonneau bottling regimen). He said that he likes to bottle and release his wines when he thinks that the fruit and tannins are in harmony, "but not so much that they have to be drunk immediately." As I noted last year, the wines here seem to have acquired more polish than in the past, but that's strictly relative as these are still among the most idiosyncratic wines made in France today. They've always had quirkiness and personality to burn, so long-time fans have no reason for alarm. The 2005 Marie Beurrier, which Bonneau opened after our tasting, is still extremely young but displays very impressive depth, energy and concentrated red fruit character and notes of woodsmoke and minerals. Hands off, please.

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Marie Beurrier Bright ruby-red. Vibrant, perfumed aromas of redcurrant, raspberry and floral oils are accented by white pepper. Nicely delineated and sweet in the mouth, with vibrant red fruit liqueur flavors enlivened by juicy acidity. The sweet, persistent finish features building sweetness, supple tannins and a hint of allspice. Extremely elegant, even polished and refined, especially for a Bonneau wine. **92-95**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Reserve Des Celestins Full ruby. Heady black and blue fruit aromas are lifted by smoky mineral and exotic Indian spice nuances. Offers deep, palate-staining blueberry and floral pastille flavors that pick up spiciness and energy with air. Closes smooth and long, with outstanding thrust and velvety tannins. **94-97**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Marie Beurrier Bright ruby. Wild, slightly gamey dark berry and cherry pit aromas, with notes of woodsmoke and licorice building in the glass. Smoky and meaty on the palate, offering cassis and bitter cherry flavors that gain sweetness with air. Closes with youthfully firm tannins, an echo of smoked meat and good length. Distinctly *sauvage* at this early stage in its *elevage*. **89-92**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Reserve Des Celestins Deep ruby. Potent aromas of cassis, blueberry, fruitcake, violet and smoky minerals. Impressively deep, seamless and broad, offering black and blue fruit flavors accented by espresso, cola, star anise and cracked pepper. For all its power and richness this wild wine comes across as almost feminine, showing impressive lift and focus thanks to bright, juicy acidity. The deep, sappy blackcurrant and blueberry flavors come back strong on the long, spicy finish. **93-95**

2010 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Marie Beurrier Bright ruby. Smoked meat, cherry pit, raspberry liqueur and pungent herbs on the highly perfumed nose. Offers intense, deeply pitched red fruit flavors that are lifted by suggestions of cracked pepper and minerals. The meaty quality returns on the finish, which is framed by dusty, chewy tannins. **92-93**

2010 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Reserve Des Celestins Saturated ruby. A complex bouquet evokes black and blue fruit preserves, licorice, pungent herbs and floral oils. Smooth, sweet and expansive, offering intense cassis and boysenberry flavors and a hint of bitter chocolate. Impressively sweet and focused on the endless finish, which leaves notes of spicecake and dark berries behind. **95-96**

2009 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Marie Beurrier Bright ruby. Sexy aromas of red and dark berry preserves, along with notes of incense and lavender. Supple, seamless and broad, offering juicy black raspberry and blueberry flavors and a touch of candied flowers. Shows the ripeness of the vintage to excellent effect, with plenty of depth but no excess fat. Closes smooth, sweet and long, with an echo of lavender and lingering smokiness. **93-94**

2009 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Reserve Des Celestins Dark ruby. Pungent, expansive aromas of black and blue fruits, licorice, incense and violet, with a zesty spicy overtone. Shows outstanding depth and power, with potent dark fruit compote flavors and an enlivening jolt of minerality adding lift and bite. Closes sweet, sappy and extremely long, leaving sexy floral pastille and spicecake notes behind. Fans of Bonneau's wines need to start hoarding their nickels and Benjamins for this one. **95-96**

2008 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Reserve Des Celestins Deep ruby. High-pitched aromas of red berry liqueur, cherry pit, lavender and allspice, with a zesty mineral nuance adding vivacity. Sweet and expansive on the palate, offering vibrant black raspberry and floral pastille flavors that become richer and spicier with aeration. Silky tannins give shape to the strikingly persistent finish, which features sappy dark berry and fruitcake qualities. **94**

2007 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Reserve Des Celestins (\$315) Deep ruby. An exotically perfumed bouquet evokes blackberry and cherry preserves, candied flowers, licorice and incense, with a bright mineral overtone. Stains the palate with sappy, spice-tinged dark berry and fruitcake flavors that are deepened by a suggestion of fruitcake. At once ripe and lively, finishing with superb energy and length and supple, building tannins. This is surprisingly graceful for a 2007 Chateauneuf, especially at this stage when most of them have gone to sleep or at least are in a sullen mood. **96**

(Wines of France, www.winesoffranceinc.com)

Bosquet des Papes

Nicolas Boiron says that he finds most of the 2011s to have "a little sweetness and easy tannins, which makes them easy to drink now." His shorthand take on the most recent vintages is to go ahead and drink the '11s now and over the next few years. "But absolutely wait on your '10s and also the '12s, which are acting more and more like the '10s as they age." While he believes that his own 2010s are the best wines he has ever made, he cautions that "they're really shut down and all structure and bones at this point. Anybody who drinks them now and expects to get pleasure is going to be disappointed."

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. Smoky cherry, cassis and black pepper on the nose, with hints of olive, violet and dark chocolate adding complexity. Big, mouthfilling and chewy, but with surprising vivacity to its fleshy dark berry and floral pastille flavors. Firm and focused on the finish, with supple tannins adding support and shape. Nicely concentrated for an entry-level bottling. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape A La Gloire De Mon Grand-Pere (100% grenache): Bright ruby-red. Expansive, mineral-accented aromas of raspberry and blueberry compote, potpourri and *garrigue*. Lush and creamy in texture, with palate-staining red fruit and lavender pastille flavors complicated by a smoky nuance. The floral quality comes back on the powerful, subtly tannic finish, which shows very good clarity and lift. **91-93**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Chante Le Merle Vieilles Vignes (made with whole clusters): Deep ruby. Complex bouquet of ripe cherry, blood orange, succulent herbs and potpourri. Nicely concentrated and sappy, with cherry and bitter rhubarb flavors gaining sweetness with air. Finishes with powerful thrust, good grip and fine-grained tannins, leaving a sexy floral pastille note behind. **91-93**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$46) Bright ruby. Ripe raspberry and cherry on the deeply scented nose and in the mouth. Fleshy and broad, with very good depth and a spicy nuance adding lift. Closes smooth and long, with lingering spiciness and pliant, harmonious tannins coming on late. **90**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Chante Le Merle Vieilles Vignes (\$75) Brilliant ruby-red. Fresh redcurrant and cherry-cola on the highly perfumed, floral nose. Broad and deep but lively on the palate, offering intense red fruit preserve, lavender pastille and anise flavors lifted by peppery spices. Tightly focused on the youthfully tannic, persistent finish, which smoothly plays richness off vivacity. There's 16.5% alcohol here, in case you're driving. **93**

(Wines of France, www.winesoffranceinc.com)

Domaine Charvin

"Nobody can call the last few vintages here boring," Laurent Charvin told me in November, which he explained was "his way of saying that there's never been so much stress and work for so little wine." Like all of his colleagues, Charvin is alarmed by the ongoing issue of short to seemingly nonexistent grenache crops, courtesy of *coulure*, which he says "have had a huge financial impact" on growers and producers. "While Chateauneuf isn't suffering as much as Volnay, for example, it's going to be a huge problem if we don't get back to normal production soon. A small producer can only absorb so much yield loss." Charvin views 2011 as "a vintage in the line of 2008, 2006 and 2004, but with more fruit intensity than 2008 and probably 2006." It's a vintage to drink during its first decade, "but there isn't a huge hurry."

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. Vibrant, mineral-laced red fruit and floral scents are complemented by notes of licorice and succulent herbs. Densely packed and lively, boasting superb clarity and lift to its sweet black raspberry and cherry flavors. Expands and deepens on the finish, which is firmed by smooth, fine-grained tannins. Lovely balance here. **92-94**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$70) Brilliant ruby-red. Complex, seductive bouquet of raspberry and cherry preserves, pungent herbs and fresh lavender. Juicy, penetrating and pure, with superb clarity and lift to its sweet red fruit flavors. Silky tannins give shape to the finish, which clings with outstanding tenacity and resonating florality. I find this elegant Chateauneuf extremely easy to drink now but it has the depth and balance to reward at least another six years of patience. **93**

(Weygandt-Metzler Importing, www.weygandtmetzler.com)

Clos des Brusquieres

The 2012 and 2011 Chateauneufs produced by Claude Courtil and his sons David and Jerome were among the most elegant wines I tasted during my November trip through the southern Rhone. I daresay they would go a long way toward renewing the lost faith of backsliding Chateauneuf believers who have bought into the notion that all the wines of the region are high in octane and over the top. Which isn't to say that the Courtils' wines are lightweights--far from it, in fact. The remarkable 2007 Cuvee Speciale, some of which is still aging in old *barriques*, checks in at 17% alcohol, which gives the Usseglios and Janasses a run for their money in the richness stakes. The key, Claude told me, "is to be sure that you're harvesting fruit before there's any sign of raisining, and not just in appearance. You have to taste the grapes to be sure that the freshness is maintained." Freshness is achievable at high sugar

levels if you have the right soils and expositions, he went on, adding that "if you harvest here without full ripeness you have high acidity, sure, but the flavors aren't developed and the wine won't age positively."

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Tasted in three components. #1: Intensely perfumed in a distinctly pinot way, offering intense red berry and floral scents and a strong mineral component. Weightless and pure, with superb focus and depth. #2: Deeper cherry and dark berry character, with notes of licorice and black tea. Shows serious depth and power, with strong finishing grip. #3: Even richer than #2, offering bitter cherry and dark chocolate aromas and flavors and a hint of candied violet. The ultimate wine should be richer than usual for this estate, whose wines are always among the purest and most delineated of the Chateauneufs that I taste every year. **92-94**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$39) Ruby-red. Pungent, seductive perfume of dark berry preserves, blood orange, potpourri and spicecake. Silky and energetic but surprisingly dense, offering intense red and dark berry flavors and notes of licorice and candied lavender. This nicely balanced, already-delicious wine shows no excess fat, excellent finishing clarity and smooth, harmonious tannins that add grip. **92**

(Wines of France, www.winesoffranceinc.com)

Le Clos du Caillou

In Bruno Gaspard's opinion, "2011 could turn out a lot like 2009 because the ripeness is similar and so are the tannins." He pointed out that all of the 2011s here were bottled at between 16.5% and 17.2% alcohol, "so calling them anything but rich is impossible." While there are definitely plenty of shrill and/or hard-edged wines to be found from 2011, "if you waited for the tannins to soften you didn't have that problem and you also got higher sugars, so it's a question of who was patient and who wasn't." Like a number of his neighbors, Gaspard likens 2012 to 2010 "but with less serious structure, so they'll definitely be for drinking before the 2010s and maybe about the same time as the 2009s." While the wines here have a solid track record for aging, Gaspard prefers to err on the younger side for a drinking plan, citing his own love for wines "where the fruit is still intense and fresh."

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. Aromas of raspberry liqueur, smoky minerals and lavender, with a deeper cherry pit quality in the background. Smooth and fleshy on the palate, offering sweet red fruit and floral pastille flavors and an undercurrent of zesty minerality. Packs a punch but comes off as lithe and precise on the long, spicy finish. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Safres Bright ruby. Mineral-tinged redcurrant, raspberry and spicecake aromas, with a hint of candied lavender. Clean and zesty, showing intense red fruit and floral character, assertive spiciness and very good clarity. Finishes silky and long, with vibrant berry character, soft tannins and a lingering note of tangy minerality. **91-93**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Quartz Deep ruby. Powerful, intensely perfumed aromas of red and dark berry preserves, incense and lavender, with a piquant mineral topnote. Stains the palate with intense black raspberry and cherry flavors, picking up a darker cassis quality with air. Supple tannins build through the long, sweet, penetrating finish, which highlights the berry note. **92-94**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Reserve Opaque ruby. Expressive cherry compote, incense and licorice aromas are complemented by potpourri, vanilla and smoky minerals. Seamless, juicy and deep, offering expansive black raspberry and cherry-vanilla flavors and a suave floral pastille quality. Shows impressive density with zero excess weight, finishing sweet, broad and very long. Potentially one of the wines of the vintage. **93-95**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$54) (all grenache): Vivid ruby. Fresh raspberry and floral scents are complemented by a note of licorice and given a lively kick by a suggestion of white pepper. Racy and seamless in texture, offering gently sweet red fruit and blood orange flavors that put on weight with aeration. Closes with strong cut and very good length, leaving a sexy floral note behind.

91

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Safres (\$68) Brilliant ruby. Black raspberry, cherry compote, blood orange and Asian spices on the heady nose. Shows excellent depth and focus, with sweet dark berry and floral pastille flavors picking up a smoky nuance with aeration. Finishes sappy, sweet and very long, with silky tannins sneaking up on the back end. **93**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Quartz (\$100) (85% grenache and 15% syrah): Bright ruby. Candied cherry, blackberry, anise and lavender on the deeply scented nose. Offers palate-staining dark fruit flavors that become livelier and spicier with air. Closes smooth and very long, with velvety tannins adding shape and gentle grip. Just as impressive as the Safres but in a darker style, with perhaps less elegance but more heft and power. Call it a Bonnes-Mares to the Safre's Musigny. **93**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Reserve (\$190) (60% grenache and 40% mourvedre): Inky ruby. Heady aromas of red fruit liqueur, lavender, sandalwood and cola, with a smoky mineral topnote. Picks up a darker fruit character with air, showing superb concentration and spicy lift. The floral and cola notes come back strong on the finish, which is framed by smooth, sweet, harmonious tannins. This sexy Chateauneuf was one of the most impressive '11s that I tasted from the southern Rhone this year. **94**

(North Berkeley Imports, www.northberkeleyimports.com)

Clos des Papes

Yields in recent vintages have been "historically terrible" at this historic property, Paul Avril told me in November. "In terms of production," he said, "we have basically made four vintages out of the last six, including 2013," pointing out that production in 2011 barely hit 18 hectoliters per hectare and that he had his team drop almost a third of the potential crop during the summer. Avril is fond of pointing out that he has never sold fruit or wine to the *negoce* and that he has never made a second wine or a super single-site or old-vines bottling either. "All of the fruit that's left after selection in the vineyard and at the sorting tables goes into the one Clos des Papes," he said, adding that "it's for all intents, in a typical year, a 70,000-bottle special *cuvée* because it's a selection of a selection of a selection." He compares his 2012 Chateauneuf to his 2005 "because of its elegance" but also sees elements of his 2010 "because of its structure." He has no doubt that it will age gracefully, by the way.

At the end of our tasting Avril opened his 2010, which is starting to close down as "the tannins are coming forward now." We also tasted his 2008, a wine (and vintage) that he thinks is going to surprise people. There's 30% mourvedre in the '08, he told me, "which is going to help it hold up far better than a lot of people expect." I found it to be quite complex already, with smoky, mineral-tinged red fruit character, good spicy cut and a long, focused finish. It can be drunk now but I'd bet on another three to five years of positive development.

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Tasted in three components, from three different *foudres*, followed by a hypothetical final blend that Avril has assembled in its own *foudre*. #1 (80% grenache, 10% syrah and the rest "all the other varieties): Intense red fruit and floral scents, with a bright mineral overtone. Silky and fruit-driven, offering sweet raspberry liqueur and lavender flavors and a touch of white pepper. Spicy and precise, with serious finishing power. This is carrying 15.7% alcohol. #2) (70% grenache, 20% syrah and 10% mourvedre): Deeper and darker in character than #1, offering bitter cherry and blackberry aromas and flavors and a touch of licorice. A sexy floral note dominates the finish, which is smooth, focused and long. #3 (55% grenache, 40% mourvedre and 5% counoise): Exotic black and blue fruit compote on the nose, with a smoky note gaining power with air. Rich and energetic, finishing with excellent clarity and thrust. A hypothetical final blend: Opaque ruby. Heady aromas of dark berry preserves, potpourri, anise and spicecake, with a zesty mineral topnote. Juicy, focused and penetrating, offering sweet black raspberry and floral pastille flavors and a strong mineral undertone. Closes spicy and long, with smooth tannins folding smoothly into the fruit. **93-95**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$128) Vivid ruby. Smoky cherry, red berry and potpourri scents show excellent clarity and pick up spiciness with aeration. Stains the palate with intense black raspberry and bitter cherry flavors, with a sexy floral pastille quality adding complexity. Finishes with impressive energy and thrust, firmed by fine-grained tannins and piquant minerality. Avril thinks that this will be an ager based on its balance. **93**

(Wines of France, www.winesoffranceinc.com)

Clos du Mont-Olivet

Generational shifts and typical French inheritance turmoil have forced this branch of the extended Sabon family to move operations into a new (for them) cellar across the road from the old family house. It has also caused the paring down of a number of Clos du Mont-

Olivet's vineyards, "mostly from the Cotes-du-Rhone," Thierry Sabon told me in November. While the process was stressful, Thierry is relieved that by scaling back the politics he can now "be even more focused on the vines and cellar" than before. In his opinion, 2012 is a fruit vintage. "The wines have good but not too much structure so it's not necessary to drink them too young, but their biggest asset is fruit intensity, which will make them approachable early." He added that his 2011s have been a surprise: "they became richer as they got closer to bottling." While Sabon still thinks that they emphasize freshness, they also have the concentration and balance to allow at least five to seven years of positive development in the cellar.

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Le Petit Mont Bright ruby. Black raspberry, Indian spices and anise on the expressive nose. Juicy, spicy and supple in texture, with smoky dark berry and fruitcake flavors lifted by juicy acidity. A fleshy but lively Chateauneuf with smooth, integrated tannins and very good finishing clarity and sweetness. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. Lively aromas of fresh red berries, potpourri and Asian spices, with a hint of blood orange adding an exotic flourish. Smooth, seamless and focused on the palate, offering vibrant, mineral-tinged raspberry and bitter cherry flavors and a touch of anise. Supple tannins come on late and add shape to the long, sweet, penetrating finish.

91-93

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Du Papet Brilliant ruby. Spice- and mineral-accented red fruits and lavender on the intensely perfumed nose. Juicy, focused and pure, with excellent depth to its raspberry and cherry compote flavors. Puts on weight with air without any loss of vibrancy. The mineral element carries strongly through the finish, which features silky tannins and a strong red fruit quality. Extremely elegant Chateauneuf, balanced to age. **94-96**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$33) Vivid ruby. Sexy, mineral-tinged red berry and floral pastille aromas pick up a pungent note of *garrigue* with air and show very good clarity. Sappy, penetrating and lively on the palate, offering sweet raspberry and cherry flavors and a touch of white pepper.

The mineral note echoes on the persistent finish, which is firmed by chewy, fine-grained tannins. **91**
(Michael Skurnik Wines, www.skurnikwines.com; North Berkeley Imports, www.northberkeleyimports.com)

Clos Saint Jean

In Vincent Maurel's opinion, "in simple terms 2011 is a pretty vintage while 2012 is richer. Not the structure of 2010 or the weight of 2009 or the ripeness of 2007, maybe more classic than those." He thinks that a generation ago the '12s would have been considered massive "but it's a different climate now, for weather and for peoples' tastes." Maurel believes that 2004 is the most recent vintage that people should be actively drinking ("they are *a point*") and that his 2011s will follow a similar trajectory "but maybe always having a little more depth."

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. Dark berries and cherry compote on the nose, with a touch of smoky herbs in the background. Round and velvety in texture, offering pliant bitter cherry and blackberry flavors and a hint of dark chocolate. Plush, broad and very fruity, finishing with lingering sweetness and supple tannins. **89-91**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Vieilles Vignes Opaque ruby. High-pitched raspberry, floral pastille and Asian spice aromas are deepened by notes of cola and licorice. Deeper and darker in character on the palate, offering sweet cherry and black raspberry flavors and a suggestion of spicecake. Finishes silky and long, with exotic spice and floral qualities and smooth, well-knit tannins. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape La Combe Des Fous Vivid ruby. Blackberry, cherry-cola and spicecake on the intensely perfumed nose, with a sexy floral nuance adding complexity. Youthfully primary cherry and dark berry flavors gain sweetness and flesh with air, picking up a gentle vanilla quality and a touch of smoky Indian spices. Finishes with very good grip and focus and lingering dark berry and spice qualities. **92-94**

2012 Chateauneuf Du Pape Sanctus Sanctorum Saturated ruby. Explosive aromas of red fruit preserves, sandalwood, potpourri and cola, with a strong spicy overtone. Offers palate-coating raspberry and cherry compote flavors and suggestions of vanilla, spicecake and floral pastilles. Reaches every corner of the palate, displaying superb clarity and a seamless texture. Finishes sweet, broad and long, with supple tannins and an echo of candied lavender. **93-95**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Brilliant ruby. Black raspberry, lavender and white pepper on the expressive nose. Juicy and open-knit, offering lively red fruit flavors and a jolt of bracing acidity. Closes silky and sweet, with no obvious tannins and very good fruity persistence. This is already delicious. **90**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Vieilles Vignes (\$50) Ruby-red. Sexy raspberry and cherry compote aromas are complicated by exotic notes of apricot and potpourri. Offers palate-staining red fruit liqueur flavors that gain weight and power with aeration. Impressively lively for its heft and intensity, finishing sweet, gently tannic and very long. Vincent Maurel told me that the plantings for this wine, which are virtually all grenache, stretch back to 1905. **92**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape La Combe Des Fous (\$105) Vivid ruby-red. Red berry liqueur and floral pastille aromas are complicated by hints of vanilla, incense and cola. Fleshy, mineral-laced raspberry and blueberry flavors gain sweetness and depth with air, picking up suave notes of lavender and allspice. Finishes silky and extremely long, with resonating spiciness and smooth, harmonious tannins. **93**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deus Ex Machina (\$100) Bright ruby. An exotic bouquet displays red fruit preserves, cola, sandalwood and smoky minerals. Coats the palate with intense black raspberry and cherry-cola flavors and picks up sweet floral pastille and fruitcake nuances with air. Strikingly deep and focused on the finish, which clings with outstanding tenacity and harmonious tannins. **94**

(Eric Solomon Selections, www.europeancellars.com)

Les Halos de Jupiter

Philippe Cambie and Michel Gassier's grenache-centric project is focused exclusively on wines made predominantly or exclusively from that variety. Cambie calls grenache "the Jupiter of southern Rhone varieties, because virtually every wine from the region revolves around it." These wines are raised entirely or almost entirely in concrete or neutral wood "to let the grenache express itself in the individual voice of each region," Cambie told me, and they are all sourced from old-vine plantings throughout the region that are farmed by growers and *vignerons* with whom Cambie has developed close friendships during his extensive consulting career.

2012 Vacqueyras (all grenache): Inky purple. Exotic, highly expressive aromas of blackberry, blueberry compote and floral oils, with complicating notes of Indian spices and fresh herbs. Supple and expansive on the palate, offering sweet black and blue fruit flavors and smoky minerality. The floral note returns on the gently tannic, very persistent finish.

91

2012 Gigondas (all grenache): Deep ruby. Spicy raspberry, lavender and smoky minerals on the nose, with complicating notes of white pepper and *garrigue*. Appealingly sweet and sharply focused, offering lively red fruit flavors that put on weight and gain in spiciness with aeration. Shows very good balance and clarity, finishing sweet, seamless and long. This wine was recently bottled but is none the worse for wear. **92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (90% grenache and 10% syrah): Deep ruby. Expressive aromas of musky blackberry, cassia and floral oils. Plush, pliant and sweet, with smoky blueberry and bitter chocolate flavors complicated by zesty minerals and licorice. Finishes very long and spicy, with smooth, even tannins and a whiplash of candied lavender. This has the concentration and structure to reward aging but can also be enjoyed now. Most of this fruit was grown in the northern sector of the region, at Cabrieres, and 10% was grown near Vaudieu. **92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Adastree Opaque ruby. Powerful black and blue fruit aromas are brightened by allspice, fresh lavender and cracked pepper. At once rich and energetic, offering spicy blueberry and black raspberry flavors complicated by hints of allspice and licorice. Closes on a zesty mineral note, with excellent focus and power and silky tannins. **93**

(Philippe Cambie, www.philippeCambie.com)

Domaine du Pegau

The big news here is the Feraud family's recent acquisition of 41 hectares of vineyards, all planted to red varieties, due south of Chateauneuf and abutting Sorgues to the west, and spanning the Cotes-du-Rhone-Villages (25 hectares), Cotes-du-Rhone (5) and more generic IGP (11) appellations. This almost triples the Ferauds' land holdings (they own 21 hectares

in Chateauneuf-du-Pape) and will allow them, according to Laurence Feraud, "to reach a far greater market than we could with Pegau." And while she continues her *negociant* projects throughout the southern Rhone, "there's nothing like having your own vines." I've noticed a bit more refinement and less *sauvage* character to the Pegau Chateauneufs in the last few vintages, with 2008 being a high-water mark for wildness and gaminess here. That said, a couple of '08s that I've had recently were in no way excessively funky, which wasn't the case a year or so ago. I suspect that bottle variation is at work here as I continue to hear of widely variable drinking experiences with this wine. Incidentally, the 1999 Pegau is a knockout right now, offering vibrant red fruit and floral character, striking freshness and fully absorbed tannins.

2009 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Laurence (roughly 80% grenache, 6% syrah, 4% mourvedre and 10% "everything else"): Bright violet color; looks a lot younger than it is. High-pitched red fruit and floral pastille scents are deepened by notes of olive, licorice and smoked meat. Sweet, expansive and seamless, offering intense raspberry and cherry compote flavors accented by white pepper and succulent herbs. Velvety tannins build on a finish of appealing sweetness, with a touch of bitter chocolate. **94**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Reservee Bright purple. Smoky, spice-accented aromas of blackberry and cherry-cola, with sexy floral and mineral overtones. Sweet and expansive on the palate, offering an array of red and dark berry preserve flavors complicated by hints of Indian spices and black pepper. Rich and energetic, with strong finishing thrust, slow-building tannins and a late kick of smoky minerality. I was looking for some funky gaminess here but didn't find any. **92-94**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Reservee (80% grenache, 6% syrah, 4% mourvedre and the rest "everything else"): Deep ruby. Ripe black and blue fruit aromas are complicated by potpourri, incense and licorice, with a smoky topnote. Sappy, focused dark berry and bitter cherry flavors are sharpened by juicy acidity and show very good depth. Lots of fruit here but there's good structure as well. Finishes sweet and long, with velvety tannins adding shape. As with the '12, there's a degree of elegance to this wine and less of the wild edge of the Pegaus of a few vintages back.

92

2010 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Inspiration Ruby-red. Heady, spice-tinged aromas of candied red fruits, lavender pastille, incense and licorice, with a smoky nuance gaining strength with aeration. Offers vibrant, palate-staining raspberry liqueur and bitter cherry flavors lifted by juicy acidity and a hint of white pepper. Supple tannins come up late and add shape to the strikingly long, sweet, penetrating finish. This wine is still aging in a *foudre*. **94-96**

(Hand Picked Selections, www.handpickedselections.com; Martine's Wines, www.mwines.com)

Chateau Rayas

Production at Rayas was off by a full third in 2012, according to Emmanuel Reynaud, "but what fruit we got was excellent--clean and ripe, with excellent acidity and tannins." Reynaud compares '12 favorably with 2010 "for depth of flavor" but thinks that the earlier vintage is a safer bet for long-term cellaring thanks to its "greater structure and more solid tannins." Two thousand eleven is a vintage with a lot of charm but some of its power has yet to emerge, he added. The low yields ensured good depth and, if a grower was willing not to rush into harvest, "very good ripeness of the fruit was possible, with acidity that was still fresh and with easy tannins."

2012 Pignan Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Reserve Deep red. Sexy, high-pitched aromas of fresh red berries, lavender and Indian spices, plus a touch of olive. Sappy and precise, with very good lift and clarity to its black raspberry and bitter cherry flavors. Puts on weight with air and finishes sappy, penetrating and very long, with slow-building tannins. Quite rich and powerful for this bottling but still elegant. **92-94**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Reserve Presented in three components, as is Reynaud's custom. #1: High-pitched red berry and floral aromas show superb purity and focus. Racy, crisp and concentrated, offering intense raspberry and cherry flavors and a bracing mineral nuance. Finishes long and spicy, with a whiplash of zesty minerality and lingering red fruit. #2: Deeper and darker in profile, offering sweet black raspberry and cherry-cola aromas and flavors and a hint of licorice. Shows impressive power on the close, with dusty tannins coming on late. #3: Spicy, floral dark berry aromas, with an exotic Indian spice note in the background. Stains the palate with powerful blackberry and bitter cherry flavors that are complicated by notes of smoky minerals and lavender.

Suave and seamless on the finish, which lingers with excellent tenacity and smooth, harmonious tannins. **94-96**

2011 Pignan Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Reserve Vivid ruby. Intense raspberry, potpourri and spicecake scents gain depth with air and pick up a bright mineral nuance. Fleshy, seamless and concentrated, showing impressive clarity to its juicy red fruit flavors. Dusty tannins come on late and add shape to the strikingly long, energetic finish.

93

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Reserve Bright ruby-red. An exotic bouquet presents black raspberry, incense, Asian spices and blood orange. On the palate, sweet red and dark berry flavors become more tangy and spicy with air. Shows an impressive blend of depth and vivacity and finishes with outstanding focus and thrust and gentle tannic grip. Evidently this wine didn't get the memo that 2011 couldn't produce outstanding wines.

94

(Martine's Wines, www.mwines.com)

Chateau de Saint Cosme

The ever-loquacious, opinionated and reliably frank Louis Barruol told me that 2010 has only one weakness as a vintage, and that's the fact that "the wines are too structured for a market that more and more wants immediate gratification." He went on: "Too many people won't understand just how great the wines are because they've started opening them and they're not finding upfront pleasure, so they think the wines are overrated." In Barruol's view, 2011 is bound to become "a classic example of a vintage that's overlooked because of what's around it, which means 2009, 2010 and 2012, so it's not going to be easy for people to accept that these wines can be excellent, and powerful as well." It's worth noting that Barruol's "basic" Gigondas checks in at 14.5% alcohol in 2011, which doesn't fit in with many folks' stereotype of the vintage as being weak-kneed. The natural concentration that was brought on by the low yields of the vintage "has made wines that will fool people down the road. They'll never guess that they're from a vintage that people wrote off," Barruol concludes.

2012 Chateau Du St. Cosme Gigondas Inky ruby. Powerful, deeply pitched aromas of black and blue fruits, *garrigue* and licorice, with a spicy topnote. Densely packed and chewy in texture, offering smoky cassis and cherry flavors that coat the palate. Closes sweet and long, with lingering smokiness and smooth tannins. **90-92**

2012 Gigondas Valbelle Opaque ruby. Smoke- and mineral-laced dark berry compote and cherry liqueur on the deeply perfumed nose. Fleshy, broad and concentrated, offering sweet blackberry and bitter chocolate flavors and a bracing kick of juicy acidity. Shows excellent clarity and punch on a finish that's firmed by dusty, harmonious tannins. **91-93**

2012 Gigondas Hominis Fides Deep ruby. Blackberry and cassis on the highly perfumed nose, with smoky licorice, floral and spicecake overtones. Juicy dark berry preserve flavors are brightened by acidity, with a sweet lavender pastille note gaining strength in the glass. Balanced and energetic Gigondas with superb finishing clarity and length. **92-94**

2012 Gigondas Les Claux Opaque ruby. An intensely perfumed bouquet presents candied dark berries, incense, lavender and olive tapenade, along with a bright mineral overtone. Sweet, penetrating blackberry and cherry compote flavors show outstanding depth and clarity, with a spicy quality gaining strength in the glass. Finishes smooth, smoky and very long, with solid tannins adding grip. This one is built for the cellar. **92-94**

2012 Gigondas Le Poste Glass-staining ruby. Youthfully brooding aromas of cherry pit, cassis and plum jam, with licorice and cracked pepper accents. Deeply pitched red and dark berry compote flavors firm up in the mid-palate, picking up bitter chocolate and spicecake qualities. Then surprisingly sweet and lively on the finish, leaving behind a suave black raspberry quality. This powerful yet graceful Gigondas has the depth to age. **91-93**

2011 Chateau Du St. Cosme Gigondas Bright ruby. Energetic aromas of fresh red fruits, potpourri, white pepper and allspice gain power with air and pick up a note of licorice. Lively and precise on the palate, offering sappy raspberry and floral pastille flavors and a hint of orange zest. Shows very good focus and lift on the sweet, seamless finish, with a trail of spice and mineral notes. This is a pretty impressive effort for an entry-level bottling.

91

2011 Gigondas Valbelle Bright ruby-red. Black raspberry, lavender, woodsmoke and licorice on the nose. Shows a zesty, spicy character on the palate, offering energetic red and dark berry flavors and notes of white pepper and star anise. Fine-grained tannins add grip to the very long, spicy finish. **92**

2011 Gigondas Hominis Fides Inky ruby. Intense aromas of dark berry liqueur, cherry pit, licorice and potpourri. On the palate, the concentrated blackberry and cherry-cola flavors become spicier and livelier with aeration. A zesty mineral quality adds cut to the finish, which features silky tannins and a hint of smokiness. For all its power this wine shows impressive balance and finesse. **93**

2011 Gigondas Les Claux Deep ruby. Heady scents of black raspberry, cherry-cola, Indian spices and vanilla, with a bright mineral overlay. Sappy, incisive and pure, displaying impressive thrust to its intense red and dark berry preserve and spicecake flavors. A sexy floral note comes up on the clinging finish, which shows smooth, harmonious tannins.

93

2011 Gigondas Le Poste Bright purple. Vibrant blackberry and lavender scents are complicated by star anise, minerals and woodsmoke. Sweet, seamless and expansive, offering intense black and blue fruit flavors and bracing acidity that adds cut. This rich, energetic wine finishes with superb clarity and length and a persistent floral note. **93**

(Craft+Estate/The Vintner Group, www.craftandestate.com; Cavatappi Distribuzione, www.cavatappi.com; Epic Wines, www.epic-wines.com)

Domaine Saint Prefert

Isabel Ferrando describes 2012 as "a very northern vintage, meaning fresh and balanced, with lively fruit and acidity." She views 2011 as having a similar personality "but without as much depth, tannins or structure," and advises drinking her '11s before digging into the '10s, '09s and, of course, the '12s. Trying to get finer tannins is her current obsession, she told me, "because making a massive wine from ripe fruit with thick skins isn't a problem, but making an elegant Chateauneuf is a real challenge." Ferrando also opened a bottle of her 2011 "regular" Chateauneuf (to make the point about elegance), which had recently been bottled when she showed it to me last year. I found it to be elegant indeed, with an almost pinot-like liveliness and intense spice-tinged red fruit character. Tannins are there but you'll have to look for them; I wouldn't fault anybody for drinking this wine now.

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Brilliant ruby-red. An exotic perfume calls up candied red fruits, Asian spices and fresh flowers. Silky, appealingly sweet raspberry and cherry-cola flavors show impressive vivacity and become spicier with air. Silky tannins build on the supple yet nicely delineated finish. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Reserve Auguste Favier Opaque ruby. Lively and precise on the nose, displaying scents of redcurrant, cherry liqueur and dried flowers, along with a spicy topnote. Juicy and focused, with impressive depth and sweetness to its red fruit and lavender pastille flavors. Shows a refreshingly bitter nuance on the youthfully tannic finish, which lingers with impressive vibrancy and persistence. There will be no Charles Giraud bottling in this vintage because of a short crop, so all of the fruit that would have been designated for that wine was diverted here and into the "regular" Chateauneuf. **92-94**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Reserve Auguste Favier (\$58) (85% grenache and 15% cinsault): Bright ruby. Candied red berries and potpourri on the pungent nose. Sweet and expansive, offering energetic raspberry and cherry flavors and a bright touch of blood orange. Pure, focused and seamless, finishing with an echo of red fruits and silky, even tannins.

92

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Collection Charles Giraud (\$75) (60% grenache and 40% mourvedre): Inky ruby. Highly perfumed bouquet of candied red fruits, Asian spices and incense, with a bright mineral overtone. Stains the palate with energetic raspberry and bitter cherry flavors that deepen with air. Closes on a suave floral note, with excellent clarity and length and smooth, harmonious tannins. **93**

(A Daniel Johnnes Selection, imported by Michael Skurnik Wines, www.skurnikwines.com and danieljohnneswines.com)

Rotem & Mounir Saouma

The Burgundies produced under the Saoumas' Lucien Le Moine label are consistently among the most expressive and flamboyant wines made in that region, and their new project in the southern Rhone seems poised to make a similar statement. Mounir Saouma told me that while many consider him a rebel or, worse, a modernist, his winemaking regimen is actually "about as traditional as you can get." The grapes here are never destemmed, get a cold maceration for 7 to 11 days, and are crushed in a small basket press; only free-run juice is used. Most important, in Saouma's view, is the fact that he uses all of the wines' lees during their *elevage*, which can run up to four years, in the Bonneau style. He admits that he's still getting the feel for grenache and its associated varieties and he's using a variety of vessels to raise his wines, including terra cotta amphorae.

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Omnia Dark red. Deeply pitched aromas of blackberry, cassis, smoky minerals, *garrigue* and fruitcake. Impressively dense and velvety in texture, with a surprisingly light touch to its sweet dark fruit and peppery spice flavors. Stains the palate without giving any suggestion of excess weight. The energetic finish features sexy notes of Asian spices and candied violet, with chewy tannins buffered by the sappy fruit. **93**

2010 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Arioso Opaque ruby. Heady dark berry, candied licorice and Indian spice aromas are brightened by a suave mineral nuance. Juicy, incisive and pure on the palate, offering sweet black raspberry and spicecake flavors that take on weight with aeration. The spicy quality dominates the very long, penetrating finish, which features smooth tannins and a sexy floral pastille nuance. **94**

2009 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Arioso (aged for three years before bottling): Vivid ruby. Intense aromas of black raspberry, minerals, dried flowers and cola. Very dense and velvety in texture, with excellent depth to its red and blue fruit and floral pastille flavors. Stains the palate and shows real power on the long, spicy finish, leaving behind notes of star anise, smoky minerals and lavender. **93**

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Tardieu-Laurent

"The easiest word to describe 2011 is freshness," in the opinion of Michel Tardieu. But one had to wait until late to harvest or there wasn't enough fruit concentration to go with that freshness, he added. "And then you had to worry about losing acidity, but that didn't happen." As Dominique Laurent has been completely out of the picture here for almost a decade, Michel and his son Bastien are toying with the idea of changing the name of their winery to Famille Tardieu. That designation is starting to appear on their labels "but it isn't easy for the public to accept a radical name change too quickly," said Michel, so Tardieu-Laurent is still the official name here.

2012 Vacqueyras Vieilles Vignes Glass-staining ruby. Musky, floral aromas of cherry compote, cassis and licorice, with a bright mineral topnote. Rich, supple and expansive, with intense bitter cherry and blackcurrant flavors picking up a spicy nuance with air. For its weight this wine comes off as quite elegant, finishing with supple tannins and a suggestion of candied flowers. **90-92**

2012 Gigondas Vieilles Vignes Opaque ruby. Smoky, deeply perfumed aromas of dark fruit preserves, pipe tobacco and woodsmoke, with a peppery overtone. Lush and appealingly sweet on the palate, offering distinctly ripe cassis and blueberry flavors and a hint of mocha. Closes smoky and warm, with resonating spiciness and sweet, slow-building tannins. **88-90**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Speciale Opaque ruby. Heady scents of red fruit preserves, potpourri and anise, with sexy Asian spice nuances building in the glass. Sweet, high-pitched and sharply focused, conveying a seductive, juicy quality to its black raspberry, mineral and lavender pastille flavors. Finishes long and sappy, with smooth tannins and a lingering floral element. **91-93**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Vieilles Vignes Inky ruby. Deep, powerful aromas of cassis and dried cherry, with complicating notes of incense, licorice and cured tobacco. Deeply pitched, smoky dark fruit flavors are complicated by suggestions of musky herbs and floral pastilles. Chewy tannins give shape and grip to the very long, spice-accented finish, with the cassis note lingering. This is a baby. **92-94**

2011 Vacqueyras Vieilles Vignes (\$46) Deep ruby. Ripe raspberry and lavender aromas are deepened by a hint of candied licorice. Shows a darker fruit profile on the palate, offering weighty black raspberry and boysenberry flavors and a bracing jolt of juicy acidity. Dusty tannins give shape to the clinging, lucid, fruit-driven finish. **91**

2011 Gigondas Vieilles Vignes (\$48) Dark ruby. Ripe cherry, blackberry and allspice on the perfumed nose and palate. Offers gently sweet dark fruit flavors braced by juicy acidity and a smoky mineral quality. Powerful and lively wine with no excess fat. Closes spicy, focused and long, with excellent clarity and smooth, even tannins. **91**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Speciale (\$80) (100% grenache): Brilliant ruby-red. Ripe red fruits, spicecake, woodsmoke and pungent herbs on the intensely perfumed nose. Stains the palate with sappy raspberry and floral pastille flavors, picking up a bitter chocolate nuance on the back half. Clings with superb tenacity on the incisive finish, which shows lasting floral and spice notes. **92**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Vieilles Vignes (\$84) Deep ruby. Candied dark berries, pipe tobacco, cola and licorice on the deeply perfumed nose. The palate offers lush, weighty blueberry and blackcurrant flavors that expand with air and pick up a peppery, spicy nuance. The clinging finish is firm by youthful, chewy tannins. **92**

(Wilson Daniels, www.wilsondaniels.com)

Domaine Pierre Usseglio & Fils

There will be no Reserve des Deux Freres bottling in 2012 and only a single wine in 2011 from Thierry Usseglio, who said that the decision to declassify in both vintages was based almost entirely on "horrible yields, which are an ongoing problem in Chateauneuf." Since that 2011 "regular" bottling contains all the juice that would normally be designated as Mon Aieul and Reserve des Deux Freres, it's a serious value for savvy Chateauneuf lovers.

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Inky ruby. Ripe blackberry and blueberry on the fragrant nose, with hints of fresh flowers and pipe tobacco adding complexity. Sappy dark berry and candied cherry flavors show impressive depth and a smooth, velvety texture. Open-knit and very attractive already, but with good spine and structure as well. Finishes sweet and supple, with excellent persistence and a hint of candied flowers. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee De Mon Aieul (all grenache): Opaque ruby. Black raspberry, Indian spices and licorice on the highly perfumed nose, with a sexy floral overtone gaining strength with air. Red and dark berry preserve flavors show excellent depth and sweetness, along with an assertive spiciness. Supple tannins build on a finish that accentuates the floral and berry notes. **92-94**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$48) (80% grenache, 10% syrah, 5% mourvedre and 5% cinsault): Brilliant ruby color. Ripe red fruits on the nose, with peppery spices and a floral element adding complexity. Deep and sweet but energetic, showing powerful thrust to its raspberry and bitter cherry flavors. Silky tannins frame the long, pliant finish, which leaves suave spicecake and lavender pastille notes behind. I find this wine very approachable now. **91**

(Wines of France, www.winesoffranceinc.com)

Le Vieux Donjon

Claire Michel describes the 2012 vintage as one that will provide "a lot of immediate appeal, with fresh fruit that might make people suspect that the wines must be drunk young," but she thinks that their balance will imbue them with surprising ageworthiness. Like a number of her colleagues she points to the overall success of the 1999s, "which lived in the shadow of the 1998s, especially, but which are now proving to be even better for aging than the '98s." I've heard rumblings among old-time Chateauneuf lovers that there's been too much of a turn to modernity here in recent years, and if by modernity one means cleanliness, then I suppose that the Michel family is guilty. Recent bottles of the 2008, 2006 and 2004 have displayed the kind of classic, *garrigue*-driven character (so does the 2011 here, in fact) that I would think lovers of old-school Chateauneuf would love. I wonder if those consumers are engaging in guilt by association owing to the estate's relationship with enologist Philippe Cambie, whose work is wildly misunderstood by many Rhone aficionados who believe that all of the wineries with which he works make a single style of wine--all evidence to the

contrary. If the Vieux Donjon wines are cleaner today, they have lost none of their classic appeal.

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (75% grenache, 10% syrah, 10% mourvedre and 5% cinsault): Vivid ruby. Sexy, expansive aromas of raspberry preserves, potpourri and Asian spices show impressive clarity. Sweet, seamless and pure, offering intense red fruit and floral pastille flavors and notes of allspice and anise. The velvety, focused finish shows superb length and harmonious tannins. **92-94**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$66) Bright ruby. A heady bouquet presents candied red fruits, *garrigue*, woodsmoke and cured meat, with an exotic Asian spice quality gaining strength with air. Sappy, penetrating and seamless, offering sweet, concentrated red and dark berry flavors and a touch of licorice. The smoke and spice notes come back strong on the clinging finish, which is framed by silky, nicely woven tannins. This already shows terrific complexity. **93**

(Wines of France, www.winesoffranceinc.com)

Domaine de la Vieille Julienne

Recent vintages here have yielded wines that, while plenty rich and often among the most powerful of the appellation, are distinctly more restrained than those of a decade ago. Jean-Paul Daumen pointed out that the ripeness that nature has imparted in recent vintages has necessitated a lighter touch in the cellar because "the extraction is, in a way, happening in the vineyard," and thus it has been critical to emphasize "freshness, balance and energy" in the wines rather than weight and power. He views the 2011s as "about balance" and thinks that they'll probably turn out like the 1999s, which he says many people wrote off in their early days. Richness is not a problem for his '11s, Daumen said, pointing out that his two Chateauneufs both check in at around 16% alcohol. "So calling them lightweights is a bit silly."

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Trois Sources Brilliant ruby. Vibrant aromas of black raspberry, floral pastilles and Asian spices are deepened by notes of licorice and espresso. Stains the palate with intense, spice-accented dark berry and star anise flavors, with a lavender nuance emerging on the back half. Closes spicy and long, with superb clarity and sneaky, fine-grained tannins. Shows excellent vivacity for such a powerful wine. **92-94**

2012 Chateauneuf Du Pape Les Hauts Lieux Inky ruby. Blackberry, mulberry, Indian spices and anise on the expressive, mineral-accented nose. Focused, spicy and chewy in texture, offering smoky dark berry compote and fruitcake flavors and a hint of cracked pepper. Quite rich but energetic as well, with slow-building tannins and a very long, sweet finish. **92-94**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Reserve Inky purple. Heady, floral aromas of blueberry, mulberry and cassis, along with a smoky mineral topnote. Broad, sappy and extremely concentrated, offering sweet black and blue fruit flavors complemented by hints of spicecake and bitter chocolate. A rich, deep but surprisingly lively Chateauneuf that finishes spicy and very long, with harmonious tannins and lingering sweetness. **93-95**

2011 Chateauneuf Du Pape Les Trois Source Bright ruby. Fresh red fruits, flowers and Asian spices on the highly perfumed nose. Juicy and precise, offering vibrant black raspberry and bitter cherry flavors and a refreshing touch of blood orange. Packs a pretty serious punch but comes off as elegant. Finishes supple and sweet, with gentle tannic grip and lingering floral pastille and spicecake notes. **92**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Hauts Lieux Vivid ruby. Aromas of raspberry liqueur, cherry, potpourri and Asian spices on the exotically perfumed nose. Juicy, penetrating and sweet, with intense black raspberry and floral pastille flavors and a supple, velvety texture. Finishes very long, with smooth, melting tannins and a strong note of candied flowers. There's a full-bore 16% alcohol here but I wouldn't have guessed it. **93**

(T. Edward Wines, www.tedwardwines.com; Pascal Schildt/USA Wine West, www.pascalschildt.com)

Other Recommended Producers

Domaine l'Abbe Dine

2012 Chateauneuf Du Pape Bright ruby-red. Vibrant, spice-accented aromas of raspberry liqueur, potpourri and *garrigue*. An elegant, seamless wine, with intense inner-mouth perfume and strong thrust to its sappy red fruit flavors. Finishes on a spicy note, with silky tannins building slowly and fading into the wine's sweet fruit. **90-92**

(www.domainelabbedine.com)

Adissat

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Isabelle Inky ruby. Smoke-tinged cherry and dark berries on the nose, with hints of *garrigue*, olive and cracked pepper adding complexity. Lush and creamy in texture, offering bitter cherry and blackcurrant flavors plus a hint of spicecake. Closes on a firmly tannic note, with impressive power and smoky persistence. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Gabrielle Opaque ruby. Dark berries and dried cherry on the pungent, smoke-accented nose. Deeply pitched blackberry and bitter cherry flavors become sweeter with air, picking up licorice and cola nuances. Finishes on a smoky note, with very good energy, building tannins and a lingering note of floral pastille. **91-93**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Isabelle (\$55) Brilliant ruby. Cherry and dark berry aromas are complicated by hints of *garrigue* and anise. In a fleshy, ripe style, showing good depth and breadth to its bitter cherry and blackberry flavors. Finishes on a smoky note, with supple tannins, good cling and a hint of cherry compote. **90**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Gabrielle Inky ruby. Ripe blackberry and cassis on the deeply perfumed nose, with hints of fresh flowers and pipe tobacco adding complexity. Sweet dark berry and candied cherry flavors show noteworthy depth and a smooth, velvety texture. Finishes sweet and supple, with excellent persistence and a suave flourish of candied lavender.

90-92

(Serge Dore Selections, www.sergedoreselections.com)

Domaine Albin Jacumin

2012 La Begude Des Papes Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Dark ruby. Smoky, herb-accented cherry and dark berries on the nose and palate. Plush and easygoing, with good breadth, depth and appealing sweetness. The juicy, focused, firmly tannic finish resonates with cherry. **89-91**

2011 La Begude Des Papes Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (75% grenache, with mourvedre, syrah and dashes of all the other allowed varieties): Ruby-red. Spice-accented red fruits and dried flowers on the perfumed nose. Taut, focused bitter cherry and redcurrant flavors gain weight and breadth with air. Shows a darker blackberry quality on the finish, which is firmed by dusty, fine-grained tannins.

88

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Pierre Amadiou

2012 Vacqueyras La Grangeliere (80% grenache and 20% syrah): Saturated ruby. Bright red fruits on the perfumed nose, with sexy Asian spices and a floral element adding nuance. Deeply concentrated, energetic and precise, displaying good lift and vibrancy to its raspberry and bitter cherry flavors. Silky tannins build on the long, pliant finish, leaving a spicy quality behind. **90-92**

2012 Gigondas Rose Romane-Machotte Pale pink. Redcurrant, cherry pit and quinine on the perfumed nose. Emphatically spicy and tight on the palate, offering energetic red berry flavors and a hint of bitter herbs. Finishes clean and nervy, leaving subtle floral and anise notes behind. I like the tight, linear character of this pink Gigondas. **89**

2012 Domaine Grand Romane Gigondas Opaque ruby. Ripe cherry, raspberry liqueur and Christmas spices on the exotically perfumed nose, complemented by a suave floral overtone. Broad, lush and sweet, with powerfully aromatic flavors of red berry compote and spicecake. Bright acidity gives lift and cut to the finish, which leaves behind an intense raspberry element. **91-93**

2012 Gigondas Romane-Machotte Opaque ruby. Highly perfumed aromas of dark berries, fruitcake, potpourri and incense. Palate-staining blackberry and cherry compote flavors show very good depth, with floral pastille and anise nuances adding complexity. Finishes on a sexy, deeply sweet dark berry liqueur note, with smooth tannins and excellent persistence. **91-93**

2012 Gigondas Grande Reserve Le Pas De L'Aingle Saturated ruby. Sexy black and blue fruit aromas are complicated by vanilla, licorice and woodsmoke. Fleshy cassis and blueberry flavors are

lifted and sharpened by juicy acidity and a peppery nuance. Gains flesh and depth with air, finishing with serious energy and slow-building tannins. Very sexy stuff. **92-94**

2011 Vacqueyras La Grangeliere (\$23) (80% grenache and 20% syrah): Brilliant ruby. Fresh red berries, allspice and potpourri on the seductively perfumed nose. Silky and open-knit, showing very good depth and clarity to its sweet raspberry and lavender pastille flavors. This suave, seamless, elegant Vacqueyras finishes with subtle tannins and a late kick of peppery spices. Delicious right now. **91**

2011 Gigondas Grande Reserve Le Pas De L'Aingle Deep ruby. Ripe red fruits and lavender on the deeply scented nose. Shows very good concentration but comes off as lively, offering intense black raspberry and bitter cherry flavors and a hint of licorice. The lavender note returns on the finish, which is firmed by youthfully chewy tannins and tangy acidity. **91-92**

2011 Gigondas Romane-Machotte (\$30) Vivid red. Candied dark berries, potpourri and vanilla on the lively, mineral-laced nose and palate. Smooth and expansive, offering a suave combination of richness and vivacity. Closes silky and long, with subtle tannins adding shape and grip. While this sexy wine has the depth to age, I find it highly drinkable already.

91

2011 Domaine Grand Romane Gigondas (\$30) Full ruby. Dark berries, potpourri and Indian spices on the perfumed nose. Pliant blackberry and bitter cherry flavors are enlivened by a peppery element, showing very good depth as well as energy. Closes spicy, focused and very long, with slow-building tannins and a jolt of candied blue fruit. **91**

(Total Wine & More, www.totalwine.com)

Domaine des Amouriers

2012 Vacqueyras (55% grenache, 39% syrah and 6% mourvedre; all concrete): Bright purple. Complex scents of ripe cherry, fresh flowers, pipe tobacco and dark chocolate. Then dense, sappy and expansive in the mouth, with bitter cherry, dark chocolate and spicecake flavors complemented by a subtle licorice accent. Firms up on the youthfully tannic finish, with a spicy quality providing lift and cut. **90-92**

2012 Vacqueyras Les Genestes (56% grenache and 44% syrah): Saturated ruby. Powerful aromas of cassis, bitter chocolate, cracked pepper and candied licorice. Fat and pliant in the mouth, offering ripe, expansive flavors of cherry compote and floral pastilles. For its weight and richness this comes off as lively and precise, finishing with youthful tannic grip and very good length. **90-92**

2011 Vacqueyras (54% grenache, 38% syrah, 6% mourvedre and 2% carignan): Deep ruby. Ripe raspberry and blackberry aromas are underscored by smoky minerality and fresh flowers, with a spicy quality adding complexity. Rich, pliant dark berry fruit and exotic floral pastille flavors show very good clarity and become sweeter with air. The mineral and floral notes continue through the energetic finish. **90**

2011 Vacqueyras Les Genestes (60% grenache and 40% syrah): Saturated ruby. Fresh cherry and dark berry scents are complicated by cola and Asian spices. Chewy and precise on the palate, offering sappy cherry and black raspberry flavors and an invigorating jolt of white pepper. Closes spicy and long, with a hint of bitter chocolate and youthful tannic grip. **91(+?)**

(Robert Kacher Selections, www.robertkacherselections.com)

Domaine de L'Arnesque

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee La Capelane Bright ruby. High-pitched red fruit and floral scents are complemented by deeper-pitched notes of licorice and smoky herbs. Lively, sharply focused redcurrant and bitter cherry flavors show good depth and pick up a spicy nuance with aeration. Dusty tannins give shape to the persistent finish, which strongly echoes the red fruit and spice notes. I like the linear character of this Chateauneuf. **90-92**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee La Capelane (80% grenache, 10% mourvedre and 10% syrah): Saturated ruby. Deeply scented aromas of black and blue fruits and incense. On the palate, plump cassis and blueberry flavors are sharpened and lifted by juicy acidity and a touch of white pepper. Supple tannins give shape to the strong, spicy, lingering finish. **90**

(www.arnesque.com)

Maison Arnoux et Fils

2012 Vacqueyras Vieux Clocher (70% grenache, 25% syrah and 5% mourvedre; raised in old *foudres*): Opaque ruby. Highly aromatic nose displays scents of fresh black raspberry, blueberry and candied licorice. Rich and fleshy, with nicely concentrated dark berry and spicecake flavors, a velvety texture and a hint of peppery spices. Smoothly combines richness and vivacity, finishing with very good clarity and gentle tannic grip. **90-92**

2012 Vacqueyras Vieux Clocher Jean Marie Arnoux (70% grenache, 27% syrah and 5% mourvedre;?? aged in older *foudres*): Saturated ruby. A highly aromatic nose presents red and dark berry preserves, incense, lavender and anise, with a peppery nuance adding lift. Juicy black raspberry and boysenberry flavors deliver very good palate coverage, with zesty acidity giving the ripe fruit lift and verve. This rich, lively Vacqueyras finishes with powerful thrust and lingering sappiness. **91-93**

2012 Vacqueyras Seigneur De Lauris (70% grenache and 30% syrah): Inky ruby. Powerful dark fruit, vanilla and floral pastille aromas are lifted by dusty minerality and a hint of white pepper. Silky and expansive on the palate, offering juicy blackberry and cola flavors and a touch of candied flowers. Picks up a smoky quality on the spice-accented finish, which shows very good energy and thrust. In a pretty flamboyant, exotic style that reminded me of some high-end Central Coast Rhone blends. **91-93**

2012 Vacqueyras 1717 (65% grenache and 35% syrah; raised in concrete vats and then aged for two years in small oak barrels): Bright purple. Sexy aromas of dark berry preserves, potpourri, vanilla and allspice, with a smoky nuance gaining strength with air. Big and ripe but very fresh as well, offering juicy blueberry and blackberry flavors that gain energy with aeration. Shows excellent clarity for its volume and finishes with smooth, even tannins and impressive persistence. **91-93**

2012 Gigondas Vieux Clocher Bright ruby. Ripe raspberry, dried flowers and a touch of camphor on the pungent nose. Fleshy and broad on entry, then tighter in the mid-palate, offering bitter cherry and red berry flavors and a touch of peppery spices. Closes on a youthfully tannic note, with good clarity and punch. Still in its infancy. **88(+?)**

2012 Chateauneuf Du Pape The Chato9 Full ruby. Musky cherry and plum compote aromas are complicated by notes of dark chocolate and licorice. Weighty and broad in the mouth, offering bitter cherry and blackberry flavors and a touch of charred meat. In a somewhat brooding style, finishing with good power and supple tannins. **86-88**

2011 Vacqueyras Vieux Clocher (\$19) (70% grenache, 25% syrah and 5% mourvedre): Deep ruby. Deeply pitched aromas of blackberry, blueberry and cherry compote. Lush, gently sweet dark fruit flavors are lifted by a peppery quality and show good focus. Delivers a lot of rich fruit but comes off as lively, finishing with good breadth and lingering smokiness. **89**

2011 Chateau Lastours Clocher Vacqueyras (80% grenache and 20% syrah): Bright purple. Ripe blackberry, smoky minerals and exotic spices on the intensely perfumed nose, with complicating notes of succulent herbs and flowers. Sappy, spicy and concentrated, offering pungent blackberry and floral pastille flavors that expand with air. Supple tannins give shape to the very persistent finish. **92**

2011 Vacqueyras Vieux Clocher Jean Marie Arnoux (70% grenache, 25% syrah and 5% mourvedre): Saturated ruby. Ripe, smoky cherry and blackberry aromas become spicier with air, picking up a zestier raspberry quality and a hint of cured meat. Juicy and focused in the mouth, offering sweet red and dark berry flavors, a touch of gaminess and a supple texture. Finishes with very good persistence, chewy tannins and lingering smokiness. **90**

2011 Vacqueyras Seigneur De Lauris (\$24) (70% grenache and 30% syrah): Inky ruby. Aromas of cassis, blueberry, vanilla and smoky oak spices, with a peppery overtone. Palate-coating dark fruits and vanilla on the palate, along with a touch of bitter chocolate. The sweet, supple finish shows very good energy, silky tannins and an echo of fresh black and blue fruits. **91**

2011 Vacqueyras 1717 (\$18) (65% grenache and 35% syrah): Bright purple. Ripe black and blue fruits, incense and sexy oak spices on the intensely fragrant nose. Offers deeply pitched blueberry and cherry-vanilla flavors plus suggestions of candied lavender and spicecake. Smooth, broad and sweet on a finish framed by supple, slow-building tannins. **92**

2011 Gigondas (\$24) Inky ruby. Powerful black and blue fruits on the nose and in the mouth. Supple and broad, with a slightly decadent superripe character and strong finishing punch. With its serious heft and palate-coating richness, this acts a lot like a 2007. Not for those who prize delicacy. **88**

2011 Chateauneuf Du Pape The Chato9 (\$30) Bright ruby. A perfumed bouquet offers scents of blackberry, blueberry, dried flowers and peppery spices. Pliant dark berry flavors show good freshness and energy, picking up smokiness with air. Turns more taut on the finish, with the dark fruit qualities echoing. **88**

(Monsieur Touton Selection, www.mtouton.com)

Domaine Paul Autard

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$45) (roughly 70% grenache, 15% syrah and 15% counoise): Dark ruby. Powerful aromas of dark berries, cherry compote, vanilla and woodsmoke. Broad and fleshy in texture, offering velvety dark fruit flavors and a hint of peppery spices. The vanilla note comes back on the finish, which features supple tannins and a suave floral pastille nuance. This flamboyant Chateauneuf is drinking very nicely right now and shows good power for an entry-level bottling. **90**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape La Cote Ronde (\$65) (half grenache and half syrah): Deep ruby. Sexy, oak-spiced black and blue fruit aromas are complemented by notes of woodsmoke, licorice and mocha. Sappy and broad on the palate, offering gently sweet boysenberry and cherry-vanilla flavors that become spicier with air. The oak here is far more integrated than it was at this time last year. Finishes smooth and long, with excellent clarity and focus. **91**

(Russell Herman, Berkeley Heights, NJ)

Vignobles Balma Venitia

2012 Domaine Mailise Vacqueyras (50% grenache, 41% syrah and 9% mourvedre; all done in concrete): Dark ruby. Complex aromas of dark berry preserves, potpourri and allspice, with a smoky overtone. Sappy and broad in the mouth, offering black raspberry and floral pastille flavors lifted by a peppery nuance. Closes on a warm note, with soft tannins and a strong note of lavender. **88-90**

2012 Vacqueyras (64% grenache, 29% syrah, 5% mourvedre and 2% cinsault; 100% concrete-raised): Dark ruby. Aromas of cherry pit, licorice, bitter chocolate and cracked pepper, with an herbal nuance in the background. Offers bitter cherry and candied licorice flavors that pick up a spicy quality with aeration. Finishes on a strict tannic note, with an echo of bitter cherry and a slight tart edge.

85-87

2011 Domaine Mailise Vacqueyras (55% grenache and 45% syrah; all concrete): Bright ruby. Fresh red and dark berry aromas are accented by subtle smoke and licorice nuances. Vaguely jammy raspberry and blackberry flavors show good depth and power, with a white pepper note adding bite. Closes on a refreshingly bitter note, with building tannins and good length. **88**

2011 Vacqueyras (68% grenache, 27% syrah, 4% mourvedre and 1% cinsault; 100% concrete): Brilliant ruby. An expressive bouquet displays floral blackberry, cassis and spicecake qualities, along with slow-building smokiness. Sappy and concentrated, displaying intense dark berry flavors and suave floral character. The floral element carries through a long, nicely delineated, gently tannic finish. **90**

(www.beaumes-de-venise.com)

Domaine Du Banneret

2010 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$55) (70% grenache, 20% syrah and 10% mourvedre): Ruby-red. Smoke- and mineral-accented aromas of dried cherry, cassis and lavender, with a spicy nuance gaining strength with aeration. Taut and focused on entry, then fleshier in the mid-palate, offering sweet dark berry and floral pastille flavors and a hint of cured meat. Closes spicy and long, with building tannins, a touch of licorice and very good energy. Old school in the best sense, with the depth to age. **91**

(VOS Selections, www.vosselections.com)

Domaine Lucien Barrot et Fils

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Bright ruby-red. Spicy, floral red fruits on the fragrant nose. Sappy and appealingly sweet, offering fresh raspberry and cherry flavors and a touch of peppery spices. Closes silky, sweet and long, with zesty lift and smooth tannins. This is a far more polished wine than I've come to expect from the property, whose wines have often been downright feral over the last couple of decades. Nicely done. **90-92**

(Michael Skurnik Wines, www.skurnikwines.com)

Domaine Barville

2012 Domaine Barville Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Bright ruby. A flamboyantly aromatic bouquet evokes blackberry, blueberry, licorice, incense and lavender. Deep, sweet and velvety, offering sappy black and blue fruit flavors, a touch of candied flowers and building spiciness. Finishes with good vivacity and strong, spice-driven persistence. **90-92**

2011 Domaine Barville Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Ruby-red. Blackberry, mocha and white pepper on the perfumed nose. Juicy and smooth in texture, offering plump black and blue fruit and floral pastille flavors and a touch of bitter chocolate. Finishes spicy and long, with a hint of smokiness and lingering warmth. **88**

(www.brotte.com)

La Bastide Saint Dominique

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. Pungent aromas of cherry compote, pipe tobacco and *garrigue*, with a smoky overtone. Lush and expansive on the palate, offering pliant dark berry flavors, a hint of anise and good energy. Supple tannins add shape and grip to the clinging, fruit-driven finish. **89-91**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Hespirides Dark ruby. Blackberry and cherry-vanilla on the deeply perfumed nose and in the mouth. Smooth and open-knit, with intense black and blue fruit flavors and a hint of candied licorice. Supple tannins give shape to a persistent finish that features sweet vanilla and bitter chocolate.

91-93

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Secrets De Pignan Vieilles Vignes Inky ruby. Ripe black and blue fruits on the deeply pitched smoke- and spice-accented nose. Broad and fleshy, offering sweet, palate-staining blueberry and cassis flavors and a hint of candied licorice. Delivers a serious wallop of intense dark berry character on the relentless, incisive finish, which is firmed by smooth, harmonious tannins. **93-95**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Ruby-red. Pungent dark berries, plum and peppery spices on the nose. Chewy blackberry and cassis flavors show good depth and a smoky nuance that builds with air. Closes on a bitter cherry note, with good energy and dusty tannins. **88**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Hespirides Bright ruby. Black raspberry, cola and vanilla on the highly perfumed nose. Offers juicy dark berry and peppery spice flavors that are sweetened by a mocha quality and lifted by tangy acidity. Supple tannins give shape to the focused, clinging, attractively sweet finish.

91

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Secrets De Pignan Vieilles Vignes Opaque ruby. Sexy aromas of dark berries, lavender and incense are lifted and sharpened cracked pepper and smoky minerals. The palate offers an array of dark fruit and spice flavors, showing excellent depth and clarity. Closes smooth and long, with vibrant mineral and floral notes and gentle tannic grip. **92**

(www.bastide-st-dominique.com)

La Bastide Saint Vincent

2012 Vacqueyras Pavane (75% grenache, 15% mourvedre and 10% syrah; all done in concrete): Bright ruby. Perfumed aromas of dark fruit compote, peppery spices and anise, with a building floral quality. Coats the palate with juicy blackberry and bitter cherry flavors enlivened by lively acidity. In a fairly rich style but manages to maintain energy, finishing with lingering dark berry flavors and smooth, well-judged tannins. **90-92**

2012 Gigondas Deep ruby. Blackcurrant and cherry compote aromas display a subtle spiciness and a touch of pungent herbs. Fleshy and broad on the palate, offering black and blue fruit flavors and a kick of white pepper. Displays very good finishing clarity and tenacity and a bitter note of medicinal cherry. I like the grown-up style of this wine. **90-92**

2011 Gigondas Vivid red. Aromas of ripe cherry and black raspberry, with a smoky overtone. Pliant and broad on entry, then tighter in the mid-palate, offering sweet red fruit flavors and a touch of licorice. Shows good energy on the finish, which is firmed by supple tannins and a touch of tangy acidity. This has fleshed out since I tasted it last fall. **88**

2011 Gigondas Costevieille Inky ruby. Perfumed scents of black raspberry, cherry compote and peppery spices are lifted by floral and mineral nuances. Round, velvety and broad, with sappy red berry flavors and a sweet floral pastille quality. Finishes with smooth, fine-grained tannins and impressive fruit-driven persistence. **90**

(OSLO Enterprise, www.voilawines.com; Vigneron Imports, www.vigneronimports.com)

Chateau Beauchene

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Vignobles De La Serriere Ruby-red. Fresh red and dark berries, lavender and Christmas spices on the fragrant nose. Sappy raspberry and bitter cherry flavors are complicated by a zesty mineral quality and a hint of floral pastille. At once rich and lively, finishing with very good thrust and smooth, harmonious tannins that add shape. **88-90**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Grande Reserve Deep ruby. An exotically perfumed bouquet evokes candied red fruits, Asian spices and potpourri, with a bright mineral topnote. Sappy, incisive, densely packed black raspberry and bitter cherry flavors gain sweetness with air and pick up notes of licorice and cola. Finishes silky and long, with supple tannins and lingering sweetness. **90-92**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Grande Reserve (\$44) Deep ruby. Lively red berry and cracked pepper aromas show good clarity and subtle herbacity. Taut and brisk, offering tangy redcurrant and bitter cherry flavors and a touch of licorice. Finishes dry and slightly tart, with dusty tannins adding grip. **87**

(Regal Wine Imports, www.regalwine.com)

Domaine de Beurenard

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. Spicy cherry and blackcurrant aromas are complicated by peppery spices, licorice and mocha. Pliant and juicy, with energetic red and dark berry flavors, subtle sweetness and a hint of candied flowers. Gains weight with air but maintains its freshness, finishing smooth and long, with supple, even tannins. **89-91**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Boisrenard Bright purple. Sexy, oak-tinged aromas of dark berry preserves, Asian spices and potpourri, with a subtle *garrigue* nuance in the background. Supple and seamless in texture, offering sweet black raspberry and cherry-cola flavors and a touch of licorice. Zesty acidity adds lift and cut to the clinging, very long finish. **92-94**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Vivid ruby-red. Fresh red and dark berries on the perfumed, spice-accented nose. Offers juicy black raspberry and spicecake flavors and a hint of white pepper, with a touch of licorice in the background. Closes spicy and long, with sneaky tannins adding shape and grip. **90**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Boisrenard Deep ruby. Raspberry liqueur, candied flowers, anise and vanilla on the deeply scented nose. Becomes more energetic with air, picking up a bitter cherry quality and a touch of white pepper. Supple tannins come on late and add shape and focus to the wine's plush, lingering fruit. **92**

(Citadel Trading Corporation, www.citadel-trading.com; Ruby Wines, www.rubywines.com; Galaxy Wine Company, www.galaxywinecompany.com)

Maison Benedetti

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. Zesty cherry and redcurrant scents are complemented by deeper notes of licorice and black cardamom. Chewy and precise on the palate, offering bitter cherry and floral pastille flavors and a hint of dark chocolate. Shows an interesting blend of depth and energy and finishes spicy and long, with sneaky tannins and a subtle herbal nuance. **89-91**

(www.domainebenedetti.fr)

Louis Bernard

2012 Vacqueyras (a blend of grenache, syrah, cinsault and mourvedre): Deep ruby. Spicy blackberry and cherry compote aromas are complemented by subtle pepper and anise nuances. Ripe and fleshy, offering ripe dark berry flavors and a hint of candied flowers. Gains spiciness with air, finishing with soft tannins and a bit of warmth. **88-90**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Bright purple. Ripe dark berries and cracked pepper on the fragrant nose and in the mouth. Fleshy and open-knit, showing good breadth but a rather abrupt finish. **85-87**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Domaine La Crau Des Papes Deep ruby. Ripe blueberry and cherry aromas show an expansive character, picking up woodsmoke and floral nuances with air. Fleshy and ample on the palate, offering sweet black and blue fruit flavors and a hint of bitter chocolate. Closes sweet and long, with slow-building tannins and a touch of mocha. **89-91**

2011 Vacqueyras (\$25) (a blend of grenache, syrah, cinsault and mourvedre): Vivid ruby. Blackberry, cassis and woodsmoke aromas show good energy and precision. Firm, slightly unyielding bitter cherry and dark berry flavors are subtly accented by a peppery nuance, adding back-end bite. Candied plum notes sweeten the finish, which is firmed by chewy, slightly rustic tannins. **87**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Domaine La Crau Des Papes (\$45) Saturated ruby. Perfumed aromas of raspberry, smoky minerals and dried flowers, plus a hint of *garrigue*. Juicy, concentrated and focused, offering supple yet energetic flavors of red berries, lavender and anise. Finishes long, with firm grip, smooth tannins and lingering floral and mineral notes. **90**

Also recommended: 2011 Chateauneuf-du-Pape (85). (Boisset Family Estates, www.boissetfamilyestates.com)

Domaine Berthet-Capeau

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Elixir Des Papes Vivid ruby-red. Smoky raspberry and blackcurrant aromas are complemented by Asian spices and mocha. Spicy, sharply defined red fruit flavors give way to sweeter dark berries with air, with a hint of lavender in the background. The lively finish is sharpened by zesty acidity and a hint of white pepper. **89-91**

(Elite Wines, www.elitewines.net)

Domaine Berthet-Rayne

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Ruby-red. A fragrant bouquet evokes red berry preserves, violet and vanilla, along with smoke and anise topnotes. Sappy, sweet and expansive, offering intense black raspberry and bitter cherry flavors enlivened by a tangy mineral nuance. Fine-grained tannins give grip to the finish, which leaves floral and allspice notes behind. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Fut De Chene Ruby-red. Liqueur-like blackberry and cherry aromas are complicated by notes of smoke, mocha and white pepper. Broad, lush and round but focused, offering seamless flavors of dark berries, vanilla and floral pastilles. Finishes long, with supple tannins adding shape and grip. **90-92**

(Elite Wines, www.elitewines.net)

Domaine de la Biscarelle

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Anglaises Opaque ruby. Ripe cherry, blueberry, dark chocolate and violet on the deeply perfumed nose. Rich, weighty and chewy, offering gently sweet flavors of cassis, blackberry and allspice complicated by hints of cracked pepper and licorice. Finishes velvety and warm, with tangy minerality and good persistence. **89-91**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Opaque ruby. Smoky red and dark berry aromas are complicated by a subtle licorice note and a hint of cured meat. Sweet, round and silky, with bright flavors of black raspberry, cherry preserves and mocha. Shows good verve on the finish, along with a slightly rude meaty note. **87**

Other wines tasted: 2012 Chateauneuf-du-Pape, 2011 Les Anglaises Chateauneuf-du-Pape. (United Estates Wine Imports, www.unitedstateswines.com; Petit Monde Wine Merchant, www.petitmondewine.com)

Domaine Bois de Boursan

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Bright violet. A complex, perfumed bouquet displays scents of dried red fruits, *garrigue*, smoked meat and cracked pepper. Sappy, penetrating redcurrant and bitter cherry flavors show a suave blend of depth and energy and pick up a bitter chocolate nuance with air. Old-school Chateauneuf in the best sense, finishing with very good clarity and lingering notes of smoke and flowers. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Des Felix Bright purple. Sexy aromas of blackcurrant, blueberry, musky herbs and dried flowers. Supple, sweet and generous, with good lift and definition to its dark berry, cracked pepper and spice flavors. With aeration, this wine picks up a subtle gaminess along with a hint of candied flowers. Finishes with dusty, building tannins and excellent length. **91-93**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$46) Saturated ruby. Dark berries, cherry and smoked meat on the pungent nose. Plump blackberry and bitter cherry flavors show a subtle gaminess and pick up a spicy character with aeration. Closes sweet and long, with chewy tannins and a hint of bitter chocolate. On the wild side, which will appeal to lovers of old-school Rhone wines. **90**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Des Felix (\$60) Inky ruby. Ripe black and blue fruits on the nose, with sexy floral and spicecake nuances adding complexity and lift. On the palate, sweet blackberry and blueberry flavors are accompanied by a building note of bitter chocolate. The floral quality comes back on the spicy, youthfully tannic finish, which shows excellent cling and subtle smokiness.

92

(J et R Selections, www.jjimporters.com)

Domaine du Bois des Meges

2012 Gigondas Pierre Celeste Bright violet color. Intense, floral aromas of blackberry and cherry-vanilla, with exotic star anise, coconut and incense nuances adding complexity. Juicy, finely etched dark fruit flavors very good power and focus, with a late note of vanilla adding sweetness and depth. Supple and seamless on the lingering, oak-spiced finish. I hope the fruit here can get ahead of the oak by the time the wine goes into bottle. **89-91**

(www.boisdesmeges.fr)

Domaine du Bois de Saint-Jean

2011 Vacqueyras La Ballade Des Angles (60% grenache and 40% syrah; all stainless steel): Opaque ruby. Liqueur-like cherry and plum scents are lifted by zesty spice and mineral nuances. Weighty and chewy in texture, with good heft to its black and blue fruit flavors. Dusty tannins give grip to the finish, which features a hint of cherry compote and lingering warmth. Fairly rich for the vintage. **88**

(LVDH, www.lvdh.com)

Boisset

2012 Vacqueyras Bonpas Silbertus (a blend of grenache, syrah and mourvedre): Dark ruby. Pungent redcurrant and cherry pit on the fragrant nose, with a mineral nuance adding lift and focus. Firm, focused bitter cherry and floral pastille flavors show good concentration, with tangy acidity adding cut. Aeration brings out deeper blackberry and licorice notes, which linger on the persistent, gently tannic finish. **89-91**

Also recommended: 2011 Bonpas Silbertus Vacqueyras (86). (Boisset Family Estates, www.boissetfamilyestates.com)

Domaine des Bosquets

2012 Gigondas Rose Pale pink. Red berry and dried rose scents are complemented by jasmine and white pepper. Dry and tight in the mouth, with good energy and cut to its redcurrant and bitter cherry flavors. Nicely focused but slightly tart, finishing with lingering spiciness and a hint of succulent herbs. **87**

2012 Gigondas Le Lieu Dit Bright ruby. Spicy, mineral-accented cherry, raspberry and lavender aromas, with a dusting of white pepper. Clean and zesty, offering gently sweet red fruit and floral character and building spiciness. Finishes quite long, with vibrant raspberry and floral pastille flavors and smooth, harmonious tannins. **90-92**

2012 Gigondas Bright ruby. Dark berry, licorice and cracked pepper aromas show good clarity and depth. Sappy and broad in the mouth, offering pliant cassis and blackberry flavors and a hint of dark chocolate. Finishes sweet and long, with lingering spiciness and slow-building tannins. **90-92**

2011 Gigondas Le Lieu Dit (\$50) Deep ruby. Vibrant raspberry and cherry aromas are complicated by suggestions of spicecake and candied flowers. Offers sweet red berry and bitter cherry flavors enlivened by a hint of cracked pepper. The long, chewy finish features fine-grained tannins and a sexy floral pastille quality. **90**

2011 Gigondas (\$33) Bright red. Dark berries, Asian spices, potpourri and smoky minerals on the perfumed nose. Silky and open-knit, offering sweet dark berry flavors underscored by juicy acidity. Shows very good energy and silky, even tannins on the fruit-driven, persistent finish.

90(Eric Solomon Selections, www.europeancellars.com)

Maison Bouachon

2011 Vacqueyras Pierrelongue Opaque ruby. Spicy blueberry and cherry pit aromas are brightened by white pepper and minerals. Juicy dark fruit flavors show very good depth and appealing sweetness, with tangy acidity adding lift. A peppery spice note builds on the long, sappy finish, which features a lingering dark berry element and gripping tannins. **89**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape La Tiare Du Pape Deep ruby. Ripe cherry and blackberry aromas are lifted by notes of white pepper and camphor. Supple dark berry preserve flavors show good depth and a hint of alcoholic warmth, with tangy acidity adding lift. Comes up a bit short on the finish, which features soft, even tannins and a smoky quality. **87**

Other wines tasted 2012 Vacqueyras Pierrelongue. (www.maisonbouachon.com)

Domaine La Bouissiere

2012 Vacqueyras (55% grenache, 30% syrah and 15% mourvedre; half aged in old *demi-muids* and half in concrete): Inky ruby. Ripe cherry and dark berries on the deeply scented nose, with notes of candied lavender and licorice gaining strength with air. Powerful, spice-accented cherry and blackberry flavors show impressive concentration, with a backbone of bright acidity providing lift and focus. Shows a peppery, spicy quality on the finish, which features supple tannins and an echo of blackberry. **90-92**

2012 Gigondas Deep ruby. Spice- and mineral-accented aromas of cherry, redcurrant and fresh flowers. Fresh and lively on the palate, offering bitter cherry and spicecake flavors complicated by smoky mineral and herbal nuances. In a rather elegant style, finishing with soft tannins and very good grip and length. **90-92**

2012 Gigondas La Font De Tonin Opaque purple. Deeply pitched aromas of dark berries and cherry liqueur, plus a hint of licorice and an exotic apricot flourish. Deep, sappy and focused, offering spicy blueberry and boysenberry flavors and an enlivening hint of white pepper. Clings tenaciously on the youthfully tannic finish, which underscores the wine's candied dark fruit notes. **91-93**

2011 Vacqueyras (60% grenache, 25% syrah and 15% mourvedre): Dark ruby. Ripe dark berries and medicinal cherry on the deep, spice-accented nose and in the mouth. Chewy and broad, with a hint of allspice creeping in with aeration. Closes on a sweet note, with excellent clarity and length and smooth, well-judged tannins. **91**

2011 Gigondas Inky ruby. Ripe cherry and dark berries on the fragrant, spice-accented nose. Shows bright red fruit character on the palate, with notes of candied lavender and spicecake adding complexity. Dusty tannins give shape to the finish, which clings with excellent fruity persistence. **91**
(various importers, including Michael Skurnik Wines, www.skurnikwines.com; Ideal Wines, www.idealwine.us; Dionysus Imports, www.dionysosimports.com; Vintner Select, www.vintnerselect.com)

Domaine La Bouscatiere

2011 Gigondas Ruby-red. Ripe cherry and dark berry aromas are complicated by cola and smoky Indian spices. Chewy and precise on the palate, offering bitter cherry and blackberry flavors and a note of peppery spices. Closes spicy and warm, with a hint of bitter chocolate and youthful tannic grip. **89**

(Saurel Chauvet, www.vins-gigondas.com)

Domaine La Boutiniere

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Full ruby. Powerful aromas of ripe dark berries, singed plum and licorice are brightened by a subtle peppery nuance. Smooth and open-knit, showing good heft and a bite of cracked pepper to its blackberry and boysenberry flavors. Closes smooth and broad, with lingering warmth and supple tannins. **87-89**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Grande Reserve Inky ruby. Smoky cherry, blackberry and mocha on the perfumed nose. Sweet, supple and juicy, offering creamy cherry and dark berry flavors and

an energizing kick of white pepper. Finishes smooth, ripe and long, with soft tannins, lingering spiciness and very good energy. **90-92**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$29) Dark ruby. Black and blue fruits and licorice on the deeply scented nose. In a slightly brooding style and slow to unfold, offering bitter cherry and cassis flavors and a hint of black pepper. Closes with solid grip and a faintly hard edge, leaving a smoky note behind. This hefty Chateauneuf needs a piece of grilled or braised lamb or venison as a partner. **88**
(Bond Imports, www.bondimports.com)

Brotte

2012 Chateauneuf Du Pape Chateau De Bord Vivid ruby. Smoky cherry and redcurrant aromas are complicated by notes of pipe tobacco, musky herbs and licorice. Deep, weighty and broad, with appealingly sweet cherry and licorice pastille flavors energized by a spicy nuance. Youthful tannins give grip to a finish that shows a hint of superripe cherry. **88-90**

2012 Chateauneuf Du Pape Secret De Leonce Vivid ruby-red. Spicy redcurrant and cherry pit on the incisive nose and in the mouth. Showing a youthfully taut character, with no excess fat and a subtle floral pastille nuance on the finish. Rather bound up right now and a bit of a chore to judge. **87-89?**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Prestige Deep ruby. Dark berries and dried cherry on the deeply pitched, smoky nose. Weighty blackberry and bitter cherry flavors gain sweetness with air and pick up notes of licorice and mocha. The spicy finish features good energy, a touch of warmth and supple tannins. **88-90**
(Monsieur Touton Selection, www.mtouton.com)

Domaine Brusset

2012 Gigondas Les Hauts De Montmirail Opaque ruby. Smoky, spice-accented aromas of raspberry liqueur and cherry-cola, complicated by a floral overtone. Sweet and expansive in the mouth, offering juicy red and dark berry flavors complicated by hints of Indian spices and white pepper. Rich and lively wine with strong finishing thrust, gentle tannins and a late jolt of minerality adding lift. **90-92**

2012 Gigondas Tradition Le Grand Montmirail Bright purple. Spice-accented aromas of raspberry, licorice and fresh flowers, with a minerally overtone. Smooth and open-knit, offering plump cherry and dark berry flavors, a hint of candied licorice and good spicy cut. Finishes on a gently tannic note, with very good focus and sweet persistence. Quite suave; I find none of the rustic character that I often associate with this estate. **90**

2011 Gigondas Les Hauts De Montmirail Bright violet color. Highly aromatic and on the decadent side, displaying scents of ripe dark berries, apricot, incense and floral pastilles. Plush, open-knit and appealingly sweet, with very good depth to its intense black and blue fruit flavors. Closes smooth and long, with supple tannins and a touch of allspice. I also had the chance to retaste the 2011 Tradition Le Grand Montmirail, which is extremely young and seized-up right now. There's good material and structure to it but I'd let it rest for at least another couple of years. **91**
(www.domainebrusset.fr)

Chateau Cabrieres

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Vivid ruby. Ripe and smoky on the nose, with pungent cassis and floral oil aromas complicated by notes of licorice and dark chocolate. Broad and supple in texture, offering flavors of bitter cherry, singed plum and espresso. The smoky note echoes on the round, pliant finish, which shows a late touch of sweetness. **89-91**
(Margate Wine & Spirit Company, www.margatewine.com)

Les Cailloux

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Bright ruby. Fresh raspberry and cherry on the nose, with a mineral nuance adding vivacity. A fresh, energetic Chateauneuf, with lively red fruit and floral pastille flavors, silky texture and zesty mineral cut. Favors finesse over power and finishes sweet, focused and long. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Centenaire Saturated ruby. Highly perfumed aromas of fresh red berries, cherry-cola, minerals and potpourri, with spicecake and underbrush nuances emerging with aeration. Smooth, sappy and sweet, showing superb focus to its intense red fruit preserve,

floral pastille and allspice flavors. Boasts excellent energy and lift on the floral finish, which is firmed by supple, harmonious tannins. **93-95**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$63) Brilliant ruby-red. Spicy red berry preserve and floral aromas are complemented by white pepper and smoky minerals. Fresh raspberry, cherry and candied lavender on the palate, with tangy acidity adding lift. Elegant, precise Chateauneuf with excellent finishing clarity and intense floral persistence. **92**

(Robert Kacher Selections, www.robertkacherselections.com)

Chateau Capucine

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Opaque ruby. Deeply pitched aromas of dark fruit compote, mocha, woodsmoke and licorice, with a hint of olive in the background. Fleshy and broad, offering intense blueberry and bitter cherry flavors and a hint of musky herbs. Distinctly rich but lively Chateauneuf with good closing power and subtle spiciness. **89-91**

(Barrique Imports, www.barriqueimports.com)

Les Caves des Vignerons de Gigondas

2012 Vacqueyras Les Primaires (70% grenache, 20% syrah and 10% mourvedre): Deep ruby. Highly aromatic nose presents lively floral, blackberry and cassis qualities, plus a hint of smokiness. Sappy and nicely concentrated, displaying juicy dark berry flavors and a pungent floral character. The floral note builds through the long, vibrant, gently tannic finish.

89-91

2012 Gigondas Les Primaires Brilliant ruby-red. Pungent scents of red and dark berries are complicated by spicecake, cracked pepper and dried flowers. Pliant blackberry and bitter cherry flavors become firmer with air and show a tangy mineral edge. Finishes with good clarity and cut and slightly edgy tannins. **87**

(www.cave-gigondas.fr)

Domaine du Cayron

2012 Gigondas Bright ruby. Raspberry, lavender and passion fruit on the exotic, highly aromatic nose. Spicy, sappy and concentrated, offering intense red fruit liqueur, apricot and floral pastille flavors that expand with air. There's a delicacy here that's surprising given the wine's power. Singular and wild in the best sense, with gentle tannins and superb finishing clarity, thrust and length. **92-94**

2011 Gigondas Bright ruby. Heady aromas of raspberry liqueur, lavender and apricot, along with notes of incense and Asian spices. Stains the palate with intense red fruit and floral pastille flavors, with a repeating note of exotic apricot lending a sweet touch. Closes sappy and very long, with resonating spiciness and silky, even tannins. **92**

(Michael Skurnik Wines, www.skurnikwines.com; Vin de Garde Wines, www.vdgwines.com; Paul M. Young Fine Wines, www.pywine.com)

La Celestiere

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape La Croze Deep ruby. Perfumed aromas of cherry, raspberry and candied plum are complemented by peppery spices and a hint of smoked meat. Rich and velvety in texture, offering dark berry fruit and licorice flavors sharpened by juicy acidity. Finishes on a smoky note, with slow-building tannins and a lingering note of bitter cherry. **89-91**

2012 Chateauneuf Du Pape Confidentielle Saturated ruby. Black and blue fruits on the deeply perfumed nose. Stains the palate with intense boysenberry and bitter cherry flavors, with juicy acidity providing brightness and lift. Shows excellent clarity and cut on the finish, which features silky tannins and a hint of lavender pastille. **91-93**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Domaines Bright ruby. Deep, brooding aromas of blackcurrant, cherry pit, pipe tobacco and smoked meat. Chewy, concentrated dark berry flavors are enlivened by juicy acidity and complemented by licorice and dark chocolate nuances. Finishes on a note of candied violet, with firm tannic grip and excellent length. **91-93**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape La Croze Full ruby. Ripe dark fruits, pipe tobacco and smoky herbs on the pungent nose. Broad and fleshy, with more heft than it showed last year, offering sweet blackberry and cherry compote flavors that spread out with air. Closes supple, warm and gently sweet, with an echo of candied dark fruits.

89

Other wines tasted: 2012 Chateauneuf-du-Pape Tradition (84-86), 2011 Chateauneuf-du-Pape Confidentielle (86+?). (Free Run Wines, Seattle, WA)

Le Cellier des Princes

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Bright violet color. Smoky raspberry and blackberry aromas show good clarity and a subtle hint of peppery spices. Straightforward, slightly jammy dark fruit flavors that show a hint of warmth. Closes with echoing smokiness, a touch of white pepper and firming tannins. **85-87**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Hauts Des Coteaux Bright violet color. A powerfully scented bouquet evokes cassis, licorice and smoky minerals. Livelier red fruits on the palate, with notes of cola and anise adding complexity. Aeration brings up a meaty quality that carries through a long, sappy finish firmed by dusty tannins.

89-91

2012 Chateauneuf Du Pape Domaine Le Mourre Inky ruby. Blackberry, mocha and licorice on the perfumed nose. Broad, sweet and expressive, with rich flavors of cassis, blueberry, bitter chocolate and peppery spices. This velvety, open-knit wine finishes with good breadth and smooth, even tannins that add shape. **89-91**

2012 Chateauneuf Du Pape Domaine De La Pierre Deep ruby. Powerful, deeply pitched aromas of black and blue fruits, dark chocolate and woodsmoke, with a spicy topnote. Densely packed and chewy, offering smoky cassis and boysenberry flavors and a hint of gaminess. Closes smooth and long, with lingering smokiness and slow-building, even tannins. **89-91**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Domaine Les Escondudes Bright violet color. Highly scented bouquet evokes smoke-accented blackberry, boysenberry and resinous herbs, with subtle cola and vanilla qualities gaining power with air. Spicy dark berry and bitter cherry flavors show good depth and are sharpened by a peppery nuance. Juicy and nicely concentrated, finishing with good thrust and supple tannins. **89-91**

(Margate Wine & Spirit Company, www.margatewine.com)

Domaine Chamfort

2012 Vacqueyras (65% grenache, 25% mourvedre and 10% syrah): Opaque ruby. Deep, smoke-tinged aromas of cherry compote, boysenberry and dark chocolate, with a peppery nuance in the background. Broad and pliant, showing gently sweet black and blue fruit flavors and a refreshing jolt of tangy acidity. Finishes on a dark berry note, with supple tannins and good length. **89-91**

(USA Wine Imports, www.usawineimports.com)

Domaine des Chanssaud

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Opaque ruby. Brooding aromas of cassis, cherry compote and dark chocolate. Plush and deeply flavored, offering inky black and blue fruit flavors that show surprising vivacity and delineation. Slow-building tannins give a slight hard edge to the finish, which strongly repeats the dark fruit element. **87-89**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. Dark berries and cherry pit on the pungent, smoke-accented nose and palate. On the rigid side, with a touch of bitter chocolate building with air. Closes with good energy, a touch of licorice and chewy, building tannins.

87

(www.domaine-des-chanssaud.com)

Domaine Chante Cigale

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Bright ruby. Dark berry and cherry pit aromas are lifted by notes of fresh lavender and white pepper. Densely packed dark fruit flavors pick up a bitter edge with air, along with a touch of licorice. Pretty serious for a "basic" Chateauneuf, finishing with good energy and tannic grip. **89-91**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Vieilles Vignes Brilliant ruby-red. Sexy, expressive aromas of raspberry preserves, cherry compote and potpourri, with a smoky overtone. Lush and pliant, offering juicy red fruit and lavender pastille flavors that become spicier with air. Silky tannins add grip and

shape to the long, spice-accented finish, which shows superb clarity and thrust.

93-95

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Vivid ruby-red. Emphatically fruity aromas of fresh raspberry, cherry compote and redcurrant, plus a complicating note of white pepper. Lush and silky on the palate, with a plump raspberry quality and a seamless texture. Pliant and tannin-free, with a sweet red berry tone defining the finish. This is drinking really well right now. There was no Vieilles Vignes Chateauneuf bottling this vintage so all that juice is in here, which no doubt accounts for its intensity and quality. **90**

(Terrisson Wines, www.terrison-wines.com; David Bowler Wine, www.bowlerwine.com)

Chapelle St. Theodoric

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Le Grand Pin (\$80) Brilliant ruby. Fresh red berries, allspice and lavender on the nose, with smoky mineral and sandalwood nuances adding complexity. Offers intense black raspberry and floral pastille flavors and a zesty kick of blood orange on the back half. Racy and pure, with strong finishing thrust and silky, slow-building tannins. Smoothly combines power and finesse and shows very well now with an hour or so of aeration. This wine is made entirely from grenache. **92**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape La Guigasse (\$60) (100% grenache): Deep red. Heady, highly perfumed bouquet evokes fresh raspberry, Asian spices, potpourri and white pepper, accented by a vibrant mineral topnote. Palate-staining juicy red fruit and floral pastille flavors pick up notes of star anise and cinnamon with aeration. Fine-grained tannins sneak up on the finish, which strongly echoes the red fruit and spice elements. **92**

(Weygandt-Metzler Importing, www.wegandtmetzler.com)

Maison Chapoutier

2012 Gigondas Bright ruby. Lively red berry and Asian spice aromas are deepened by notes of lavender and anise. Taut and linear on entry, then fleshier in the mid-palate, offering lively raspberry and bitter cherry flavors and a hint of succulent herbs. Shows good clarity and bite, finishing on a note of tangy berry skin, with subtle spiciness. **88-90**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape La Bernardine Brilliant ruby. High-pitched red berry and floral scents are complemented by notes of allspice and woodsmoke. Fresh and light on its feet, offering gently sweet raspberry and cherry flavors and a hint of floral pastilles. In an elegant style, finishing with impressive clarity and length. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Collection Bio Bright ruby. Wilder, darker in character and more pungent than the Bernardine, displaying scents of cured meat, cherry pit, blackcurrant and violets, plus a peppery topnote. Chewy, densely packed dark berry and bitter cherry flavors show a spicy quality with air, along with a smoky nuance. Closes with smokiness, building tannins and very good persistence. Those out there who consider Chapoutier's wines to be too polished should give this one a shot. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Croix De Bois Saturated ruby. Aromas of red berry preserves, smoky minerals and potpourri are lifted by a suave spicy quality that carries through to the finish. Lush and sweet in the mouth, offering spicy raspberry and floral pastille flavors along with a touch of spicecake. Closes silky and long, with lingering mineral and floral notes. **92-94**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Barbe-Rac Full ruby. Deeper and more brooding than the Croix de Bois. Displays intense dark berry, cherry, anise and black cardamom scents, along with notes of dried flowers and smoky minerals. Powerful but lively as well, offering gently sweet black raspberry and cherry flavors and a touch of orange pith. Finishes smooth, broad and long, with building spiciness and excellent clarity. **92-94**

2011 Gigondas Bright ruby. Scents of ripe red fruit and musky herbs show good power and focus. Round and velvety in texture, offering sweet raspberry and cola flavors and a hint of white pepper. At once amply and lively, finishing with very good clarity and length and smooth, even tannins. **90**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape La Bernardine (\$60) (all grenache): Bright ruby. Red and dark berries, incense and lavender on the highly perfumed, spice-accented nose. Silky and open-knit, offering sappy raspberry compote and spicecake flavors that take a turn to blueberry with air. Closes long, gently tannic and sweet, with bright mineral and peppery spice notes adding lift and cut. **91**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Croix De Bois (\$105) Vivid ruby-red. Sexy red fruit liqueur, potpourri and Asian spice aromas show impressive power and an energetic, pinot-like character.

Sappy, tangy and precise on the palate, displaying lively raspberry and bitter cherry flavors and a touch of spicecake. Closes on a mineral note, with superb clarity, verve and length.

93

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Barbe-Rac (\$125) Opaque ruby. Seductively perfumed aromas of spicy red berries, cherry-cola, blood orange, lavender and incense. Sappy spice- and mineral-accented red fruit flavors show palate-coating concentration but no excess fat. Gains energy on the impressively long, mineral-dominated finish, which is firm by silky, even tannins. **93**
(Terlato Wines International, www.terlatowines.com)

Domaine de la Charbonniere

2012 Vacqueyras (a blend of grenache and syrah): Deep ruby. Opens slowly to display scents of dark berries, cherry pit and licorice, along with a smoky overtone. Shows a reduced character right now but there's clearly good depth of black and blue fruits here. Closes on a note of bitter chocolate, with youthfully chewy tannins and lingering smokiness. **89-91**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. Smoky cherry and dried flowers on the nose, with hints of black pepper and cured meat adding complexity. Deep, spice-accented cherry and dark berry flavors are enlivened by a mineral quality. Dusty tannins give grip to the persistent, gently chewy finish, which echoes the cherry and smoke notes. **88-90**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Speciale Les Hautes Brusquieres Bright purple. Mineral-laced aromas of dark berries, cola and fresh flowers, with a peppery overtone. Lively and precise on the palate, offering bitter berry skin and spicecake flavors that put on weight with air. Closes silky and long, with firm tannins and spicy snap. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Mourre Des Perdrix Deep ruby. Seductive aromas of dark berry preserves, potpourri and smoky minerals. Sweet, open-knit black raspberry and cassis flavors are complemented by lavender pastille and fruitcake, with tangy acidity adding lift. Shows a suave blend of power and finesse, closing with smooth tannins and impressive clarity. **91-93**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Vieilles Vignes Opaque ruby. Vibrant aromas of raspberry, cherry, potpourri and Asian spices, with a zesty mineral topnote. Juicy and appealingly sweet, with graceful, deeply concentrated strawberry and raspberry flavors and a seamless, silky texture. Finishes very long, with slow-building tannins and a strong sweet note of candied lavender. **92-94**

2011 Vacqueyras (\$28) Bright ruby. Pungent blackberry, boysenberry and fresh flowers on the highly perfumed nose. Lush and complex, offering potent flavors of bitter cherry, blackberry, lavender pastille and cola. Rich but nonetheless lively and distinctly elegant, finishing with solid punch, gentle tannins and very good spicy, floral-dominated persistence. **91**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$43) Ruby-red. Fresh red fruits and floral oils on the perfumed nose, brightened by a spicy element that carries through the palate to the finish. Silky and seamless in texture, with good lift and clarity to its spice-tinged raspberry and floral pastille flavors. In an elegant style, finishing with strong punch and smooth tannins.

90

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Speciale Les Hautes Brusquieres (\$59) Bright ruby-red. Black raspberry, Asian spices, lavender and smoked meat on the highly perfumed nose. Juicy, penetrating and seamless, offering intense red and dark berry flavors that pick up a smoky nuance with air. Closes on a youthfully tannic note, with excellent thrust and floral length. **92**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Mourre Des Perdrix (\$58) Bright red. Intense red berry and floral scents are sharpened by notes of smoky minerals and white pepper. Sweet, penetrating and pure, offering lively raspberry and bitter cherry flavors and a touch of blood orange. Shows excellent focus and lift on the finish, which is nicely firm by silky tannins and a nervy mineral note.

92

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Vieilles Vignes (\$59) Saturated ruby. A complex bouquet evokes candied dark berries, potpourri and sandalwood, plus a spicy topnote. Sweet black raspberry and floral pastille flavors gain weight and power in the glass. Silky and seamless on a finish that features fine-grained tannins and a touch of bitter berry skin. **91**
(Wines of France, www.winesoffranceinc.com)

Domaine Cecile Chassagne

2012 Gigondas Bright ruby. Perfumed, floral red and dark berry aromas are brightened by a suggestion of Asian spices and zesty minerality. Taut, youthfully tangy raspberry and bitter cherry flavors are clear and vivacious. Finishes with silky, slow-building tannins and mineral-driven persistence. I like this wine's tension. **90-92**

2011 Gigondas Vivid ruby-red. Expressive aromas of raspberry, woodsmoke, apricot and white pepper. Intensely flavored and graceful, with a penetrating quality and good lift to its red berry preserve flavors. Finishes with fine-grained tannins and noteworthy spicy persistence. **90**
(BNP Distributing Company, www.bnpdist.com; K & L Wine Merchants, www.klwines.com)

Domaine de Chateaumar

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Secret De Nos Vignes Bright ruby-red. Powerful scents of cherry-vanilla, cassis and potpourri, with a smoky quality that gains power with air. Sappy and broad, offering plump red and dark berry flavors, a hint of bitter chocolate and a sweet cola nuance. Fine-grained tannins add shape and grip to the long, smoky, vanilla-tinged finish. **90-92**

(Bourgeois Family Selections, www.bourgeoiswines.com)

Les Vignobles Cheron

2012 Vacqueyras (half grenache and half syrah; all done in concrete): Inky ruby. Pungent aromas of black raspberry and fresh lavender. Lush and complex, offering potent bitter cherry, blackberry and floral pastille flavors of very good clarity. This rich and lively Vacqueyras finishes with good punch and gentle, harmonious tannins for grip. **90-92**

(Jeff Welburn Selections, www.jeffwelburn.com)

Domaine Les Clefs d'Or

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Brilliant ruby. Ripe cherry, cassis and licorice on the pungent nose. Dense, chewy and concentrated, offering spicy blackberry and blueberry fruit flavors with suggestions of candied lavender and black pepper. Closes with supple tannins and a touch of bitter chocolate. Quite rich for an entry-level, or "Tradition" bottling, and showing a lot of upfront fruit. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Selection Vivid ruby. Fresh raspberry and cherry on the nose, plus hints of dried rose, smoky minerals and allspice. Taut and linear, with sappy red berry and floral pastille flavors turning sweeter with air. Refreshing, distinctly elegant and seamless in texture, finishing with excellent clarity and smooth, even tannins. **91-93**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Craus Centenaires Deep ruby. Sexy dark berry preserve and floral pastille scents are complicated by woodsmoke, *garrigue* and licorice. Round and expansive on the palate, offering gently sweet blueberry and black raspberry flavors and a hint of spicecake. Closes silky and long, with lingering smokiness and supple, slow-building tannins. Rich but graceful in character, boasting excellent balance and depth. **92-94**

(Verity Wine Partners, www.veritywines.com; Atlanta Improvement Company, www.aicwine.com)

Clos du Calvaire

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. Pungent cherry and cassis aromas are accented by an earthy nuance and a touch of licorice. Chewy, solid and powerful, with musky cherry pit and bitter chocolate flavors complicated by a subtle floral note. Closes with building sweetness, dusty tannins and good smoky persistence. **87-89**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$36) Ruby-red. Dark berries, lavender, allspice and anise on the perfumed nose. Fleshy and broad on entry, then tighter in the mid-palate, offering bitter cherry and cassis flavors and a touch of succulent herbs. Closes with good power and grip and dusty tannins, leaving a subtle floral note behind. **88**

(Polaner Selections, www.polanerselections.com)

Domaine Le Clos des Cazaux

2012 Vacqueyras Cuvee Des Templiers (a 50/50 blend of grenache and syrah): Bright purple. A seductively perfumed bouquet brings forth dark berry preserves, potpourri and olive, along with a

spicy nuance. Smooth and open-knit, displaying nicely focused spicy blackberry and floral pastille flavors. Finishes sweet, sappy and long, with resonating spiciness and youthful tannic grip. **89-91**

2012 Gigondas Cuvee De La Tour Sarrazine Ruby-red. Pungent, medicinal aromas of cherry, licorice, smoky minerals and fresh herbs. Shows good depth and sweetness to its cassis, blackberry and bitter chocolate flavors. Finishes spicy and long, with chewy tannins adding grip. **89-91**

2011 Vacqueyras Cuvee Saint Roch (\$225) (70% grenache, 25% syrah and 5% mourvedre; no oak): Saturated ruby. Blackberry compote, allspice and floral oils on the powerfully scented nose. Fleshy and broad, offering sweet black and blue fruit flavors that pick up a refreshingly bitter quality with aeration. This rich, lively wine finishes with very good power, focus and energy. **90**

2011 Vacqueyras Cuvee Des Templiers (\$25) (half grenache and half syrah): Saturated ruby. Powerful dark fruit preserve and licorice aromas are complemented by notes of violet and black pepper. Sappy and nicely concentrated, offering sweet blackberry and cherry compote flavors and a touch of bitter chocolate. The licorice note comes back on the very persistent finish, which features a faintly medicinal quality and youthfully firm tannins. **91**

2011 Gigondas Cuvee De La Tour Sarrazine (\$29) Bright ruby. Flowers, dark berries and cherry on the perfumed nose. Becomes brighter with air, offering gently sweet, round raspberry and lavender pastille flavors and a touch of spicecake. Closes silky and long, with fine-grained tannins adding shape and grip. Showing far more vivacity than it did at this time last year and drinking well already. **90**

2011 Gigondas Prestige (\$40) Deep ruby. Deeply pitched black and blue fruit aromas are lifted by sexy floral and peppery spice nuances. Fleshy and broad but lively as well, offering juicy black raspberry and blueberry flavors and a hint of lavender. Closes long, silky and sweet, with fine-grained tannins adding shape and grip. Quite suave and very drinkable right now. **91**
(Kysela Pere et Fils, www.kysela.com)

Clos du Joncuas

2012 Vacqueyras La Font De Papier (80% grenache and 20% syrah; done entirely in concrete): Glass-staining ruby. Deeply pitched black and blue fruit aromas show impressive power and energy. Broad, smoke-tinged blueberry and bitter cherry flavors pick up a spicy nuance with air, along with a hint of candied licorice. Closes sappy and long, with chewy tannins adding grip. **90-92**

2012 Gigondas Bright violet color. An exotically perfumed bouquet evokes smoky blackberry, blueberry, lavender and Indian spices. Seamless and sweet, with energetic dark berry flavors and a sexy floral pastille quality. Gains richness and power with air and finishes long and sweet, with smooth tannins adding shape. **90-92**

2011 Gigondas (\$38) Deep ruby. Ripe red fruits and woodsmoke on the pungent nose. Chewy and broad on entry, then tighter in the mid-palate, offering juicy redcurrant and cherry flavors that pick up a spicy element with aeration. The spicy note carries through the warm finish, which is firmed by fine-grained tannins.

87

(Casa Bruno, www.casabrunowines.com)

Clos de l'Oratoire des Papes

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Bright ruby-red. Intense floral pastille and raspberry aromas show good clarity and a hint of spicecake. Lively and penetrating, with bright acidity lifting and sharpening the red fruit compote and licorice flavors. Smooth and spicy on the clinging finish, with firm tannins coming on late. Shows a lot of promise and continues the upward swing in quality at this estate. **90-92**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Opaque ruby. Heady dark berry, spicecake and floral aromas are complicated by white pepper, anise and cola. Powerful dark berry compote flavors show impressive depth and gain sweetness with air, taking a turn to brighter raspberry and displaying a sexy floral quality. Finishes spicy and very long, leaving intense dark berry, cherry and licorice pastille notes behind. A very impressive showing for this property and for the vintage. **92**

(Bronco Wine Company, www.broncowine.com; Cannon Wines Limited, www.cannonwines.com)

Clos Saint Michel

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Dark ruby. Sexy, highly perfumed aromas of fresh red berries, potpourri and anise, with a smoky topnote. Silky, open-knit raspberry and bitter cherry flavors show very good depth and energy, with zesty acidity adding spine. Richer and darker in profile on the finish, which is firmed by dusty, fine-grained tannins. **89-91**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. Spice-accented aromas of red fruit preserves and floral oils, with a smoky nuance in the background. Lively and seamless on the palate, offering juicy raspberry and cherry flavors with good focus and lift. Closes on a warm note, with good clarity and dusty tannins. **88**

(www.clos-saint-michel.com)

Domaine de La Colline St. Jean

2012 Vacqueyras (a blend of grenache, syrah and mourvedre): Opaque ruby. Powerful dark berry and plum aromas show a distinctly ripe character and pick up spiciness with aeration. Fleshy and broad but surprisingly lively, offering sweet plum compote and blueberry flavors and a touch of bitter chocolate. Closes with building tannins, good focus and an echo of peppery spices. **88-90**

(Kysela Pere et Fils, www.kysela.com)

Domaine Le Colombier

2012 Vacqueyras Tradition (70% grenache, 20% syrah and 10% mourvedre; 100% concrete): Inky ruby. Powerful scents of cherry compote and dark berries, with a suggestion of dark chocolate. Broad and palate-coating, offering weighty black and blue fruit and bitter chocolate flavors, with slow-building spiciness. Becomes firmer on the finish, featuring youthfully gripping tannins and a lingering licorice note. **90-92**

2012 Vacqueyras Mas Des Genets (70% grenache, 20% mourvedre and 10% syrah; all done in concrete): Inky ruby. An intensely perfumed nose displays floral cherry and dark berry aromas, along with slow-building spiciness and zesty minerality. Tangy, focused and pure, offering deep cassis and bitter cherry flavors and a touch of candied lavender. Shows very good depth and power on the long, gently tannic finish. **91-93**

2012 Vacqueyras Vieilles Vignes (80% grenache and 20% syrah; raised entirely in concrete): Bright violet color. Cherry and dark berry preserves on the perfumed nose, with complicating notes of licorice and olive gaining power in the glass. Lively cherry and blackberry flavors stain the palate, showing very good clarity and building smoky minerality. The very long finish features strong cut, lingering sweetness and smooth, harmonious tannins that fade quickly into the fruit. **91-93**

2011 Vacqueyras Les 3 J (\$35) Deep ruby. Deep, brooding aromas of medicinal cherry and blackberry, with a smoky nuance building in the glass. Rich and plush but surprisingly energetic, offering powerful dark fruit flavors that slowly open up to show a peppery quality. Finishes long and smooth, with round tannins and a hint of warmth. **89**

(Jerome Selection, Brooklyn NY; Milton Road Trading Company, www.miltonroadtrading.com)

La Compagnie Rhodanienne

Other wines tasted: 2012 Domaine Saint Roch Vacqueyras. (L&L Imports, www.l-limports.com)

Domaine la Consonniere

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Bright purple. Potent dark berry and cherry aromas are complicated by notes of cola, anise and woodsmoke. Lush and open-knit, offering sweet blackberry and licorice flavors that pick up spiciness with air. Finishes sappy, sweet and long, with slow-building tannins and a hint of smoked meat. **88-90**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$43) Vivid red. Fresh red berries, Asian spices and potpourri on the perfumed nose. Fresh and sharply focused on the palate, offering vibrant raspberry and blood orange flavors that put on weight with air. Closes spicy and long, with sneaky tannins adding shape and grip. **90**

Also recommended: 2011 Chateauneuf-du-Pape (85). (Wines of France, www.winesoffranceinc.com)

Domaine de la Cote de l'Ange

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. Black raspberry, cherry and dried flowers on the pungent nose. Fleshy and expansive, offering deep red and dark berry flavors and a subtle note of candied licorice. Picks up spiciness with air and finishes on a smoky note, with very good thrust and length and slow-building tannins. **89-91**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Vieilles Vignes Opaque ruby. Wild aromas of ripe dark berries, cherry pit, smoked meat and black pepper. Supple and nicely concentrated, with a vaguely animal side to its sappy blackberry and bitter cherry flavors. The long, gently tannic, peppery finish repeats the smoky note and lingers with good intensity. Plenty of material here but I wonder about the gaminess; fans of funky Rhone wines will call me a wimp for my hesitant score here. **87-89?**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$43) Bright ruby. Smoky cherry and cured meat scents are lifted by bright lavender and mineral elements. Fleshy red and dark berry flavors show depth and sweetness, with a gentle kick of minerality and citrus zest adding bite. Finishes on a bitter cherry note, with good length and a hint of gaminess. **88**

(Wines of France, www.winesoffranceinc.com)

Vignobles La Coterie

2012 Vacqueyras Dentelles De Raimbaut (64% grenache, 29% syrah, 5% mourvedre and 2% cinsault; all done in concrete): Inky ruby. Displays a wild set of dark fruit, game and floral scents, with a smoky overtone. Bitter cherry and cured meat flavors become sweeter with air and pick up a spicy accent that adds lift and bite. The tangy finish displays good power and an echo of smoky herbs. Old school in style.

86-88

2012 Vacqueyras Dentelles De Verlaine (made from a blend similar to that of the Dentelles de Raimbaut and also raised entirely in concrete): Brilliant ruby. More urbane than the funky Dentelles de Raimbaut, displaying scents of candied red fruits, potpourri and spicecake. Juicy and precise, offering pliant black raspberry and cherry compote flavors and a touch of bitter chocolate. Closes silky and long, with well-hidden tannins and lasting sweetness. **89-91**

(www.lacoterie.fr)

Domaine Le Couroulou

2012 Vacqueyras Cuvee Classique (65% grenache, 20% syrah and 15% mourvedre): Dark purple. Lively and precise on the nose, displaying scents of blackcurrant, cherry pit, pipe tobacco and dried flowers. Juicy and focused on the palate, with very good depth and sweetness to its dark berry and bitter cherry flavors. Shows a lively, spicy quality on the long finish. **90-92**

2012 Vacqueyras Vieilles Vignes (70% grenache and 30% syrah): Glass-staining ruby. Wilder and more expressive than the Cuvee Classique, displaying scents of dried cherry, dark fruit preserves, smoked meat and licorice. Sappy and concentrated on the palate, offering intense cassis and bitter cherry flavors and a touch of cracked pepper. Chewy tannins give grip to the powerfully long, spicy finish. **91-93**

2011 Vacqueyras Cuvee Classique (\$22) (65% grenache, 20% syrah and 15% mourvedre; all concrete): Opaque ruby. Smoky, pungent aromas of dried cherry and red berries, with a hint of gaminess emerging with aeration. Tightly wound redcurrant and bitter cherry flavors show good depth and a leathery nuance, along with a sweet floral pastille note. Closes with gripping tannins, an echo of bitter cherry and good spicy persistence. On the wild side, which will please fans of old-school Rhone wines. **87**

2011 Vacqueyras Vieilles Vignes (70% grenache and 30% syrah; 100% concrete): Ripe red fruit, floral and succulent herb aromas show very good clarity and pick up a smoky nuance with aeration. Sweet raspberry compote and spicecake flavors provide impressive palate coverage and no rough edges. A sexy lavender pastille note comes up on the subtly tannic finish, which clings with excellent tenacity and focus. **91**

(Russell Herman, Berkeley Heights, NJ)

La Crau de Ma Mere

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Vivid ruby. Sexy, floral aromas of cherry and black raspberry, with slow-building smokiness. Deep, powerful red fruit compote flavors provide very good palate coverage, with supple tannins providing shape. Gains ripeness with air and finishes smooth and long, with notes of cherry compote and candied plum. **90-92**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$51) Deep ruby. Cassis and bitter cherry on the fragrant nose, with complicating licorice and roasted coffee qualities. Sweeter and brighter on the palate, which offers bitter cherry and dark chocolate flavors and a hint of cracked pepper. On the powerful side for the vintage, finishing with good grip and a touch of heat. **88**

(Polaner Selections, www.polanerselections.com)

Domaine Cros De La Mure

2012 Gigondas Saturated ruby. Intense spice- and smoke-accented aromas of cherry-cola, cassis, incense and pipe tobacco, with a hint of cracked pepper in the background. Round, fleshy and sweet, with dense dark fruit compote flavors complicated by notes of cracked pepper and licorice. Tannins build slowly on the smoky finish, which is velvety, broad and long. In a masculine style, with heft and punch. **90-92**

2011 Gigondas (\$25) Deep ruby. Powerful aromas of dark berry compote and cherry pit, with woodsmoke and white pepper overtones. Lush, palate-coating cassis and plum jam flavors show very good depth and a seamless texture. Velvety tannins give shape to the sweet, smoky, clinging finish. **90**

(Didier Boutet Wine Selection, www.dbwineselection.com)

Domaine de Cristia

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. Powerful, floral black and blue fruit scents are enlivened by cracked pepper and smoky minerals. Pliant and appealingly sweet, offering lively boysenberry and cassis flavors and a hint of candied lavender. Finishes on a smoky note, with smooth tannins and lingering sweetness. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Vieilles Vignes Bright purple. Intense aromas of dark berry liqueur, incense and oak spices, with a sexy floral overtone. Sweet, expansive black and blue fruit flavors show very good depth and a velvety, open-knit character. Finishes smooth and ripe, with harmonious tannins and a late jolt of smoky Indian spices. This exotic Chateauneuf should be very appealing soon after release. **91-93**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Vivid ruby. Vibrant red fruit and floral aromas are complemented by notes of allspice and orange zest. On the palate, juicy raspberry and blood orange flavors put on weight in the glass. Closes tangy and long, with silky tannins making a late appearance. (I had the chance to revisit the 2009 Renaissance bottling from Cristia and while it's still very young it's showing some intriguing floral and spice qualities that become more powerful as the wine opens up with aeration. There's a serious core of dark fruit and the necessary structure to see it well past a decade of aging but I wouldn't fault anybody for opening and decanting one now, especially if you have more than a couple of bottles.) **90**

(David Bowler Wine, www.bowlerwine.com; Galaxy Wine Company, www.galaxywinecompany.com; Wine Warehouse, www.winewarehouse.com)

Chateau La Croix des Pins

2012 Gigondas Les Echalas Ruby-red. Candied cherry, blackberry and smoky herbs on the nose and palate. Plush and open-knit, with good depth and appealing sweetness. Fine-grained tannins come on late and add grip to the long, spicy, singed plum finish.

88-90

2011 Gigondas Les Dessous Des Dentelles Opaque ruby. Pungent aromas of blackberry, cherry-cola and star anise, with a suave floral quality emerging with air. Juicy cherry and dark berry preserve flavors show very good depth and energy thanks to tangy acidity. The gently tannic finish shows good breadth, precision and spicy persistence. **90**

(www.chateaulacroixdespins.fr)

Domaine de la Croze Granier

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Full ruby. Lively black raspberry and Asian spice aromas are complemented by deeper notes of cola and licorice. Taut and linear on entry, then fleshier in the mid-palate, offering dark berry and bitter cherry flavors along with a hint of succulent herbs. Shows good lift and energy, finishing with lingering notes of tangy berry skin and spice. **89-91**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Le Chateau Opaque ruby. Expansive aromas of cassis, blackberry liqueur, bitter chocolate and dried flowers. Lush, round and broad, with a floral pastille nuance

adding complexity to the sweet dark berry flavors. Very generous and open-knit, finishing with fine-grained tannins, ripe fruit and a kick of smoky minerals. **90-92**
(www.domainegranier.fr)

Daumen Pere & Fils

2011 Gigondas Deep ruby. Fragrant scents of dark berries, licorice and floral oils, with a peppery topnote. Fleshy, sweet and nicely concentrated, displaying a smoky quality to its flavors of black raspberry, anise and allspice. Lush and broad on the back, finishing with silky tannins and good spicy persistence. **90**
(T. Edward Wines, www.tedwardwines.com)

Vignobles David

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Masques Opaque ruby. Powerful aromas of ripe cherry, smoky minerals, tar and dried flowers. Rich and layered, with a pungent quality to its dark fruit, licorice and bitter chocolate flavors. Finishes with slow-mounting tannins, a jolt of vanilla and a bit of lingering heat. **87-89**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Masques Deep ruby. Musky blackberry, dried cherry, minerals, licorice and fresh herbs on the nose. Minerally and tightly structured, showing a restrained sweetness to its dark berry and bitter cherry flavors. Finishes sweet and gently tannic, with good smoke- and mineral-tinged persistence. **89-91**
(www.vignobles-david.fr)

Delas Freres

2011 Vacqueyras Domaine Des Genets Deep ruby. Perfumed scents of fresh raspberry, smoky minerals, candied flowers and peppery spices. Sappy and focused, with intense red fruit and floral pastille flavors picking up a spicy element with aeration. This supple Vacqueyras finishes with very good length and only a hint of tannins. **90**
(Maisons Marques & Domaines, www.mmdusa.com)

Domaine Duclaux

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$45) Bright ruby-red. Jammy red fruit aromas are uncomplicated but appealingly primary. Ripe strawberry and raspberry flavors are lifted by tangy acidity and a hint of white pepper. Brisk, clean and slightly dry on the raspberry-inflected finish. **87**
(David Milligan Selections, www.davidmilliganselections.com)

Domaine de Durban

2012 Gigondas (\$28) Brilliant ruby. Sexy red berries and floral oils on the perfumed nose. The palate shows very good depth, with energizing spicy nuance emerging with air. Distinctly fruity Gigondas with strong finishing punch, supple tannins and an echo of candied red berries. **90**
(Kermit Lynch Wine Merchant, www.kermitlynch.com)

Domaine Durieu

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Dark ruby. Ripe dark berries and singed plum on the perfumed nose. Offers sweet cassis and blueberry flavors and a hint of licorice that adds an earthy flourish. Fleshy and broad on the spicy, persistent finish. **88-90**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Reserve Lucile Avril Saturated ruby. Powerful, deeply pitched black and blue fruits on the nose and in the mouth. Shows impressive depth and thrust, with a suave floral quality coming up with aeration. Closes sweet, broad and very long, with repeating florality and smooth, even tannins. This looks quite promising. **90-92**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$40) Vivid ruby-red. Spicy raspberry and cherry on the smoke-accented nose, with zesty minerality adding vibrancy. Brisk red fruit flavors show very good clarity and sweetness, with a snap of zesty acidity adding bite. Closes smooth, sweet and long, with subtle smokiness and a dash of anise. **90**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Reserve Lucile Avril (\$60) Vibrant ruby. Spicy blueberry and boysenberry aromas and flavors are complemented by a hint of smoky herbs. Weighty but energetic

as well, showing good lift and cut. With aeration, this wine picks up licorice and vanilla nuances that carry through a long, gently tannic finish. Nicely complex already but with the heft to reward some patience. **90**

(Jack Siler Selections, www.jacksilerselections.com)

Domaine Duseigneur

2012 Chateauneuf Du Pape Catarina Bright ruby. Sexy red fruit preserve and floral aromas are lifted and sharpened by white pepper and smoky minerals. Racy and precise on the palate, offering sweet raspberry and cherry flavors and a touch of anise. Shows good energy and lift on the finish, which is firmed by dusty, fine-grained tannins. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf Du Pape Vieilles Vignes (85% grenache, 10% syrah and 5% mourvedre): Bright purple. Oak-accented dark berries and cola on the highly perfumed nose. Broad and fleshy, offering sweet cherry-vanilla and blueberry preserve flavors and a strong note of clove. Really showing its oak today but appears to have ample fruit to handle it. Closes sweet, broad and long, with serious power and slow-building tannins. **90-92**

(Weygandt-Metzler Importing, www.weygandtmetzler.com)

Romain Duverney

2012 Vacqueyras (70% grenache, 20% syrah and 10% mourvedre): Dark ruby. Highly perfumed aromas of dark berry preserves, cola, floral oils and woodsmoke; smells like there's oak here, but there's not. Smooth and expansive on the palate, offering sweet blackberry and boysenberry flavors braced by tangy acidity. Closes sappy, warm and long, with smooth tannins making a late appearance. **89-91**

2012 Gigondas Vivid purple. Ripe blueberry and boysenberry aromas are complemented by hints of mocha, white pepper and licorice. Broad, sweet and weighty, with smoke and anise notes complicating ripe black and blue fruit flavors. Closes supple and warm, with smooth tannins adding shape and grip. **88-90**

2011 Vacqueyras (\$30) (70% grenache, 20% syrah and 10% mourvedre; no oak): Inky ruby. Cassis, black raspberry, licorice and cracked pepper aromas are complicated by a subtle herbal nuance. Juicy, penetrating and primary, with good intensity and lift to its dark berry, licorice and spicecake flavors. Closes sappy and long, with sneaky tannins adding grip. **90**

2011 Gigondas (\$35) Dark ruby. Pungent dark fruits, licorice and minerals on the nose. Ripe and chewy, offering cassis and bitter cherry flavors along with a touch of warmth. Distinctly weighty Gigondas with lingering smokiness and dusty tannins. Give this one some air. **88**

(Z Wine Gallery Imports, Herndon, VA)

Domaine de L'Espigouette

2012 Vacqueyras (80% grenache, 15% syrah and 5% mourvedre): Bright ruby. Ripe cherry, cassis, pipe tobacco and *garrigue* on the nose, with a subtle mineral undertone. Fleshy dark fruit flavors are supported by zesty acidity and pick up spiciness with aeration. Finishes sweet, gently tannic and long, with the dark fruit and tobacco qualities lingering. The 2011 version of this wine is drinking very nicely now, by the way, with a supple texture and highly appealing dark fruit and spice character. **89-91**

(J et R Selections, Ann Arbor, MI; Blue Coast Wine Imports, www.bluecoastwines.com)

Selection Laurence Feraud

2010 Gigondas (\$40) Bright ruby. Smoke- and spice-accented aromas of dried cherry, cassis and licorice, with a peppery nuance emerging with aeration. Chewy, incisive bitter cherry and dark chocolate flavors gain sweetness in the glass, with juicy acidity and a mineral element providing lift. Dusty tannins frame a finish that strongly echoes the cherry and licorice elements. Powerful, deep and built to age; I'd let this one rest for at least a few more years.

91

2010 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$62) Opaque ruby. Ripe cherry and blackcurrant on the nose, with complicating notes of smoked meat, olive and lavender. Fleshy and broad but energetic too, offering powerful dark fruit and floral pastille flavors and a hint of succulent herbs. Old-school in style, finishing with strong power and length, and fine-grained tannins adding grip. **91**

(Hand Picked Selections, www.handpickedselections.com)

La Ferme du Mont

2012 Gigondas Cotes Jugunda Opaque ruby. Sexy, highly perfumed bouquet displays an array of black and blue fruits, incense, licorice and candied flowers. Supple, velvety, palate-staining blueberry and cherry-cola flavors are buoyed by tangy acidity. Ripe and fleshy but lively too, finishing with excellent clarity and resonating spiciness. **90-92**
(Weygandt-Metzler Importing, www.wegandtmetzler.com)

Domaine de Ferrand

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Bright ruby. Heady candied cherry and raspberry aromas are lifted by smoky minerals and floral oils, with a spicy note gaining strength in the glass. Silky and seductively perfumed, showing superb cut to its flavors of raspberry liqueur, floral pastilles and blood orange. Silky tannins rise up late in the finish, which is all about intense red fruit. Extremely seductive stuff. **93-95**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$55) (95% grenache, 2% syrah, 2% mourvedre and 1% bourboulenc): Inky ruby. Dark berries, cherry pit, lavender and peppery spices on the fragrant nose. The palate offers appealingly sweet black raspberry and cherry compote flavors braced by juicy acidity and a hint of white pepper. Clean and focused on the youthfully tannic, strikingly long and urgent finish. **93**
(Weygandt-Metzler Importing, www.wegandtmetzler.com)

Domaine Isabel Ferrando

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Colombis (100% grenache; vinified with 100% whole clusters): Vivid ruby. Intensely perfumed scents of spicy dark berries and lavender, with zesty mineral and blood orange notes adding complexity. Pliant blackberry and cherry flavors are impressively fresh, becoming deeper and spicier with air. Really shows its stems--in an aromatic and spicy way, not in a tannic sense. This beautifully balanced, pure wine finishes with outstanding clarity and floral persistence. **92-94**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Colombis (\$58) Bright ruby. Fragrant bouquet of black raspberry, star anise and mineral aromas, with a sexy floral element building in the glass. On the palate, energetic red berry and bitter cherry flavors become sweeter and spicier with air. Very suave wine with excellent finishing clarity and lingering florality. I barely detected any tannins here, which adds to this wine's considerable upfront appeal. **92**
(A Daniel Johnnes Selection, imported by Michael Skurnik Wines, www.skurnikwines.com)

Eddie Feraud

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Bright ruby. Sexy raspberry and floral pastille aromas are complicated by hints of smoky minerals and cola. Fleshy raspberry and boysenberry flavors are given cut and lift by juicy acidity. Gains sweetness and depth with air, finishing with suave notes of lavender pastille and licorice and supple, slow-building tannins. **91-93**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$48) Saturated ruby. Raspberry, candied cherry and fresh flowers on the bright, mineral-accented nose. Lively and precise on the palate, offering intense red fruit preserve and spicecake flavors and a hint of white pepper. Lithe and pure wine with very good finishing clarity and smooth, harmonious tannins. **91**
(J et R Selections, www.jjimporters.com)

Feraud Brunel

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$49) Bright ruby. Musky cherry and redcurrant aromas are complicated by notes of *garrigue*, woodsmoke and pipe tobacco. Offers sappy cherry compote and floral pastille flavors and a hint of licorice, with a peppery nuance adding lift. Closes sweet and very long, with resonating spiciness and slow-building tannins. **91**
(Martine's Wines, www.mwines.com)

Ferme des Arnaud

2011 Vacqueyras Souviens-Toi Deep ruby. Cherry-cola, cassis and smoky Indian spices on the fragrant nose. Fat, rich and velvety, offering dense dark berry flavors and a touch of spicecake. Tangy acidity adds lift and bite to the spicy, clinging finish, which is framed by smooth, fully absorbed tannins. Quite sexy, and delicious right now. **90**

(www.fermedesarnaud.com)

Ferraton Pere et Fils

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Le Parvis (90% grenache and 10% syrah): Inky ruby. Pungent aromas of dried red fruits, anise, cola and herbs. Supple and broad, with very good depth to its black raspberry and cherry compote flavors. Becomes spicier with air and finishes on a subtle floral note, with chewy tannins coming on late and adding grip. **90-92**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Le Parvis (\$49) Deep ruby. Expressive aromas of ripe red berries, anise and Asian spices. Lush raspberry and bitter cherry flavors are lifted by tangy acidity and pick up a smoky nuance with air. Silky tannins give shape to the finish, which leaves sweet red berry and spicecake notes behind. This drinks very nicely now. **90**

(Baron Francois, www.baronfrancois.com)

Chateau des Fines Roches

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Bright violet color. A complex bouquet evokes blackberry, cherry-cola and violet, along with a subtle mineral nuance. Juicy, palate-coating black and blue fruit flavors blend density and energy, with a peppery note adding bite. Fresh and focused on the long, spicy finish. **90-92**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Inky ruby. Black and blue fruits, licorice and peppery spices on the perfumed nose and in the mouth. Aeration brings out a touch of bitter chocolate and a hint of succulent herbs. Tightens up on the back end, finishing with good clarity and bite.

88

(Vignobles Mousset-Barrot, www.vmb.fr)

Domaine des Florets

2012 Gigondas Full ruby. Musky, highly perfumed scents of fresh plum, redcurrant and game, all lifted by a sexy floral note. Sweet, focused and silky, with intense red fruit, herb and spicecake flavors gaining in volume with air. Finishes on a smoky note, with supple tannins and a lingering spicy aftertaste. **90-92**

2012 Gigondas Supreme Saturated ruby. Ripe cherry, blackberry and incense on the fragrant nose. Lush, sweet and broad on entry, with plush dark flavors turning drier and firmer with air. Closes on a floral note, with dusty, mounting tannins and a hint of bitter cherry pit. **89-91**

Also recommended: 2012 Gigondas Saveur des Dentelles (85). (www.domainedesflorets.com)

Chateau de la Font du Loup

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Bright violet color. A highly perfumed nose offers cherry-vanilla, blackberry, cola and peppery spices. Silky and broad on entry, then more taut in the mid-palate, offering gently sweet red and dark fruit compote flavors with complicating notes of anise and spicecake. Seamless and fruit-forward but the wine's depth and vivacity suggest that it will age gracefully. **90-92**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$42) Bright ruby. Aromas of fresh red fruits, white pepper, pipe tobacco and mocha, with a suave floral overtone. Offers sweet raspberry and cherry-cola flavors, lifted by juicy acidity that adds back-end cut. Smooth tannins shape the energetic, punchy finish.

89

(Paul M. Young Fine Wines, www.pywine.com)

Domaine Font de Michelle

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Vivid ruby. A highly perfumed bouquet evokes red fruit liqueur, incense and spicecake. Shows deeper, darker fruit qualities on the palate, with gently sweet black raspberry and boysenberry flavors braced by juicy acidity. Finishes smooth and very long, with resonating spiciness and even, harmonious tannins. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Elegance De Jeanne Vivid ruby. Spicy, sharply focused cherry and blackberry on the explosively perfumed nose, with exotic anise and incense notes adding complexity. Sweet and expansive, with powerful dark fruit flavors and a sexy floral pastille quality that mounts with air. Smoky minerality builds on the very long, spicy, sharply delineated finish. **92-94**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Etienne Gonnet Brilliant ruby. Powerful, brooding aromas of ripe cherry, roasted plum, cassis, dark chocolate and anise. Dense and palate-coating, offering strong dark berry and plum liqueur flavors and a touch of smoked meat. Shows serious concentration and extract on the finish, featuring velvety tannins and repeating smokiness.

Decidedly masculine Chateauneuf, and not lacking for energy. **91-93**

(Robert Kacher Selections, www.robertkacherselections.com)

Domaine de Font Sane

2012 Gigondas Deep ruby. Exotic aromas of candied dark berries, pit fruits and licorice, with a smoky overtone. Lush and seamless in texture, offering sweet blackberry and passion fruit flavors and a hint of bitter chocolate. Smooth tannins shape the very long, fruity finish. Pretty wild stuff.

90-92

2011 Gigondas (\$27) Bright ruby. Fresh raspberry and Asian spices on the floral nose. Juicy and precise on the palate, offering pliant red fruit and floral pastille flavors and a touch of allspice. Closes silky and long, with lingering spiciness and soft, even tannins. This is drinking very nicely right now.

90

Also recommended: 2011 Terrasses des Dentelles Gigondas (85). (Baron Francois, www.baronfrancois.com)

Domaine Font Sarade

2012 Gigondas Les Pigieres Deep ruby. Youthfully medicinal aromas of cherry pit, licorice and pungent herbs. Juicy, fresh and tight on the palate, offering bitter cherry and anise flavors supported by firm minerality. Finishes firm and gripping, with dusty tannins and a hint of cracked pepper. **87**

2012 Vacqueyras Les Hautes De La Ponche (50% grenache, 25% syrah and 25% mourvedre): Bright purple. Lively, spice-accented aromas of dark berries, cherry pit and cola. Peppery and taut on entry, then fleshier and deeper in the mid-palate, offering supple blackberry and cherry-cola flavors and a hint of tangy acidity on the back half. Finishes sappy and long, with excellent clarity and lingering spiciness. **91-93**

(Weygandt-Metzler Importing, www.weygandtmetzler.com)

Domaine Fontaine du Clos

2012 Vacqueyras Reflets De L'Ame (60% grenache and 40% syrah): Dark purple. Pungent aromas of ripe blueberry, vanilla and white pepper, with a note of incense building with air. Supple and broad on the palate, with intense dark berry and cherry-vanilla flavors and a spicy note that adds lift and cut. Juicy, appealingly sweet and deep, with good energy and drive to its smooth, seamless finish. **90-92**

2012 Vacqueyras Castillon (70% syrah and 30% grenache): Bright purple. Really showing its syrah today, with intense dark berry, olive, apricot and candied violet scents and a zesty, peppery overtone. Picks up a vanilla nuance with air, which adds sweetness to the deep black and blue fruit and floral pastille flavors. Closes smooth and very long, with a touch of smokiness and supple tannins. I suspect that most tasters would pick this exotic wine as coming from the northern Rhone.

91-93

(Didier Boutet Wine Selection, www.dbwineselection.com)

Domaine de Fontavin

2012 Vacqueyras (75% grenache and 25% mourvedre; all done in concrete): Opaque ruby. Vibrant blackberry and boysenberry scents are impressively focused and expressive. Pliant, sweet dark berry preserve flavors display very good clarity and freshness, with a touch of candied flowers adding an exotic twist. A spicy quality builds on the long, energetic finish, which is framed by youthfully chewy tannins. **90-92**

2012 Gigondas Cuvee Combe Sauvage Bright purple. Black raspberry, incense, lavender and Asian spices on the exotically perfumed nose, with a hint of cola gaining strength with air. Sappy and concentrated, offering juicy red and dark berry flavors underscored by zesty minerality. Shows impressive depth and finishes with excellent energy, cut and spiciness. I'm sure there are some tannins here but they're awfully well hidden right now. **91**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Bright ruby. Perfumed aromas of red berry preserves, vanilla, smoky minerals and licorice. Sweet, vibrant flavors of black raspberry, cherry, mocha and rose pastille, with

a creamy, open-knit character and good back-end lift. Velvety and broad but lively, showing very good clarity and verve on the gently tannic, floral finish. **89-91**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Full ruby. Spicy raspberry and cherry on the nose, with anise and floral notes building with air. Fresh, nicely delineated red berry flavors are given an exotic touch by zesty blood orange. Closes with gentle tannic grip, a touch of warmth and lingering sweetness. This is drinking well now. **88**

(Milton Road Trading Company, www.miltonroadtrading.com)

Chateau Fortia

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Tradition Deep ruby. Pungent aromas of cassis, blackberry, licorice and floral pastilles. Taut and focused, with bright acidity enlivening the dark fruit and bitter chocolate flavors. Finishes spicy and long, with chewy tannins and lingering notes of licorice and smoky minerals. **89-91**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Du Baron Inky ruby. Blackcurrant, incense and dark chocolate aromas, with a meaty topnote. Juicy, firm flavors of dark berries and bitter cherry are complicated by nuances of smoke and succulent herbs. Youthfully taut and gripping on the finish, trailing notes of licorice and bitter chocolate. Pretty serious, even brooding in character right now. **89-91**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Tradition (\$32) Vibrant ruby. Dark berries, lavender, smoky minerals and peppery spices on the pungent nose. On the palate, black raspberry and bitter cherry flavors are braced by juicy acidity and complicated by subtle anise and allspice. Shows a more civilized character than it did a year ago, finishing with good cut and focus and fine-grained tannins. **89**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Du Baron (\$34) Bright ruby. Pungent herbal, floral cherry and licorice aromas are complicated by notes of woodsmoke and cured meat. In a wild, old-school style, displaying good depth to its gamey red fruit flavors. Sweetens up on the finish, which is firmed by dusty tannins and a touch of bitter cherry pit. **88**

Other wines tasted: 2011 Cuvee du Baron Chateauneuf-du-Pape (?). (Wines of France, www.winesoffranceinc.com)

Domaine de La Fourmone

2012 Vacqueyras Tresor Du Poete Inky ruby. Blackberry, cherry-cola and pungent herbs on the smoke-tinged nose and palate. Lush, open-knit dark berry flavors become livelier with air, picking up notes of cracked pepper and smoked meat. Supple and seamless in texture, finishing with appealing sweetness and a subtle touch of earthiness. **88-90**

2012 Gigondas Cuvee Fauquet Deep ruby. High-toned aromas of cherry, licorice and pungent herbs. Offers nicely concentrated bitter cherry and cassis flavors and hints of cracked pepper and candied rose that build with air. Closes on a spicy note, with firm grip and tangy cut. **88-90**

2012 Vacqueyras Cepes D'Or (made from a blend old-vines grenache and mourvedre; no oak): Glass-staining ruby. Pungent dark berry and floral scents are complemented by notes of woodsmoke and peppery spices. Chewy and broad in the mouth, offering bitter cherry and cassis flavors and a strong note of candied lavender. Finishes spicy and long, with slow-building tannins and a touch of cola. **90-92**

2012 Gigondas Secret De La Barrique Dark ruby. Red and dark berry preserves on the nose, with hints of licorice and mocha adding complexity. Lively black raspberry and bitter cherry flavors stain the palate and show very good precision and lift. An exotic floral quality emerges with air and carries through the long, gently tannic finish. This is quite suave. **91-93**

2011 Vacqueyras Tresor Du Poete Deep ruby. A heady, complex bouquet presents candied red fruits, incense and floral pastilles. Lively and precise in the mouth, offering sweet red fruit and spicecake flavors that gain weight with air. Offers a suave blend of richness and vivacity and finishes with silky tannins and a kick of smoky, energizing minerality. **91**

2011 Gigondas Cuvee Fauquet Brilliant ruby. Expressive aromas of black raspberry, lavender and incense, with a bright mineral overtone. Lush and expansive, offering red berry preserve and spicecake flavors plus a hint of licorice. Finishes silky and long, with sweet, melting tannins and an echo of floral pastilles. **90**

2011 Vacqueyras Cepes D'Or Opaque ruby. Blueberry, blackberry, licorice and bitter chocolate on the deeply scented nose. Juicy, intense and focused, with a restrained sweetness and good peppery lift to its flavors of dark berry liqueur, anise and candied flowers. Finishes with a fine dusting of tannins and impressive fruit-driven persistence. **92**

2011 Gigondas Secret De La Barrique Opaque ruby. Deep, smoke-tinged aromas of dark berry preserves, vanilla and *garrigue*, with a suave mineral underpinning. Fleshy blackberry and blueberry flavors are enlivened by building Asian spice and white pepper qualities. Finishes on a sweet note of candied dark berries, with very good clarity and length. **91**

(Aliane Wines, www.alinethiebaut.com)

Domaine de la Ganse

2012 Vacqueyras (a blend of grenache and syrah; all done in concrete): Youthful purple. Powerful aromas of black and blue fruits, cherry pit and anise, with a smoky mineral note adding lift. Big, dense and sappy, offering ripe, deep cassis and mulberry flavors that blossom in the glass. Supple tannins build with air and linger on the sweet, smoke-accented finish. **90-92**

2011 Vacqueyras Ruby-red. Lively, focused aromas of redcurrant, cured tobacco, licorice and Asian spices. Sweet and aromatic, with juicy acidity lifting bitter cherry and spicecake flavors; gains in sweetness with aeration. Finishes with very good aromatic persistence and smooth, harmonious tannins. Very suave in a pinot-like fashion, and delicious right now. **90**

(www.domaine-de-la-ganse.fr)

Chateau de la Gardine

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Bright violet color. Dark berries, woodsmoke, licorice and dried flowers on the assertive nose. Fresh and energetic, offering sweet blueberry and blackberry flavors that gain spiciness and power with air. Zesty acidity adds focus and bite to the long, sappy, fruit-driven finish shaped by dusty tannins. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Des Generations Gaston Philippe Bright purple. Exotic, oak-spiced scents of dark berry preserves, cherry-cola and licorice. Sweet and broad on the palate, offering intense blackberry, vanilla and cola flavors and a hint of white pepper. Picks up a smoky nuance on the finish, which features velvety tannins and a touch of clove. I suspect that the more overt oak aspects that are showing today will be more subdued by the time this lush wine gets into bottle. **91-93**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$45) Vivid ruby. Raspberry, cassis, woodsmoke and a peppery note on the nose. Supple and gently sweet, offering somewhat loose-knit red fruit flavors and a hint of licorice. Finishes with smooth tannins and decent length, leaving a smoky note behind. **87**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Des Generations Gaston Philippe (\$75) Saturated ruby. Pungent aromas of black raspberry, smoky minerals, licorice and underbrush, with a gamey nuance building with air. Dense and weighty on entry, then powerful and energetic in the mid-palate, with distinct sweetness to its dark fruit and spicecake flavors. A big, full-bodied wine for the vintage, with broad, nicely integrated tannins shaping the finish. **91**

(Shaw-Ross International, www.shaw-ross.com)

Domaine La Garrigue

2012 Vacqueyras (80% grenache, 10% syrah, 5% mourvedre and 5% cinsault; no oak): Dark ruby. High-pitched aromas of dark berries, cherry pit and smoked meat, with a peppery overtone. Smoky and broad in the mouth, with palate-coating blueberry, game and cracked pepper flavors and a hint of candied violet. Seems like there's more syrah in here. Closes on a smoky note, with supple, even tannins and very good spicy persistence. **89-91**

2012 Vacqueyras Cuvee De L'Hostellerie (75% grenache and 25% syrah): Inky ruby. Dark berries and cherry pit on the spice- and smoke-tinged nose. Taut blackberry and floral pastille flavors open slowly, picking up sweetness and a hint of licorice. Chewy tannins give a firm edge to the refreshingly bitter, gripping finish. **90-92**

2012 Vacqueyras La Cantarelle (85% grenache and 15% syrah; zero oak): Vivid ruby. Aromas of lavender, anise and fresh dark berries show very good clarity. Ripe yet lively cherry and blueberry flavors pick up a smoky nuance with air, with complicating notes of candied flowers and medicinal herbs in the background. Quite complex already, finishing sweet, penetrating and long, with smooth, fine-grained tannins. **91-93**

(Eric Solomon Selections, www.europeancellars.com)

Chateau Gigognan

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Clos Du Roi Deep ruby. Deep, youthfully brooding scents of cherry compote, cassis, incense and woodsmoke. Plush cherry and dark berry flavors show a subtle anise quality and slow-building sweetness. Gently tannic and chewy in texture, finishing with echoes of spicecake and candied flowers. **89-91**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cardinalice Dark ruby. Higher-pitched than the Clos du Roi bottling, offering vibrant black raspberry and lavender aromas and notes of white pepper and smoky minerals. Lively and sharply focused, showing intense red and dark berry flavors that gain sweetness and weight with air. Closes silky and very long, with supple tannins making a late appearance and adding grip. **91-93**

(Beaune Imports, www.beauneimports.com)

Domaine Giraud

2012 Chateauneuf Du Pape Premices Brilliant ruby. Exotic raspberry preserve, incense and lavender aromas are brightened by vibrant minerality. Offers sweet red berry liqueur and floral pastille flavors of very good freshness and clarity, picking up an exotic blood orange quality with air. Finishes sweet, bright and long, with smooth, slow-building tannins. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Tradition Bright ruby-red. Highly perfumed scents of candied red fruit, potpourri and incense. Smooth and open-knit, offering intense black raspberry and cola flavors that become sweeter with air. Closes very long and spicy, with excellent clarity and fine-grained, harmonious tannins. **91-93**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Grenaches De Pierre Inky ruby. A highly aromatic bouquet evokes candied red fruits and cherry-cola, complicated by suggestions of smoky minerals, fresh flowers, cinnamon and suave oak spices. Deep, round and expansive, offering sweet, highly concentrated dark fruit flavors, lively minerality and a hint of floral pastilles. A rich and powerful yet graceful wine, boasting exceptional balance and strong finishing cling. **93-95**

2011 Chateauneuf Du Pape Premices (\$39) Bright red. Fresh blackberry, cherry and peppery spices on the nose. Silky, palate-staining dark fruit flavors pick up floral pastille and candied licorice qualities with air and show very good energy. Turns sweeter on the clinging finish, with the cherry and floral notes repeating. **90**

(Eric Solomon Selections, www.europeancellars.com)

Domaine Giuliani

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Inky ruby. Perfumed aromas of ripe dark berries, woodsmoke and cured meat. Chewy blackcurrant and bitter cherry flavors show good depth and pick up a peppery nuance with aeration. Closes on a chewy note, with youthful tannins and lingering spiciness. Showing a slightly rustic gamey character today. **85-87**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$39) Dark ruby. Pungent aromas of dried cherry, licorice and musky herbs, with a smoked meat nuance building in the glass. Chewy and expansive, offering smoky cherry-cola and licorice flavors and a hint of cracked pepper. Dusty tannins shape the clinging, smoky finish, with the meaty quality carrying through on the finish. This rather rustic wine will be more appreciated by fans of old-school Chateauneuf. **87**

(USA Wine Imports, www.usawineimports.com)

Domaine Les Goubert

2012 Gigondas Deep ruby. Smoke- and game-accented aromas of dried cherry and redcurrant, with a sexy floral nuance building in the glass. Displays an intriguing blend of gaminess and fruitiness, offering sweet red fruit flavors and a hint of bitter chocolate. Closes silky and long, with lingering spiciness and just a hint of tannins. Pretty interesting stuff here. **90-92**

2012 Gigondas Cuvee Florence Vivid ruby. Wild aromas of black raspberry, mocha, licorice and violet, with a peppery topnote. Sweet and supple on entry, then firmer in the mid-palate, offering bitter cherry, dark berry, anise and plum jam flavors. Finishes with supple, building tannins and an echo of licorice pastille. **90-92**

2011 Gigondas Bright red. Ripe cherry and raspberry scents are lifted by notes of allspice and white pepper. Shows darker fruit character on the palate, with juicy black raspberry joined by cherry-cola. Closes spicy and firm, with slow-building tannins and a touch of spicecake. **89-90**

2011 Gigondas Cuvee Florence Deep red. Raspberry, lavender and pungent herbs on the aromatic nose, with a mineral nuance adding lift. Sweet, chewy red berry and spicecake flavors show good depth and energy and pick up a smoky quality with air. Finishes with supple, fine-grained tannins, a repeating floral character and very good length. In a traditional style, but in no way rustic. **91-92**

(Ansonia Wines, www.ansoniawines.com)

Domaine du Gour de Chaule

2012 Gigondas Cuvee Tradition Ruby-red. Spicy raspberry and cherry on the nose, with complicating notes of white pepper and potpourri. Sweet, juicy red berry flavors show very good clarity and depth, with orange zest and peppery spices providing lift. Finishes sappy and long, with silky tannins and impressive length. **91-93**

2011 Gigondas Cuvee Tradition Bright ruby. Heady scents of black raspberry, pit fruits and potpourri, with a bright mineral quality adding definition and lift. Stains the palate with intense, spice-accented red and dark berry flavors that put on weight with air. The floral quality comes back strong on the finish, which shows striking clarity and sweet, penetrating persistence. This wine was still awaiting bottling when I tasted it in mid-November. **92-93**

(Rosenthal Wine Merchant, www.rosenthalwinemerchant.com)

Domaine du Grand Bourjassot

2012 Gigondas Cuvee Cecile Opaque ruby. Smoky cherry and cured meat scents are complemented by violet and musky earth tones. Bitter cherry and dark berry flavors display good depth and sweetness, lifted by refreshing notes of tangy minerals and blood orange. Finishes on a chewy note, with good length and grip. **88-90**

2012 Gigondas (\$28) Deep ruby. Wild, smoke-accented aromas of dried cherry, cassis and leather. In a funky, rustic style, with good depth to its dark fruit flavors. The smoky notes comes back on the finish, which features supple tannins and an echo of cured meat. Shows a rather rude personality but there's good fruit here as well. **87**

2011 Gigondas Cuvee Cecile (\$36) (80% grenache, with syrah and mourvedre): Deep ruby. Pungent aromas of ripe raspberry, vanilla and white pepper, with a touch of incense gaining strength with air. Smoky and plush on the palate, with slightly jammy raspberry and cherry-vanilla flavors accented by a peppery note. Smooth and supple on the smoky finish. **89**

2011 Gigondas (\$28) Deep ruby. Aromas of dark berries, candied licorice and Indian spices, with a floral nuance gaining strength with air. Juicy, broad and nicely concentrated, offering hefty cassis and bitter cherry flavors that are sharpened by a white pepper quality. A smoky note appears on the long, spice-dominated finish, which is firmed by youthfully chewy tannins. **90**

(Margate Wine & Spirit Company, www.margatewine.com)

La Grand Comtadine

2012 Vacqueyras Cuvee Reserve-Vieilles Vignes (70% grenache and 30% syrah): Deep ruby. Fresh black and blue fruits on the deeply perfumed nose. Plush and expansive, offering sweet cassis and blueberry flavors accented by a note of peppery spices. Closes sappy and very long, with supple tannins coming on late and folding quickly into the wine's lush fruit. **91-93**

(Serge Dore Selections, www.sergedoreselections.com)

Domaine du Grand Montmirail

2012 Vacqueyras (65% grenache and 35% syrah; aged for 18 months in concrete tanks): Inky ruby. Powerful, deeply pitched aromas of ripe black and blue fruits show a liqueur-like character. Broad, palate-staining blueberry and cassis flavors are lifted by a spicy nuance. Closes with building tannins, a whiplash of intense dark fruit and very good thrust and length. Nothing shy here. **90-92**

2012 Gigondas Vieilles Vignes Vivid ruby. Ripe cherry and dark berry aromas are complicated by cola and woodsmoke. Chewy and precise on the palate, offering bitter cherry and blackcurrant flavors and a note of peppery spices. Closes spicy and long, with a touch of bitter chocolate and youthful tannic grip. **89-91**

2011 Gigondas Les Deux Juliettes Vivid ruby. An intensely perfumed bouquet displays ripe cherry, blackcurrant and woodsmoke, along with a spicy overtone and a hint of lavender. Broad and fleshy on the palate, offering bitter cherry, dark berry and spicecake flavors complemented by mocha and licorice. Finishes sappy, spicy and long, with slow-building tannins and an echo of dark berries.

91

2011 Gigondas Vieilles Vignes (\$45) (60% grenache, 30% syrah and 10% mourvedre): Vivid ruby. Deeply pitched dark berry and floral pastille aromas are complemented by notes of spicecake and smoky minerals. At once rich and lively on the palate, offering gently sweet black raspberry and cherry flavors and a hint of white pepper. Finishes sweet and very long, with resonating spiciness and smooth, even tannins. **91**

2011 Vacqueyras (65% grenache and 35% syrah): Bright violet. Perfumed dark berry and lavender aromas show very good clarity and a high-pitched spicy nuance. Silky, appealingly sweet black raspberry and cherry flavors are sharpened by tangy acidity and put on weight with air. Closes spicy and long, with an echo of bitter cherry and supple, slow-building tannins. For a wine from vintage that some perceive as weak, there's no shortage of heft or power here. **90**

Also recommended: 2011 Gigondas Cuvee Yves Cheron (86). (Charles Neal Selections, www.charlesnealselections.com; Serge Dore Selections, www.sergedoreselections.com)

Domaine du Grand Tinel

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Full ruby. Blackberry and cherry compote on the pungent, highly perfumed nose. Plush and expansive but lively as well, offering sappy black raspberry and bitter cherry flavors that pick up smoke and peppery spice notes with air. Closes with good energy and length, leaving spice and smoke notes behind. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Alexis Establet Saturated ruby. Heady aromas of candied blackberry and cherry-cola are complemented by intense floral pastille and Indian spice nuances. Juicy and precise in the mouth, boasting impressive energy to its black and blue fruit preserve and bitter chocolate flavors. Solid tannins come on late and add shape to the sappy smoke- and spice-accented finish. This deeply concentrated Chateauneuf shows serious promise. **92-94**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Vivid ruby. Fresh red berries and cherry on the high-pitched nose. Juicy and focused, offering bitter cherry and black raspberry flavors complicated by hints of licorice and cracked pepper. Finishes tight and nervy, with sneaky tannins, a touch of cherry pit and good persistence. **89**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Alexis Establet Vivid ruby. Red fruit liqueur, lavender, anise and spicecake on the fragrant nose. Lively raspberry and floral pastille flavors show impressive clarity and lift, with a dusty mineral quality adding cut. Seamless and expansive on the penetrating finish, which features supple tannins and a strong echo of sweet red fruit. **92**

(Serge Dore Selections, www.sergedoreselections.com; Paul M. Young Fine Wines, www.pywine.com; J et R Selections, www.jjimimporters.com)

Domaine Grand Veneur

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. Powerful aromas of black and blue fruits, dried flowers and smoky minerals. Fruity and expansive, with weighty blackberry and mulberry flavors, supple texture and good mineral snap. Becomes spicier on the finish, which is framed by velvety, harmonious tannins. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Origines Bright purple. An alluring bouquet displays scents of blackberry and blueberry preserves, cherry-cola and vanillin oak. Broad, supple and densely packed, with sweet flavors of dark berries, floral pastilles and vanilla bean. The intense fruit is more than up to the oak component, which fades away slowly on the long, sappy finish. This sexy wine should provide plenty of immediate appeal on release but is built to age. **92-94**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Vieilles Vignes Inky ruby. Strongly perfumed bouquet evokes ripe blackberry, blueberry, violet and smoky oak. Seamless and sweet, offering plush dark berry compote flavors and an exotic floral pastille quality. Becomes spicier with air and finishes long and gently tannic, with clinging sweetness and a hint of licorice. **91-93**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$53) Ruby-red. Aromas of raspberry, lavender and white pepper, with a hint of smokiness in the background. Juicy and tightly focused on the palate, offering tangy red fruit flavors and building spiciness. Silky tannins give shape to the finish, which clings with appealing sweetness. **90**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Origines (\$70) Deep ruby. Blackberry, smoky minerals and sandalwood on the exotically perfumed nose. On the palate, sweet dark fruit flavors show very good depth and energy, picking up a sexy floral nuance with aeration. Closes smooth, sappy and very long, with youthful tannins adding shape and grip. **91**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Vieilles Vignes (\$120) Inky ruby. Powerful, spice-accented aromas of dark berry preserves and incense, with suave vanilla and woodsmoke nuances adding complexity. Plush and open-knit, showing impressive depth to its sweet, densely packed black and blue fruit flavors. Nicely braced by juicy acidity. The smoky note lingers on the gently tannic, sweet finish, which shows superb energy, power and thrust. **93**

(Kysela Pere et Fils, www.kysela.com)

Chateau de la Grande Gardiole

2012 Chateauneuf Du Pape Deep red. Spice-accented blackberry, cherry, anise and lavender aromas, along with a smoky topnote. Sweet and plump, with juicy cherry and dark berry flavors lifted by gentle acidity. Finishes on a bitter cherry note, with supple tannins coming on late.

Straightforward and fruit-dominated, which suggests that this wine will provide early appeal. **88-90**
(L&L Imports, www.l-limports.com)

Les Grandes Serres

2012 Vacqueyras Les Hautes Vacquieres Opaque ruby. Initially reduced scents of cherry skin, dark berries and smoky herbs brighten with air, picking up floral and peppery spice nuances. Smooth and seamless on the palate, offering gently sweet, deep black raspberry and lavender pastille flavors. Finishes with good spicy lift, gentle tannins and an echo of bitter cherry. **90-92**

2012 Gigondas La Combe Des Marchands Bright violet. Smoky dark berries, licorice and lavender on the perfumed nose. Sweet and expansive in the mouth, offering round blackberry and cherry-cola flavors and a touch of bitter herbs. Shows very good focus on the fruit-driven finish, which is framed by smooth, fine-grained tannins. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape La Cour Des Papes Deep ruby. Black raspberry, peppery spices and a floral element on the fragrant nose. Smooth and gently sweet, with fresh raspberry and cherry compote flavors enlivened by juicy acidity. Finishes with building, fine-grained tannins and lingering spiciness. This elegant example displays a restraint and balance that I really like. **91-93**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape La Cour Des Papes Deep red. Smoky, floral redcurrant and cherry on the nose, with zesty minerality adding energy and lift. Clean and brisk, offering lively red fruit flavors, tangy minerality and an exotic blood orange quality. Finishes with very good focus, silky tannins and a touch of lavender pastille. **91**

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Domaine du Grapillon d'Or

2012 Gigondas Excellence Inky ruby. Highly perfumed scents of dark berry preserves, licorice, smoky minerals and pungent flowers. Sweet, energetic flavors of black raspberry, cherry and white pepper show very good depth and clarity. Dense and chewy but lively too, showing impressive focus on the gently tannic, floral finish. **90-92**

2012 Gigondas Deep ruby. Dark berries, cherry, licorice and smoked meat on the rather rustic nose, with a peppery nuance adding lift. Pliant and gently sweet in the mouth, with dark fruit flavors complicated by notes of succulent herbs and bitter chocolate. Finishes with slightly dry tannins. **85-87**

2011 Gigondas Excellence (\$32) Bright ruby. Musky cherry pit, berry skin and smoked meat aromas expand with air and pick up a peppery nuance. Offers gently sweet cherry and blueberry flavors and a touch of lavender, with the meaty note sneaking up on the back half. On the wild side but shows good depth and finishing power. **88**

Also recommended: 2011 Gigondas (85). (Wineberry, www.wineberry.com)

E. Guigal

2010 Gigondas (\$36) Ruby-red. Fresh red fruits and floral oils on the fragrant nose. Juicy and seamless in texture, with very good lift and clarity to its raspberry and cherry compote flavors.

Supple tannins build on the finish, which lingers with persistent notes of flowers and spices. This elegant wine is delicious right now. **91**

2007 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$56) Bright ruby-red. Vibrant red and dark berry scents are complemented by notes of *garrigue*, woodsmoke and dark chocolate. Rich and expansive but energetic as well, offering sweet blackberry and cherry compote flavors and a touch of licorice. Shows the heft of the vintage but comes off as lively on the long, spicy, smoky finish. **92**

(Vintus Wines, www.vintuswines.com)

Domaine Olivier Hillaire

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Petits Pieds D'Armand (\$94) Full ruby. Blackberry, cherry-cola and potpourri on the perfumed nose. Sappy dark fruit flavors show very good depth, picking up spicecake and anise nuances with air. This smooth, expansive wine finishes with strong punch, slow-building tannins and an exotic floral pastille flourish. Nicely energetic for its heft. **91**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$48) Saturated ruby. Fresh black raspberry and cherry-cola scents are complemented by suggestions of potpourri and licorice. Smooth, gently sweet and broad on entry, then tighter in the middle, offering juicy red and dark berry flavors that pick up a refreshingly bitter edge with air. Supple tannins frame the clinging finish, which strongly repeats the red berry and spice notes. **90**

(Wines of France, www.winesoffranceinc.com)

Chateau Husson

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Saintes Vierges Bright purple. Aromas of dark berry preserves, vanilla and woodsmoke, with a subtle floral overtone. Sweet and broad in the mouth, offering plump blackberry and cherry-vanilla flavors and an exotic touch of coconut. Supple tannins shape the finish, which displays good power and an echo of vanilla. Showing a dominant oak character today, which I hope will subside by the time I revisit this wine next fall. **88-90**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Saumades Deep, vivid ruby. Heady aromas of blueberry and cherry compote, with exotic notes of apricot and incense adding complexity. Lush, deeply pitched black and blue fruit flavors show good vivacity and power, with a spicy quality building in the glass. Smoothly blends richness and vivacity, finishing with echoes of pit and blue fruits and gentle tannins. **89-91**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Saintes Vierges Opaque ruby. Powerful aromas of blackberry, cherry compote, roasted coffee and licorice, with a smoky topnote. Lush and velvety in texture, offering concentrated dark berry liqueur and mocha flavors with a peppery spice note adding complexity. Finishes with supple tannins, a subtle floral quality and very good length. **90-92**

(Vinifrance Imports, Springfield, VA)

Paul Jaboulet Aine

2012 Domaine De Terre Ferme Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (80% grenache and 20% syrah): Inky ruby. Sexy, spice-accented red berries and incense on the perfumed nose. Suave, sweet and penetrating, offering sappy raspberry preserve and floral pastille flavors that are lifted and sharpened by juicy acidity. Finishes silky and pure, with impressive clarity and spicy persistence. This lively Chateauneuf's balance and focus are striking. **91-93**

2011 Domaine De Terre Ferme Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$85) (an 80/20 blend of grenache and syrah): Inky ruby. Black and blue fruits, *garrigue* and fresh flowers on the highly perfumed nose. Dense and fleshy but energetic as well, offering sweet dark berry preserve and licorice flavors that become smokier and spicier with air. Finishes with excellent clarity and length, with fine-grained tannins sneaking in late and fading quickly into the fruit. A strong showing for this relatively new addition to the Jaboulet line-up. The 2010 version of this wine is drinking surprisingly well right now, considering the vintage, but it also has the depth to suggest that at least another five-plus years of patience will be rewarded. Aeration helps it a lot and it's an excellent match with grilled lamb. **92**

(Frederick Wildman & Sons, www.frederickwildman.com)

Domaine de la Janasse

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Opaque ruby. Highly perfumed scents of fresh blueberry, potpourri and woodsmoke, with a suave floral quality emerging with air. Sweet dark berry and spicecake flavors gain weight with air, picking up a sexy floral pastille nuance and a touch of allspice.

Impressively fresh and energetic, with a lingering note of dark berry preserves on the supple, gently tannic finish. **91-93**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Chaupin Deep ruby. Dark berries, incense, candied flowers and minerals on the highly perfumed nose. Offers sweet black raspberry and lavender flavors that become spicier with aeration. Fine-grained and sappy, with excellent finishing clarity and smooth, harmonious tannins adding grip. This sexy Chateauneuf will likely be delicious soon after release, but it has the concentration to strongly suggest that patience will be rewarded. **92-94**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Vieilles Vignes Inky ruby. Blackberry, blueberry and pungent herbs on the mineral-accented nose, with a floral topnote providing lift. Impressively sweet, lush and deep, showing sexy flavors of dark berry preserves, candied lavender and spicecake. Finishes very long and smooth, with supple tannins, lingering spiciness and outstanding clarity. **93-95**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$65) Vivid purple. Intense dark berry compote, anise and Indian spice scents show excellent power and depth. Stains the palate with sweet black and blue fruit flavors and picks up a sexy floral nuance with aeration. Atypically dense and complex for an entry-level bottling, this wine finishes with superb clarity and length and smooth, harmonious tannins.

92

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Chaupin (\$85) Dark ruby. Black and blue fruit scents show serious power and excellent focus. Sappy, expansive and alluringly sweet, offering palate-staining boysenberry and cherry-cola flavors and a touch of spicecake. Floral and mineral notes build on the potent finish, which is framed by smooth, fully absorbed tannins. **93**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Vieilles Vignes (\$115) Bright purple. Dark fruit liqueur, star anise, cinnamon and licorice aromas are sharpened by a lively mineral quality and a touch of white pepper. Sappy, sweet and incisive, with a suave blend of power and vivacity to its blackcurrant and mulberry flavors. Juicy acidity gives focus to the finish, which features velvety tannins, a touch of smokiness and outstanding energy. **94**

(Eric Solomon Selections, www.europeancellars.com)

Jas de Bressy

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. Sexy aromas of raspberry and Asian spices, plus a subtle floral character. Taut red fruit flavors open up with air and show a deeper bitter cherry quality, with tangy acidity adding lift. Shows more depth and sweetness on the finish, with the cherry and spice notes repeating. **89-91**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Inky ruby. Dark berries, black cardamom, olive and cola on the intensely perfumed nose. Round and expansive on the palate, offering sweet cassis and boysenberry flavors that pick up a spicy quality with aeration. Dusty tannins give shape to the finish, which clings with very good tenacity and lingering spiciness. **90**

(Saurel Chauvet, www.vins-gigondas.com)

Alain Jaume & Fils

2012 Gigondas Terrasses De Montmirail (\$33) Bright violet color. Smoky raspberry and blackcurrant aromas are accented by notes of allspice and mocha. Supple, nicely defined red fruit flavors give way to deeper dark berries with air and pick up a touch of bitter chocolate. Dusty tannins come on late, adding shape to a spice- and smoke-tinged finish. **89**

2012 Vacqueyras Grande Garrigue (a blend of grenache, syrah, cinsault and mourvedre): Deep ruby. Ripe blueberry, plum preserve and floral pastille aromas show impressive clarity and subtle spiciness. Lush dark berry flavors show good power and depth, with slow-building acidity providing focus and freshness. Closes on a gently tannic note, with velvety blueberry and blackberry notes lingering on the finish. **90-92**

2011 Vacqueyras Grande Garrigue (\$29) Bright violet color. Displays energetic scents and flavors of raspberry, bitter cherry, candied flowers and peppery spices. Round and seamless, with a hint of allspice emerging with aeration. Fine-grained tannins give shape to the finish, which clings with very good tenacity and appealing sweetness. **90**

(Kysela Pere et Fils, www.kysela.com)

Domaine Lafond Roc-Epine

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Bright ruby-red. Fragrant aromas of raspberry, cherry and fresh lavender, with peppery spice and anise accents building with air. Juicy and precise on the palate, offering gently sweet red berry and floral pastille flavors and a hint of succulent herbs. Shows good energy and focus on the finish, which features silky tannins and a hint of white pepper. **90-92**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$45) Deep ruby. Smoke- and spice-tinged dark fruits on the nose and in the mouth. Shows a pungent *garrigue* character with air, along with a hint of licorice that builds on the smooth, energetic, long finish. This wine has sweetened and softened since I saw it last year and it offers a lot of immediate fruit-driven appeal. **90**

(Wines of France, www.winesoffranceinc.com)

Lavau

2012 Vacqueyras (50% grenache, 40% syrah and 10% mourvedre): Inky ruby. Powerfully scented and ripe, displaying aromas of cassis, cherry compote and candied plum, with notes of woodsmoke and vanilla coming up with air. Broad and smoky in the mouth, offering sweet dark fruit and spicecake flavors and a licorice pastille nuance. Finishes smooth and long, with the ripe dark fruit notes repeating. **89-91**

2012 Gigondas Deep ruby. Spicy cherry and dark berry aromas are complemented by notes of dark chocolate and cracked pepper. Sweet dark berry flavors show good energy and depth, with a supple texture and building smokiness. Finishes with a hint of bitter berry skin, dusty tannins and good length. **87-89**

2011 Vacqueyras (50% grenache, 40% syrah and 10% mourvedre): Bright ruby. Dark berries, licorice and cracked pepper on the deeply perfumed nose. This rich yet lively Vacqueyras offers bitter cherry and blackberry flavors and a touch of floral pastilles. An olive note emerges on the finish, which is firmed by dusty, fine-grained tannins. **89**

2011 Gigondas Bright ruby-red. Redcurrant and dried cherry on the nose and palate. Shows good clarity and cut, with a peppery nuance adding bite to the taut, gently tannic finish. Clean and lively but could use more depth and dimension. **87**

(www.lavau.eu)

Domaine de Longue Toque

2012 Vacqueyras (80% grenache and 20% syrah): Inky ruby. Powerful aromas of red fruit preserves, potpourri and candied licorice, with a smoky Indian spice nuance in the background. Sweet, seamless and sharply delineated, offering a seductive, juicy quality to its red fruit preserve, mineral and floral pastille flavors. Finishes supple and long, with silky tannins and lingering florality. **90-92**

2012 Gigondas Deep ruby. Singed plum, licorice and dark chocolate on the nose, along with hints of pipe tobacco and violet. Then round, ripe and chewy in the mouth, offering densely packed black and blue fruit flavors that become spicier with air. Dusty tannins shape the finish, which lingers with good tenacity and subtle smokiness. **88-90**

2011 Gigondas Bright ruby. Ripe raspberry and cherry on the floral, spicy nose, with a smoky element emerging with aeration. Broad and seamless in the mouth, offering intense red fruit flavors and a touch of spicecake. The spicy note comes back strong on the finish, which is framed by smooth, even tannins. This Gigondas is delicious right now. **90**

(Gabriel Meffre America, www.gabrielmeffre.com)

Domaine Lou Frejau

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Inky ruby. Rich, dense and smoky on the nose, displaying scents of cassis, cured meat and leather. Fat and velvety in texture, showing musky blackcurrant and bitter cherry flavors and a hint of licorice. The long, smoky finish is weighty and broad, with good heft and persistent gaminess. Distinctly wild--perhaps a bit too much so for delicate palates or those who have yet to be weaned off squeaky-clean New World wines. **86-89**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Xiii Cepages Inky ruby. Powerful, spice-accented aromas of cherry compote, blueberry, licorice and minerals, with a strong overlay of candied flowers. Broad-shouldered but lively on the palate, offering sweet dark berry flavors complicated by exotic notes of candied flowers and fruitcake. The mineral element comes back on the youthfully tannic finish, which is broad, sweet and focused. **90-92**

Other wines tasted: 2011 Chateauneuf-du-Pape. (www.domaineloufrejau.com)

Domaine Patrice Magni

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Sensation Bright purple. High-pitched aromas of black raspberry, dusty minerals and licorice. Juicy and tightly wound, with a refreshingly brisk quality to its red and dark berry flavors. Very young but showing good depth. Finishes with bright floral lift, good cut and sneaky, fine-grained tannins. **89-91**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Sensation (\$50) Brilliant ruby. Spicy cherry and red berry aromas are accented by tobacco, musky underbrush and a subtle potpourri quality. Bright and energetic on the palate, with zesty red berry and bitter cherry flavors complicated by licorice and an exotic orange pith quality. Fine-grained tannins build on the slightly tart but persistent finish. **89**
(Domaine Select Wine Estates, www.domaineselect.com)

Domaine de Marcoux

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Youthful purple. Lively aromas of black raspberry, violet pastille and white pepper. Sweet and vibrant on the palate, which offers deeply pitched blackberry and blueberry flavors and a touch of spicecake. Distinctly fresh, focused and lively, with strong finishing thrust, soft tannins and lingering red fruit character. **91-93**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Vieilles Vignes Dark purple. Heady, complex scents of red and dark berry preserves, Asian spices, cola and smoky minerals. Densely packed but lively, offering sweet black raspberry and cherry liqueur flavors braced by a hint of blood orange. Shows terrific power and focus on the finish, which features silky tannins and an exotic floral nuance. One of the stars of the vintage, for sure. **94-96**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$75) Vivid ruby. Intense red fruit and floral scents are enlivened by a bright mineral note and a touch of white pepper. Offers penetrating raspberry and bitter cherry flavors that become sweeter with air. Shows excellent focus and energy on the lingering finish, which is firmed by silky, fine-grained tannins. This is one outstanding "basic" Chateauneuf. **92**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Vieilles Vignes (\$185) Inky ruby. Aromas of blackcurrant, cherry compote and potpourri display striking clarity and power, with a spicy quality adding lift. Dark berry liqueur and floral pastille flavors reach every corner of the palate, with juicy acidity adding focus. This refuses to let up on the youthfully tannic finish, which emphatically repeats the cherry and floral notes. **94**
(Eric Solomon Selections, www.europeancellars.com)

Mas de Boislauzon

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. Complex, herb-accented aromas of cherry, dark berries, smoked meat and licorice. Smooth, dense and subtly sweet, with gentle acidity giving lift and verve to the cherry and blackcurrant flavors. Finishes with dusty, harmonious tannins, hints of peppery spices and licorice and very good persistence. **89-91**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Du Quet (80% grenache and 20% mourvedre): Bright purple. Deeply pitched aromas of blackcurrant, cherry compote, licorice and violet, plus a hint of smoked meat. Suave and juicy, with ripe acidity framing weighty dark berry, candied licorice and bitter chocolate flavors. Finishes with well-buffered tannins, lingering smokiness and chewy, gripping tannins. Distinctly rich and broad-shouldered in style; this will work well with the richest red meat dishes. **91-93**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$46) (70% grenache and 30% mourvedre): Bright ruby. Lively red fruit and spicecake scents are complemented by deeper notes of licorice and pipe tobacco. Light on its feet and quite tangy, showing good lift and cut to its bitter cherry and redcurrant flavors. Closes on a spicy note, with good length and fine-grained tannins. **88**
(Wines of France, www.winesoffranceinc.com)

La Mas des Flauzieres

2012 Gigondas Rose La Boucaute Bright pink. Ripe melon and raspberry aromas are lifted and sharpened by a note of white pepper. Silky and open-knit, offering plump red fruit flavors and a hint of tangerine. Finishes smooth and broad, with an echo of red berries and very good length. **89**

2012 Vacqueyras Le Pilon (half grenache and half syrah; aged in one-year-old oak): Bright purple. Pungent aromas of ripe blackberry, cassis, vanilla and sandalwood. Fleshy and sweet,

showing a velvety texture to its deep dark berry preserve and vanilla flavors. Finishes with gentle grip and good sweet thrust. I tasted this wine blind and guessed that it had an awful lot of new oak, but apparently that is not the case at all. I look forward to trying it in bottle to see how it turns out. Speaking of how things turn out, the 2011 edition of this wine is quickly absorbing its oak component, which was a bit boisterous at this time last year, and shows a lot of sexy black and blue fruit and spice character that I find quite appealing right now. **87-90**

2012 Gigondas La Grande Reserve Vivid ruby. Cherry and raspberry aromas pick up a smoky nuance with aeration. On the palate, gently sweet red fruit and spicecake flavors take a darker turn as the wine opens up. Dusty tannins give grip to the powerful finish, which clings with very good tenacity and appealing sweetness. **90-92**

2012 Gigondas Four Danuga Deep ruby. Superripe cherry and dark berry aromas are complicated by notes of licorice and dark chocolate. In a brooding style, with weighty cherry-vanilla and cassis flavors that pick up a spicy nuance with aeration. Youthfully firm tannins shape the finish, which leaves vanilla and bitter cherry notes behind. Promising but quite primary right now. **89(+?)**

2011 Gigondas La Grande Reserve (\$29) Bright violet color. Deeply scented, smoky aromas of ripe cherry and cassis are lifted by notes of white pepper and Indian spices. Shows impressive depth and vivacity to its black and blue fruit flavors, which are sharpened by juicy acidity. Supple tannins come on late, adding focus to the sweet, slightly warm finish. **89**

2011 Gigondas Four Danuga Bright ruby-red. Smoky dark berry and cherry aromas show a superripe quality and a touch of candied licorice. Chewy and broad, offering good depth to its cassis and plum jam flavors. Distinctly rich Gigondas with strong finishing punch and supple tannins. I'd have liked a bit more vivacity. **87**

(Wine Warehouse, www.winewarehouse.com)

Mas des Restanques

2012 Vacqueyras (70% grenache, 20% syrah and 10% mourvedre): Deep ruby. Powerful dark berry and woodsmoke aromas are lifted by peppery spice and mineral nuances. Chewy and broad in the mouth, offering bitter cherry and cassis flavors and a velvety texture. Finishes with solid punch and very good breadth, leaving a smoky note behind. **89-91**

2012 Gigondas Bright ruby. Spicy, mineral-accented aromas of cherry pit and cassis, with licorice and cracked pepper nuances in the background. Juicy, penetrating dark berry flavors show a refreshingly bitter edge and pick up sweetness with air. Closes with firm tannic grip and good clarity, leaving spicecake and anise notes behind. **89**

2011 Vacqueyras (70% grenache, 20% syrah and 10% mourvedre): Bright ruby. Smoky, spice-tinged black and blue fruit scents are complemented by notes of licorice and white pepper. Offers supple blackberry and mulberry flavors that are braced and lifted by juicy acidity. Finishes smooth and round, nicely framed by suave, integrated tannins. **90**

(www.masdesrestanques.com)

Domaine Matthieu

2010 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$40) Ruby-red. Spicy red fruits and floral oils on the pungent, high-pitched nose. Juicy and precise, with zesty lift and cut to its concentrated raspberry and bitter cherry flavors. Shows a sexy lavender pastille quality on the finish, which is firmed by silky, slow-building tannins. In an elegant style but not lacking for depth or power. **91**

(Vintage '59 Imports, www.vintage59.com)

Domaine de la Mavette

2012 Gigondas Cuvee Boisee Deep ruby. Smoky cherry and dark berry aromas are complemented by dark chocolate and espresso. Full, round and rich on entry, displaying straightforward plum and blackberry flavors, then tighter and slightly dry in the mid-palate. Closes with building tannins and firm grip, leaving a smoky note behind. **85-88**

(www.domainedelamavette.com)

Gabriel Meffre

2012 Vacqueyras Saint Barthelemy (made from a blend of grenache, syrah and cinsault): Deep ruby. Very fresh, highly perfumed aromas of red fruit preserves, smoky minerals and peppery spices. Rich, dense and focused, offering energetic red fruit and floral pastille flavors lifted by tangy

acidity. Finishes with sweet, harmonious tannins that fade smoothly into the wine's plush fruit. **90-92**

2012 Gigondas Louis Bernard Bright purple. Heady black and blue fruit aromas are complicated by vanilla and cola accents. Fleshy cassis and blueberry flavors are sharpened by tangy acidity, which also adds mid-palate lift. Gains sweetness and depth with air, finishing with a subtle note of bitter chocolate, slow-building, harmonious tannins and impressive persistence. **91-93**

2012 Gigondas Sainte Catherine Dark ruby. Spicy redcurrant, raspberry, licorice and minerals on the perfumed nose. Lively, focused and juicy in the mouth, with flavors of fresh red fruits, spicecake and herbs. Picks up weight and sweetness with air while maintaining vivacity, and finishes with silky tannins and excellent clarity. **90-92**

2012 Gigondas Laurus Bright purple. Exotically perfumed bouquet of dark berry preserves, olive and cola, with slow-building floral character. Round and creamy on the palate, offering sweet cherry-cola and blackberry flavors and a hint of candied licorice. A note of candied lavender comes up on the clinging, youthfully tannic finish.

91-93

2012 Chateauneuf Du Pape Saint Theodoric Ruby-red. Lively aromas of raspberry, cherry and fresh flowers, with Asian spice and herb accents building with air. Juicy and precise on the palate, offering gently sweet red berry flavors and a hint of candied lavender. Shows very good energy and clarity on the finish, which features a zesty blood orange nuance and soft tannins. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Laurus Bright violet color. Sexy, highly perfumed scents of candied dark fruits, vanilla and Indian spices, with a subtle *garrigue* quality gaining power with air. Sappy, penetrating blackberry and bitter cherry flavors show impressive depth and turn smokier with air. Lingers with appealing sweetness, leaving peppery spice and floral notes behind. **92-94**

2011 Vacqueyras Laurus (a blend of grenache, syrah, cinsault and mourvedre): Vivid purple. Black and blue fruits and anise on the deeply scented nose. Plush and open-knit, with good depth and breadth to its blueberry and cherry-cola flavors. A spicy note adds lift to the finish, which leaves notes of licorice and dark berries behind. **90**

2011 Gigondas Louis Bernard Ruby-red. Pungent aromas of cherry-cola, black raspberry and woodsmoke, with a light touch of vanilla. Round and fleshy, offering sappy dark berry flavors that are lifted and sharpened by zesty acidity and a hint of white pepper. Broad and supple on the gently tannic finish, with the vanilla and cola notes repeating. Quite sexy, and approachable now. **91**

2011 Gigondas Sainte Catherine Opaque ruby. Intense aromas of red fruit liqueur, allspice and vanilla are complemented by notes of licorice and woodsmoke. Offers broad raspberry and cherry-vanilla flavors that are sharpened by a building peppery nuance. The finish repeats the spice and vanilla notes and lingers with impressive tenacity and gentle tannic grip. This sexy Gigondas is delicious right now. **91**

2011 Gigondas Laurus Bright purple. Sexy, expansive aromas of black and blue fruits, vanilla and incense, plus a zesty mineral topnote. Sweet and plush on the palate, offering intense blueberry, cassis and vanillin flavors that pick up a smoky nuance with air. The oak element fades slowly into the fruit on the clinging finish, which features smooth tannins and a late jolt of candied flowers. **91**

2011 Chateauneuf Du Pape Saint Theodoric Vivid red. High-pitched, pinot-like aromas of raspberry, zesty minerals and fresh flowers, with a spicy topnote. Silky and sharply focused, offering energetic red fruit flavors and a hint of orange pith. Finishes sweet and long, with firm grip, smooth tannins and a lingering floral note. **90**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Laurus Deep ruby. Deeply pitched, sexy aromas of raspberry liqueur, cherry-cola, vanilla and pipe tobacco. Broad, fleshy and sweet, offering palate-staining red fruit flavors and notes of floral pastilles and mocha. Smooth, seductive and open-knit, with excellent finishing clarity and smoky persistence. **92**

(Gabriel Meffre America, www.gabrielmeffre.com)

Domaine La Mereuille

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Opaque ruby. Pungent cherry and dark berry skin scents are complemented by notes of cured meat, licorice and cracked pepper. This wild, sappy, ripe Chateauneuf offers bitter cherry, cassis and game flavors and a touch of candied flowers. Gains weight with air and finishes with strong spicy cut, firm tannins and an echo of gaminess. This is pretty out there; let's see what happens after this funky boy gets into the bottle. **85-87?**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Baptaurels Saturated ruby. Cherry, dark berries, woodsmoke and licorice on the nose, with a suggestion of plum jam coming up with air. Sappy and sweet, offering ripe blueberry and mulberry flavors with notes of beef jerky and candied violet. In a somewhat decadent style, finishing with very good punch, slow-building tannins and a subtle floral nuance. **88-90**

2011 Chateauneuf Du Pape Sensation (\$55) Bright ruby. High-toned cherry and dark berry aromas are complemented by licorice and pungent herbs. On the wild side but more civilized than the fairly rude regular 2011 bottling, offering sweet blackberry and bitter cherry flavors and a touch of smoked meat. Closes on a spicy note, with supple tannins and a hint of bitter chocolate. **87**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Baptaurels (\$85) Deep ruby. Spicy, high-toned aromas of cherry skin, blackberry and peppery spices. Tangy and sharply focused, offering bitter cherry and cracked pepper flavors and a hint of volatility. Shows plenty of personality, with a wild, gamey quality carrying through the spicy, gently tannic finish. Fans of old-school Rhone wines may find my score low. **87**

Also recommended: 2011 Chateauneuf-du-Pape (85). (Good Company Wines, www.goodcompanywines.com)

Domaine La Milliere

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Vieilles Vignes Deep ruby. Spicy redcurrant and strawberry aromas are complemented by notes of peppery spices and show a slightly high-toned quality. Lively and precise on the palate, offering gently sweet red fruit flavors and a hint of licorice. Finishes with very good clarity and spicy persistence, leaving a subtle smoky note behind. **89-91**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Vieilles Vignes (\$56) Full ruby. Blackberry, cherry pit and smoky minerals on the fragrant nose and in the mouth. Rich but lively as well, displaying good back-end lift and focus. Finishes on a tangy note, with slow-building tannins, an echo of bitter cherry and very good length. **90**

(North Berkeley Imports, www.northberkeleyimports.com)

Domaine La Monardiere

2012 Vacqueyras Les 2 Monardes (70% grenache and 30% syrah): Bright purple. Spicy blackberry and cherry aromas are complemented by a suave floral quality and a hint of allspice. Open-knit dark fruit flavors are sharpened by tangy acidity and pick up a subtle spicy quality on the back end. The floral note echoes through the long, sappy finish, which is firmed by smooth, well-knit tannins. **90-92**

2011 Vacqueyras Les 2 Monardes (\$24) (70% grenache and 30% syrah): Bright ruby. Smoky aromas of dried cherry, cassis and beef jerky, with a peppery overtone. As was the case last year, this is definitely on the funky side, offering pungent red fruit and game flavors and a suggestion of floral pastilles. Finishes with good power and length and slow-building tannins. There's good balance here but the meaty quality will likely be offputting to those not comfortable with old-school Rhone wines. **87?**

(David Bowler Wine, www.bowlerwine.com)

Chateau Mont-Redon

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. Highly perfumed bouquet displays vibrant, mineral-accented red berry and cherry scents, plus a sexy floral overtone. Spicy and incisive on the palate, offering energetic raspberry and bitter cherry flavors and a hint of spicecake. The spice and mineral notes linger on the long, silky finish, which shows excellent clarity and just a hint of tannins. This wine's balance is impressive. **92-94**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$50) Brilliant ruby-red. Aromas of dark berries, spicecake, licorice and potpourri on the highly perfumed nose. Stains the palate with energetic black raspberry and bitter cherry flavors, with a zesty mineral element giving spine to the wine. The floral quality comes back strong on the finish, which features supple tannins and extremely persistent spiciness. **92**

(Kobrand Wine & Spirits, www.kobrandwineandspirits.com)

Chateau Mont-Thabor

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Dark ruby. Superripe cherry and cassis scents are complemented by notes of pipe tobacco and licorice. Broad and fleshy on the palate, with deeply pitched dark fruit

flavors that show a slightly singed character. Plenty rich, for sure, but I'd like to have seen more vibrancy. I hope that I caught this wine in a sullen phase. **85-87?**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$44) Deep ruby. Dark berries and peppery spices on the fragrant nose. Ripe and fleshy, offering sweet cherry and boysenberry flavors and a sexy lavender pastille nuance. Shows good depth and breadth on the finish, which lingers with subtle warmth and round tannins. **89**

(Wineberry, www.wineberry.com)

Domaine La Montagne Vieille

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Bright ruby. Lively aromas of red berries, herbs and flavors show good clarity, with a hint of white pepper providing lift. Taut, focused and refreshingly bitter, offering redcurrant and bitter cherry flavors and a touch of blood orange. Closes with firm grip, peppery bite and gentle, fine-grained tannins. **87-89**

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Domaine Montirius

2012 Vacqueyras Le Village (80% grenache and 20% syrah; all done in concrete): Vivid ruby. Fresh redcurrant and cherry aromas are complicated by notes of cracked pepper and fresh flowers. Firmly structured but appealingly fruity, offering juicy red fruit flavors and a hint of bitter chocolate. Closes on a tangy note, with dusty tannins and an echo of dark cherry. **88-90**

2012 Vacqueyras Garrigues (70% grenache and 30% syrah; all in concrete): Opaque ruby. Powerful, spice-laced aromas of dark berry compote, singed plum and licorice. Plush, palate-staining blackberry and blueberry flavors show impressive depth and energy and pick up a smoky nuance with air. Supple tannins add grip to the broad, sweet, very persistent finish, which echoes the blueberry note. **91-93**

2012 Vacqueyras Le Clos (half grenache and half syrah; all in concrete): Deep ruby. Complex aromas of black and blue fruits, lavender and smoky minerals. Densely packed and powerful, with impressive energy to its sweet dark berry, licorice and floral pastille flavors. Shows impressive volume and density but comes off lively and graceful, finishing with excellent clarity and sneaky tannins. **91-93**

2012 Gigondas Confidentiel Bright purple. Intensely perfumed scents of spice-accented blueberry and blackberry, along with notes of lavender and zesty minerals. Offers ripe but energetic dark berry and spicecake flavors that gain weight and sweetness with air. Gently chewy on the very long, incisive finish, which leaves floral and allspice notes behind. **91-93**

2012 Gigondas Terres Des Aines Deep ruby. Vibrant aromas of raspberry, potpourri and cola, with a zesty mineral overtone. Quite dense and silky in texture, showing very good clarity to its red and blue fruit, floral pastille and spicecake flavors. Stains the palate and leaves behind suave notes of nutmeg, smoky minerals and lavender, with just a hint of silky tannins. **91-93**

2011 Vacqueyras Garrigues (70% grenache and 30% syrah; all concrete): Bright purple. Sexy, spice-tinged aromas of blueberry and cherry compote, with a suave floral nuance in the background. Shows very good focus and lift to its sappy black and blue fruit flavors, which pick up a medicinal quality with aeration. The floral element returns on the finish, which lingers with excellent intensity and silky, harmonious tannins. **91**

2011 Vacqueyras Le Clos (half grenache and half syrah; 100% concrete): Bright purple. Expansive dark berry compote, incense and lavender aromas are brightened by a zesty mineral quality and pick up a sexy Asian spice nuance with aeration. Concentrated and lively on the palate, offering sweet boysenberry and floral pastille flavors that show excellent focus and purity. The mineral element sharpens the strikingly persistent finish, which features velvety tannins and lingering spiciness. **93**

2011 Gigondas Confidentiel Bright ruby. Sexy red fruit liqueur, potpourri and spicecake scents are given depth by notes of licorice and cured tobacco. Shows very good energy and focus on the palate, offering intense raspberry and bitter cherry flavors and a hint of allspice. Closes taut and long, with sneaky tannins adding grip. I like this wine's tension.

91

2011 Gigondas Terres Des Aines Ruby-red. Dark berries, incense and potpourri on the intensely perfumed nose. Fleshy and broad, offering powerful black and blue fruit flavors and notes of licorice

and spicecake. Finishes sweet and very long, with slow-building tannins and lingering dark fruit character. **92**

(www.montirius.com)

Domaine de Montvac

2012 Gigondas Adage Bright violet. Ripe dark berries and cherry-cola on the perfumed nose, along with hints of vanilla, pipe tobacco and licorice. Weighty blueberry and floral pastille flavors are firm by piquant minerality and become spicier with air. Pliant, juicy and penetrating on the persistent finish, with dusty tannins adding grip. **91-93**

2011 Gigondas Adage Vivid ruby. Dark berries and dried flowers on the fragrant nose. Fleshy and broad in the mouth, offering gently sweet blackberry and cherry compote flavors and a touch of white pepper. Finishes with building tannins, an echo of candied flowers and good length. **87-88**

2012 Vacqueyras Arabesque (70% grenache, 25% syrah and 5% mourvedre): Opaque ruby. Ripe cherry and blackberry aromas show good clarity and a sexy floral accent. Supple dark berry preserve flavors show good depth and solid punch, with juicy acidity adding lift. Chewy tannins give grip to the finish, with the floral note echoing. **89-91**

2012 Vacqueyras Cuvee Vincila (60% grenache and 40% syrah): Inky ruby. Fresh cherry and boysenberry aromas are complicated by notes of cola, lavender and white pepper. Broad and densely packed, with dense dark berry compote flavors enlivened by zesty minerality. Surprisingly elegant for its mass. Finishes with gentle, building tannins and good spicy persistence. **89-91**

2012 Vacqueyras Variation (80% grenache and 20% syrah): Saturated ruby. Spicy, licorice-accented red berry and cherry aromas show very good verve and focus. Juicy and fresh, offering vibrant cherry and bitter chocolate flavors complicated by dusty herb and spicecake notes. Closes tangy and long, with fine-grained tannin adding grip. This youthful wine shows plenty of promise. **90-92**

2011 Vacqueyras Arabesque (\$22) (70% grenache, 25% syrah and 5% mourvedre; all concrete): Bright ruby. Ripe red fruit aromas are lifted by a spicy nuance and pick up a candied licorice quality with air. Fleshy black raspberry and bitter cherry flavors are sharpened by a peppery nuance and tangy minerality. Closes spicy and long, with slow-building tannins and very good clarity. **90**

2011 Vacqueyras Variation (\$37) (80% grenache and 20% syrah): Bright ruby-red. Vibrant red berry and cherry scents are complicated by fresh lavender and cracked pepper. Juicy and tightly focused, offering lively redcurrant and bitter cherry flavors and a hint of licorice. Sweeter and fleshier on the finish, which is shaped by sneaky, fine-grained tannins. **89**

(T. Edward Wines, www.tedwardwines.com)

Domaine de la Mordoree

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee De La Reine Des Bois Deep ruby. Fresh black and blue fruits on the highly perfumed nose, with floral and Indian spice nuances adding complexity. Sappy, penetrating and pure, with very good depth and energy to its boysenberry and cherry-cola flavors. At once rich and lively, finishing with impressive power, supple tannins and lingering spiciness. **93-95**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee De La Reine Des Bois (\$140) Opaque ruby. Deeply pitched black raspberry, sandalwood and Indian spice scents are enlivened by a peppery nuance. Broad and sappy in the mouth, offering sweet red and dark berry compote flavors and a touch of licorice. Showing surprising depth for an '11, this wine finishes with excellent power and smooth, gently tannic persistence. **92**

(Kysela Pere et Fils, www.kysela.com)

Domaine Pierre Henri Morel

2012 Vacqueyras Brilliant ruby. A complex bouquet displays scents of fresh red berries, cherry, spicecake and licorice. Silky and seamless in texture, offering sweet raspberry and cherry flavors underscored by tangy acidity and a hint of white pepper. Impressively persistent on the finish, which betrays just a hint of tannins. **90-92**

2012 Gigondas Bright violet color. Fresh strawberry and raspberry aromas display straightforward fruity appeal. Sappy cherry and red berry flavors are given lift and bit by zesty minerality and a hint of white pepper. Clean, brisk and focused, with good lingering sweetness and persistence. **89-91**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (all done in concrete): Bright violet color. Deep, smoke-tinged aromas of dark berry preserves, pipe tobacco and potpourri, with a suave mineral underpinning. Fleshly, palate-coating blackberry and blueberry flavors are energized by building Asian spice and cracked pepper qualities. Finishes on a long, sweet note of fresh dark berries, with smooth, well-knit tannins. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Lieu Dit Pignan Glass-staining ruby. Sexy, floral bouquet of candied dark fruits, incense and allspice, along with a deeper element of licorice. Juicy and precise, displaying impressive depth to its black and blue fruit compote flavors. Shows outstanding energy and lift on the finish, which features velvety tannins and a sexy lavender pastille quality. **91-93**

2011 Gigondas (\$40) Bright ruby. Enticing high-pitched aromas of red berries, fresh flowers and white pepper. Juicy and incisive on the palate, offering lively raspberry and bitter cherry flavors and a hint of succulent herbs. Closes clean, spicy and long, with no obvious tannins and very good persistence. **90**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$55) Full ruby color. Dark berries, exotic spices and floral oils on the highly perfumed nose. Offers sweet black raspberry and lavender pastille flavors and a bracing mineral quality that adds lift and spine. Juicy, focused and appealingly sweet on the finish, which features smooth, melting tannins and a hint of blackberry preserves. **91**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Lieu Dit Pignan (\$80) Opaque ruby. Flamboyant aromas of raspberry liqueur, potpourri and spicecake, with bright minerality coming up with aeration. Juicy, penetrating raspberry and cherry-cola flavors become fleshier and deeper with air while retaining excellent clarity. Silky tannins give shape and grip to the very long, sweet, floral finish. **92**
(Massanois Imports, www.massanois.com)

Moulin de La Gardette

2012 Gigondas Ruby-red. Spicy raspberry, cherry and redcurrant aromas are complicated by suggestions of woodsmoke and dusty minerals. Silky and seamless in texture, with vibrant flavors of raspberry, allspice and star anise. A racy, energetic example of Gigondas, with very good finishing energy and supple tannins adding shape. **89-91**

2012 Gigondas La Cuvee Ventabren Opaque ruby. Aromas of blueberry, black raspberry, anise and woodsmoke. Lush and seamless in texture, with gentle acidity lifting the black and blue fruit, spicecake and dark chocolate flavors. Rich but not at all heavy. Finishes with supple tannins, a hint of cracked pepper and good energy. **89-91**

2011 Gigondas La Cuvee Tradition Deep ruby. Aromas of raspberry liqueur, cherry-cola and peppery spices, with a hint of candied flowers in the background. Smooth and fleshy on the palate, offering sweet red and dark berry flavors braced by tangy acidity. Silky tannins give shape to the finish, which clings with very good, sweet tenacity. **90**

2011 Gigondas La Cuvee Ventabren Vivid red. Fresh raspberry and boysenberry on the highly perfumed nose. Sexy floral and Asian spice nuances build with air and carry onto the palate, which offers gently sweet black raspberry and licorice flavors. Closes smooth and sweet, with soft tannins making a late appearance and folding into the fruit. This suave Gigondas is already drinking well. **91**
(Bourgeois Family Selections, www.bourgeoiswines.com)

Domaine Moulin Tacussel

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. Pungent, medicinal aromas of cherry pit, smoked game and cracked pepper. Offers bitter cherry and succulent herb flavors that pick up a spicy nuance with aeration. Closes with good energy, focus and length, with dusty tannins adding grip. On the rustic side.

85-87

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Vieilles Vignes Glass-staining ruby. Pungent aromas of ripe dark berries, potpourri and incense, with a smoky nuance in the background. Smooth and broad but lively, offering intense blackberry and cherry compote flavors and a hint of zesty minerality. Shows very good density and finishes on a spicy note, with just a hint of dusty tannins. **91-93**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$44) Brilliant ruby. Smoke- and spice-accented aromas of dried cherry, cassis and licorice, with a subtle floral quality in the background. Offers sharply focused bitter cherry and dark berry that unfold with air and pick up a subtle mineral quality. Nicely balanced and restrained, finishing with very good energy and chewy tannins. **89**

(Wines of France, www.winesoffranceinc.com)

Domaine de Nalys

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Bright ruby. Fresh red fruits and candied flowers on the nose, with notes of white pepper and anise in the background. Sappy and focused on the palate, offering gently sweet raspberry and lavender pastille flavors and a smoky quality on the back half. Closes with good clarity and gentle sweetness, leaving a flavor of red fruit preserves behind. **88-90**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Reserve Bright violet color. Complex, smoke-accented scents of blackcurrant, dried cherry, sandalwood and cured meat. Supple, nicely concentrated dark fruit flavors stain the palate and show a spicy aspect on the back half. Finishes juicy and expansive, with an echoing meaty note. Quite wild at this stage. **89-91**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Le Chataignier (\$50) Deep ruby. Highly perfumed scents of fresh red berries, peppery spices, smoked meat and lavender. Spicy and precise, with good depth and vivacity to its sweet raspberry and bitter cherry flavors. The smoky note comes back on the finish, which is framed by supple, easygoing tannins that fade slowly into the fruit. Offers plenty of appeal now but I'd give this lively wine a few more years of age.

90

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Reserve (\$50) Deep ruby. Cherry, dark fruit and smoked meat on the pungent nose. Shows a smoky, gamey quality in the mouth, along with bitter cherry and cassis qualities and a hint of tangy acidity. Finishes with good thrust, chewy tannins and lingering smokiness. **88**

Also recommended: 2011 Chateauneuf-du-Pape (87). (Didier Boutet Wine Selection, www.dbwinselection.com)

Chateau La Nerthe

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Bright ruby. Vibrant cherry and blackberry scents, complemented by a subtle floral accent. Sweet red fruit flavors show impressive vibrancy and clarity, with a licorice note adding depth. Finishes clean and spicy, with a tangy redcurrant quality and smooth, harmonious tannins. **89-91**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Des Cadettes Dark ruby. Exotically perfumed scents of candied dark berries, vanilla, woodsmoke and incense. Showing a strong dose of oak today but there's plenty of ripe blackberry and blueberry fruit to go along with it. Supple and seamless in texture, finishing with outstanding thrust, supple tannins and lingering sweetness. **92-94**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$60) Saturated ruby. Oak-spiced blackberry, cherry-cola and vanilla aromas are sharpened by a bright, mineral quality. Smooth, palate-coating black and blue fruit compote flavors show excellent depth and become spicier and more energetic with air. Offers a suave blend of richness and vivacity, finishing sweet, gently tannic and very long. There is no Cuvee des Cadettes this vintage so this bottling includes all of the estate's old-vines fruit. (I also had the chance to taste the 2010 Chateauneuf and 2010 Cuvee des Cadettes Chateauneuf this fall and both are still extremely young and in need of more patience, especially the Cuvee des Cadettes. There's an exotic character to the latter wine, as there was last year, and I can imagine plenty of wine lovers going nuts over its flamboyant character even now, but patience really is in order.) **92**

(Pasternak Wine Imports, www.pasternakwine.com)

Domaine Notre Dame des Pallieres

2012 Gigondas Rose (\$19) Lurid pink. Dried cherry, rose oil and white pepper on the incisive nose. Taut and sharply focused, offering bitter cherry and red currant flavors that pick up a smoky nuance with air. Closes on a dusty, talc-y note, with good cut and length. Quite dry and grown-up in style. **88**

2012 Gigondas La Font De Notre Dame Bright ruby. Lively aromas of raspberry, candied cherry and peppery spices, with a floral topnote. Juicy, focused, penetrating red fruit flavors put on weight with air and pick up a suave lavender pastille nuance. Finishes sweet, expansive and long, with supple tannins and excellent clarity. **90-92**

2012 Gigondas Les Mourres Brilliant ruby-red. Sexy raspberry and cherry preserve aromas are complicated by hints of Asian spices, smoky minerals and fresh lavender. Suave and velvety in

texture, with lively, sweet flavors of red and dark berries, cola and white pepper. Gentle tannins give shape and gentle grip to the smooth, spicy finish. **90-92**

2012 Gigondas Bois Des Mourres Inky ruby. Ripe red berry and spicecake aromas are complemented by deeper notes of cola, licorice and vanilla. Silky and precise, showing good thrust to its sweet black raspberry and bitter cherry flavors. A smoky quality emerges with air and carries through a gently tannic, oak-spiced finish. **89-91**

2011 Gigondas Bois Des Mourres Bright ruby. Aromas of dark fruits, sassafras and woodsmoke, with a hint of vanilla in the background. Fleshy and broad, with good depth and a touch of heat to its black and blue fruit flavors. Finishes sweet and smooth, with soft tannins and good cling. Pretty rich for the vintage and showing some warmth.

87-88

2011 Gigondas Les Mourres (\$19) Bright violet color. Ripe cassis and dark chocolate aromas are complemented by licorice and woodsmoke. Creamy dark berry flavors show good depth and expand with air. Finishes broad and smooth, with supple tannins and a bit of back-end heat. **89**
(Grape Expectations, www.grapex.com)

Ogier

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Heritages Deep ruby. Aromas of ripe cherry and dark berries, complicated by smoke and licorice accents and a hint of candied flowers. Fleshy and broad in the mouth, offering sweet blueberry and cherry compote flavors braced by juicy acidity. Finishes smooth and a touch warm, with supple tannins adding shape. **88-90**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Terroir Eclats Calcaires Opaque ruby. Ripe cherry, mocha and licorice on the deeply scented nose, with a peppery nuance adding lift. Chewy and focused on the palate, showing good cut and lift to its flavors of bitter cherry, licorice and dark chocolate. Finishes with dusty, building tannins, a firm spine of acidity and sneaky sweetness. **89**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Terroir Safres Deep ruby. Ripe dark fruit and floral scents are lifted by white pepper and Indian spices. Smooth and expansive on the palate, offering fleshy blackberry and cherry-cola flavors and a touch of anise. Mocha and smoky herb nuances build with air and carry through the long, youthfully tannic finish. Showing plenty of heft, but has the energy to carry it. **90**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Terroir Gres Rouges Bright ruby. Highly perfumed aromas of raspberry, fresh flowers and Asian spices. Densely packed, lively and focused on the palate, with brisk minerality lifting the sweet red fruit and floral pastille flavors. Shows very good definition and energy, finishing with silky tannins and a whiplash of juicy red fruit. **91**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Terroir Galets Roules Brilliant ruby. Intensely perfumed nose displays scents of spicy dark berries and potpourri, with smoky minerals and anise adding complexity. Pliant blackberry and bitter cherry flavors convey an impression of energy, becoming deeper and sweeter with air. Nicely balanced and fresh, playing depth against vivacity and finishing smoky and long, with velvety tannins adding shape. **90**

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Olivier & Lafont

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. Cherry and dark berry aromas are complicated by anise, fresh bay and smoky Indian spices. Chewy and lively on the palate, offering bitter cherry and black raspberry flavors plus an invigorating note of white pepper. Closes sappy and long, with a touch of bitter herbs and youthful tannic grip. **90-92**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Ruby-red. Dried cherry, cassis, olive tapenade and smoky herbs and flowers on the spicy nose; smells like there's some northern Rhone syrah in here. Smoky and sweet, offering plump dark berry and bitter chocolate flavors and an exotic floral pastille nuance. Closes smooth and long, with a whisper of tannins and solid punch. **90**

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Domaine l'Or de Line

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Full ruby. Pungent aromas of blackberry, minerals and dried flowers are accented by pungent spices and a whiff of white pepper. Sweet and seamless in texture,

displaying flavors of black raspberry and bitter cherry, with a hint of licorice in the background. Finishes silky and broad, with supple tannins and a hint of mocha. **89-91**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Paul Courtil Vivid ruby. Spicy redcurrant and raspberry aromas are complemented by white pepper and floral oils. Lively and precise on the palate, offering appealingly sweet red fruit flavors and a hint of allspice. Finishes with good clarity and strong spicy persistence. **90-92**

(www.chateauneufbio.com)

Domaine d'Ourea

2012 Vacqueyras (100% grenache, from vines that are reportedly over 60 years old): Deep ruby. A deeply scented bouquet evokes dark berries, peppery spices and minerals, with a suave floral quality gaining strength with air. Juicy and sweet, with lush black raspberry and blueberry flavors and a silky, seamless texture. Becomes livelier with aeration, picking up a floral pastille nuance and a touch of smokiness that lingers on the gently tannic finish. **90-92**

2012 Gigondas Deep ruby. Smoky raspberry and *garrigue* aromas are lifted by a spicy nuance. Pliant, ripe and broad on entry, then tighter in the mid-palate, offering sappy red fruit flavors that pick up a touch of warmth with aeration. Takes a turn to darker fruits on the finish, which features a note of candied plum. By the way, the 2011 is showing a lot of upfront fruit and drinking very well now, based on a bottle that I tried in November while I was in Gigondas. **89-91**

2011 Vacqueyras (all grenache and all done in concrete): Opaque ruby. Blackberry, boysenberry and smoky Indian spices on the intensely perfumed nose. Sappy, penetrating and lively, offering gently sweet dark fruit flavors and a sexy lavender quality. Closes silky and long, with slow-building tannins, an echo of candied flowers and very good spicy cut.

90

(www.domainedourea.fr)

Domaine Palliere et Pied Gu

2012 Gigondas Bright violet color. Smoke-accented cassis and dried cherry scents are lifted by a spicy element. Taut and sharply focused on entry, then fleshier in the mid-palate, offering chewy black and blue fruit flavors and a hint of licorice. Finishes with good cut and energy, leaving a smoky note behind. **87-89**

(Route des Vins Imports, www.frenchwineimporters.com)

Domaine Les Pallieres

2011 Gigondas Les Racines (\$49) Brilliant ruby. Lively red fruit and floral scents are complicated by suggestions of smoky minerals and potpourri. Spicy, penetrating and pure, offering gently sweet raspberry and lavender pastille flavors and a subtle touch of blood orange. Closes smooth and long, with a whisper of tannins and strong mineral cut. This wine is a poster child for the blend of power and elegance that marks a great Gigondas. **92**

2011 Gigondas Terrasse Du Diable (\$49) Vivid ruby. Heady scents of candied cherry, raspberry preserves, anise and potpourri. Shows a darker profile in the mouth, offering palate-staining blackberry and bitter cherry flavors and a strong floral quality. Picks up smokiness with air and finishes with superb focus and length and youthful tannic grip. No question that this is one of the best wines I tasted from Gigondas this year.

93

(Kermit Lynch Wine Merchant, www.kermitlynch.com)

Domaine Palon

2012 Gigondas Deep ruby. Raspberry, sassafras, herbs and dried flowers on the fragrant nose. Juicy, spicy and light on its feet, with ripe acidity framing bitter cherry, herb and peppery spice flavors. Finishes with a light dusting of tannins and good length, leaving a floral note behind. (The 2011 version of this wine, which I reviewed last year, is showing an attractive floral personality right now, with pliant dark fruit and bitter chocolate flavors and fading tannins. It will be ready to drink soon. The 2011 Vacqueyras, which I reviewed last year shortly after bottling, is showing nicely now, with lively red berry character and a refreshingly bitter twist to its finish.) **88-90**

(www.domainepalon.fr)

Domaine de Panisse

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Confidence Vigneronne Bright ruby-red. Black raspberry, cherry compote and licorice on the pungent nose. Fleshy and expansive, offering deeply pitched dark berry and floral pastille flavors and a suave touch of vanilla. Picks up spiciness with air and finishes on a smoky note, with very good thrust and length. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Noble Revelation Bright ruby. An aromatic nose evokes dried cherry, leather and woodsmoke, with a spicy overtone. Sweet, fleshy and broad, offering densely packed flavors of dark berries, bitter cherry and succulent herbs. Distinctly masculine and rather brooding right now, finishing with strong thrust, mounting tannins and lingering smokiness. **89-91**
(Monsieur Touton Selection, www.mtouton.com)

Domaine des Pasquiers

2012 Gigondas Bright ruby-red. Red berry and cracked pepper scents, plus a subtle note of dried flowers. Light-bodied, tangy raspberry and bitter cherry flavors are firm by lively acidity and offer good straightforward appeal. Finishes slightly rigid, leaving white pepper and succulent herb notes behind.

87

(Citadel Trading Corporation, www.citadel-trading.com)

Domaine Le Peage

2011 Gigondas Dark ruby. Displays aromas of dark fruit preserves, candied plum and licorice, with a smoky undertone. Lush and expansive on the palate, offering deep black and blue fruit flavors complicated by cola and peppery spices. Finishes smooth and long, with lingering sweetness and velvety tannins. In a ripe, vaguely decadent style that demands rich food. **90**

(Saurel Chauvet, www.vins-gigondas.com)

Domaine du Pere Caboché

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. Aromas of blackberry, boysenberry and mocha, with a sexy floral overtone. Sweet and lush in the mouth, with tangy acidity lifting and sharpening the dark berry and violet pastille flavors. Finishes with smooth, even tannins, a hint of white pepper and lingering blackberry fruit. **89-91**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Elisabeth Chambellan Vieilles Vignes Youthful purple color. Liqueur-like red fruits and licorice on the perfumed nose. Sweet, sappy and dense but lively thanks to zesty, harmonious acidity, offering tight cherry and red berry flavors. Finishes taut and quite long, with even tannins and a hint of smokiness. **90-92**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Vivid ruby-red. Aromas of black raspberry, Asian spices and lavender on the perfumed nose. Lively and precise, offering juicy red fruit flavors that take turn to darker cherry with aeration. A minty nuance appears on the finish, which clings with good tenacity and gentle tannic grip. **89**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Elisabeth Chambellan Vieilles Vignes Ruby-red. Intense red fruit and floral aromas are complemented by suggestions of peppery spices and woodsmoke. Offers lively raspberry and bitter cherry flavors and a hint of spicecake, with a candied lavender element emerging with aeration. Closes smooth, sappy and long, with slow-building tannins and very good persistence. **90**

(www.jpboisson.com)

Domaine du Pere Pape

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Dark ruby. Smoke-accented cherry and cassis aromas are complicated by pipe tobacco and mocha. Lush black and blue fruit flavors are broad and sweet but given bite by zesty acidity and a peppery quality. Finishes with firm grip, dusty tannins and an echo of sweet dark berries. **88-90**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Ruby-red. Ripe dark fruits, cola and dried flowers on the deeply scented nose. Plush and weighty, with a slightly dry edge to its cassis and bitter cherry flavors. Dusty tannins firm the finish, which leaves notes of licorice and cherry compote behind. This looks like it could use some time to stretch out. **88**

(Polaner Selections, www.polanerselections.com; Free Run Wines, Seattle, WA)

Famille Perrin

2011 Vacqueyras Les Christins (\$32) (all grenache): Brilliant ruby. Lively red berry and floral scents are sharpened by a zesty kick of white pepper. Silky and seamless on the palate, offering sweet raspberry and cherry flavors that pick up a subtle anise quality with aeration. Closes on a tangy note, with excellent clarity and soft, fully absorbed tannins. This intensely fruity wine is delicious right now. **90**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Sinards (\$45) Bright ruby-red. Black raspberry, licorice and smoky herbs on the perfumed nose and in the mouth. Fresh and energetic, with good focus and a spicy quality that builds with aeration. Closes sweet and long, with an echo of candied anise and smooth, harmonious tannins adding shape. **90**
(Vineyard Brands, www.vineyardbrands.com)

Domaine Roger Perrin

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. Black and blue fruits on the lively, spice-accented nose. Emphatically fruity and supple in texture, offering juicy boysenberry and black raspberry flavors and a hint of tangy orange pith. In a lithe, graceful style for Chateauneuf, finishing with energetic lift and cut. **89-91**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Reserve Des Vieilles Vignes Opaque ruby. Blackberry and smoky Indian spices on the nose, with notes of licorice and fruitcake emerging with aeration. Supple dark berry liqueur and cherry-cola flavors are complemented by suggestions of floral pastilles and clove. Shows impressive power and breadth on the youthfully tannic finish, which lingers with superb focus and length. **92-95**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$37) Vivid ruby. Fresh red and dark berries on the nose and in the mouth. Picks up smoky and floral nuances with air and shows good energy and a slightly tart edge. Finishes with good nerve, youthful firming tannins and a hint of bitter cherry pit. No excess fat here. **88**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Reserve Des Vieilles Vignes (\$75) Glass-staining ruby. Oak-spiced black and blue fruits on the nose and palate. Broad, fleshy and sweet, with impressive depth, but the oak is pretty boisterous today. Closes smooth and long, with firm tannic grip and a strong echo of vanillin oak and mocha. Hasn't changed much since this time last year and I still have my worries about the lumber here. **88(+?)?**
(T. Edward Wines, www.tedwardwines.com)

Domaine du Pesquier

2012 Gigondas Bright ruby. Rich smoke- and game-accented aromas of redcurrant, cherry, underbrush and pipe tobacco. Pliant and sweet in the mouth, with fresh acidity giving cut to the sappy red fruit flavors. Finishes long and spicy, with a touch of meatiness and firm tannins adding shape. **86-88**

2011 Gigondas Bright ruby. Ripe raspberry, blueberry and floral pastilles on the fragrant nose and palate. Plush and open-knit, showing very good depth and energy on the long, subtly tannic finish. This sexy Gigondas is already drinking nicely.

90

(VOS Selections, www.vosselections.com; Scott Levy Selections, Metairie, LA; Wine Warehouse, www.winewarehouse.com)

Domaine de Piaugier

2012 Gigondas Deep ruby. Expressive aromas of dried cherry, raspberry and licorice are lifted by a floral topnote. Taut and focused on entry, then more supple in the mid-palate, displaying good grip to its high-pitched black raspberry and floral pastille flavors. Finishes on a spicy note, with good clarity and slow-building tannins. **90-92**

2011 Gigondas (\$28) Bright ruby. Wild, slightly feral aromas of blackberry skin, cherry compote and smoked meat, with a peppery overtone. Chewy and gently sweet, offering ripe dark fruit flavors and a touch of blood orange. The meaty quality comes back on the finish, which shows good power and smooth, harmonious tannins. Fans of funky Rhone wines will find my score wimpy. **88**
(Charles Neal Selections, www.charlesnealselections.com)

Domaine Pontifical

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$38) Ruby-red. Fresh red and dark berry scents are complemented by notes of white pepper and *garrigue*. Lively and precise, offering good clarity and lift to its bitter cherry and blackberry flavors. Finishes with good focus, cut and length, leaving a peppery note behind. **88**

(Wines of France, www.winesoffranceinc.com)

Domaine Porte Rouge

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. Ripe cherry and plum on the deeply scented nose. Fleshy and open-knit, with a touch of warmth to its smooth dark fruit flavors. Distinctly ripe and weighty wine, with smooth tannins shaping the finish and adding grip.

87-89

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$38) Full ruby. Aromas of cherry and dried plum, with mocha and licorice accents. Smoky and expansive on the palate, offering supple dark fruit flavors and a round texture. Finishes with firming tannins, a touch of plum jam and good smoky persistence. **88**

(Grape Expectations, www.grapex.com)

Domaine du Pourra

2012 Gigondas La Reserve Deep ruby. Deeply pitched dark berry aromas are complicated by Indian spices, espresso and violet. Round and creamy in texture, with sweet, densely packed cassis and blackberry flavors becoming spicier and warmer with air. A round, broad-shouldered Gigondas with velvety texture and gentle shaping tannins. **89-91**

(Jack Siler Selections, www.jacksilerselections.com)

Domaine du Pradas

2011 Gigondas (\$45) (75% grenache and 25% syrah): Deep ruby. Spice- and smoke-accented aromas of cherry and cassis, with a hint of violet in the background. Smooth and open-knit, offering sweet, mineral-tinged dark fruit liqueur flavors and a hint of white pepper. Dusty tannins give shape to the finish, which features a vibrant cherry/berry quality and lingering spiciness. **90**

(Serge Dore Selections, www.sergedoreselections.com)

Domaine de la Presidente

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Grands Classiques (70% grenache, 15% cinsault, 10% syrah and 5% mourvedre): Deep ruby. Ripe cherry and dark berry scents are complicated by notes of vanilla and mocha. Plush and open-knit, offering round, slightly jammy blackberry and cherry-vanilla flavors. Finishes seamless and sweet, nicely framed by soft, even tannins.

88-90

(Total Wine & More, www.totalwine.com)

Domaine Puy Rolland

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. Ripe cherry and plum aromas are complicated by a subtle medicinal element. Sweet, lush and fleshy but restrained, with good lift and power to its ripe flavors of singed plum, blackberry and peppery spices. A fairly dense Chateauneuf that finishes with building spiciness and firm, youthful tannins. **88-90**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Bright ruby. Fresh cherry and blackberry on the nose, with suggestions of white pepper and lavender adding complexity. Spicy, tangy and precise, showing a silky texture and tangy dark berry skin and bitter cherry flavors. Finishes with supple tannins, a hint of sweetness and lingering smokiness. **89**

(-)

Domaine Raspail-Ay

2012 Gigondas Vivid ruby-red. Wild, highly perfumed aromas of redcurrant, lavender and smoked meat are lifted by pungent herb and white pepper nuances. Juicy and smooth in the mouth, offering complex flavors of redcurrant, peach pit, minerals and candied flowers. Finishes with a fine dusting of tannins, resonating minerality and excellent persistence. **91-93**

2011 Gigondas (\$40) Ruby-red. Youthful dark berry and cherry skin aromas open up with air, picking up notes of smoky minerals, flowers and cola. Taut, refreshingly bitter blackcurrant and cherry flavors are fresh and spicy. Finishes tangy, youthfully tannic and quite long, echoing the berry skin note. **91**

(Michael Corso Selections, www.corsowines.com)

Chateau Redortier

2012 Gigondas Dark ruby. Spicy black raspberry, licorice, herbs and pepper on the nose, with floral pastille and mineral nuances adding lift and complexity. Silky, sweet and penetrating, with nicely delineated flavors of dark berries, licorice pastille and lavender. Supple tannins come on late, giving grip to the juicy, floral, impressively persistent finish. **91-93**

2011 Gigondas (\$29) Vivid ruby. Dark berry liqueur and floral pastille scents are lifted and sharpened by notes of white pepper and smoky minerals. Sappy, penetrating and energetic on the palate, offering expansive black and blue fruit flavors and a touch of allspice. Shows excellent clarity and lift on the finish, which features silky tannins and an echo of candied lavender. **91**

(Didier Boutet Wine Selection, www.dbwineselection.com)

Domaine de Reveirolles

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Dark ruby. Highly aromatic bouquet evokes blackberry, blueberry, licorice and fresh flowers. Deep, sweet and velvety, offering open-knit black and blue fruit flavors and building spiciness. Finishes with good vivacity, rounded tannins and impressive persistence. I suspect that this will provide plenty of early appeal. **89-91**

(www.reveirolles.com)

Domaine La Roizeliere

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. Musky dark fruits and licorice on the perfumed nose. Smoky and gently sweet, offering blackberry and bitter cherry flavors that pick up a smoky nuance with air. Firms up on the finish, showing chewy tannins and a hint of medicinal cherry. **87-89**

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Domaine de la Ronciere

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. High-toned red berry and cherry pit aromas are complemented by notes of woodsmoke, licorice and bacon fat. Distinctly wild on the palate, with good depth to its bitter cherry and floral flavors. A gamey quality builds on the finish, which is firmed by dusty tannins. **85-87**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Flor De Ronce Bright purple. High-toned dark fruits and floral oils on the powerful, smoke-accented nose. Spicy, incisive blackberry and bitter cherry flavors show very good depth and pick up suggestions of candied licorice and candied violet with air. Finishes rich and weighty, with strongly echoing smoke and floral notes. **91-93**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$48) Deep ruby. Primary dark fruit aromas and flavors are complemented by notes of mocha and white pepper. Plump, warm and gently sweet, with good breadth and volume. Finishes with smooth tannins, a late note of candied flowers and good persistence. **88**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Flor De Ronce (\$60) Bright ruby. Ripe blueberry, boysenberry and floral pastille aromas are accented by licorice and allspice. Lush, broad and pliant, with deep flavors of black and blue fruit compote, mocha and cinnamon. Pretty energetic for its richness and power, finishing with gentle tannic grip and good clarity. **90**

(AP Wine Imports, www.apwineimports.com)

Chateau des Roques

2012 Vacqueyras (a blend of grenache, mourvedre and syrah): Opaque ruby. Pungent aromas of red and dark berries, potpourri and anise, with a smoky topnote. Spicy and penetrating, offering weighty black raspberry and cherry compote flavors and a bracing mineral quality that adds lift and cut. The spice and floral notes repeat on the finish, which features supple tannins and a touch of bitter chocolate. **90-92**

2011 Vacqueyras (a blend of grenache, mourvedre and syrah): Bright violet color. Pungent red berries and cherry pit on the nose, with complicating notes of musky herbs and lavender. Chewy,

densely packed red fruit flavors are initially taut and unyielding but aeration brings out flesh and breadth. The finish repeats the cherry note and leaves notes of bitter chocolate and tangy redcurrant behind. This tightly knit wine would benefit a lot from decanting. **89(+?)**
(Weygandt-Metzler Importing, www.wegandtmetzler.com)

Domaine La Roquette

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Piedlong Vivid ruby. Pungent, high-pitched aromas of red berries, dried flowers and peppery spices. The focused palate shows a penetrating quality to the sweet raspberry, cherry and bitter chocolate flavors. This vibrant, taut wine finishes quite long, with gentle spiciness and an echo of floral pastilles. **90-92**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Piedlong Brilliant ruby. Pungent aromas of raspberry, cherry, white pepper and dried violet. Deep cherry and bitter chocolate flavors are enlivened by peppery spice and floral pastille qualities, with tangy acidity giving the wine spine. Quite deep for the year, finishing with very good power and length. **90**
(Kermit Lynch Wine Merchant, www.kermitlynch.com)

Domaine La Roubine

2012 Vacqueyras (a blend of grenache, syrah and mourvedre): Opaque ruby. Dried cherry, lavender, licorice and musky herbs on the perfumed nose. Fresh and energetic in the mouth, with attractive floral lift to its blueberry and anise flavors. Finishes with building, fine-grained tannins, firm grip and a vaguely medicinal character. **88-90**

2011 Vacqueyras (\$25) Dark ruby. Aromas of cherry pit, boysenberry, fresh flowers and licorice, with a spicy nuance adding lift. Fleshy and smooth in texture, offering sappy black raspberry and bitter cherry flavors that pick up smokiness with aeration. Shows a slightly dry edge on the youthfully tannic, chewy finish. **87**

2011 Gigondas (\$30) Dark ruby. Ripe blackberry, cherry and tobacco on the powerfully scented nose and palate. Lush and weighty, with good focus and slow-building spiciness. Finishes smoky and broad, with chewy tannins adding shape and grip.

89

Other wines tasted: 2012 Gigondas (83-85). (Elite Wines, www.elitewines.net)

Roucas Toumba

2011 Vacqueyras Les Restanques De Cabassole (\$40) (60% grenache, 27% syrah, 10% mourvedre and the rest white grapes): Vivid purple. Powerful aromas of blueberry, blackberry and smoky Indian spices are lifted by a floral element. Displays vibrant dark berry, white pepper and floral pastille flavors, with a hint of white pepper in the background. This rich yet graceful Vacqueyras finishes smooth, floral and very persistent. **91**
(Import!, Madison, WI)

Vignobles Jean Royer

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Tradition Bright red. Fresh red berries and herbs on the nose, with bright mineral and floral qualities adding energy. Lively, spice-accented strawberry and raspberry flavors are nicely framed by gentle acidity. Silky, sweet and spicy on the finish, with the floral note strongly echoing. Distinctly elegant, in the house style. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Prestige Bright red. Strongly scented, expansive bouquet displays smoky blackberry, boysenberry and resinous herb aromas, with a bright mineral quality gaining power with aeration. Spicy dark berry and candied cherry flavors stain the palate, picking up a floral note on the back end. Juicy and concentrated but lithe, finishing with strong thrust and cling. **92-94**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Sables De La Crau Deep red. Highly complex nose melds ripe blackberry, cherry-cola, potpourri and smoky minerals. Intensely flavored and sharply delineated, with strong mineral spine lifting the sweet dark berry and floral pastille flavors. Shows an impressive blend of depth and finesse, along with superb finishing clarity and length and gentle tannic grip. This should be a beauty. **93-95**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Tradition Vivid ruby-red. Aromas of fresh raspberry, spicecake and potpourri, with a bright mineral nuance building with air. Offers juicy red fruit flavors

that gain weight and sweetness with air, along with a hint of candied flowers. Closes smooth and long, with a strong whiplash of raspberry and gentle tannic grip. **91**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Prestige (\$50) Bright ruby. Vibrant red fruit, lavender, anise and mineral aromas show impressive clarity. On the palate, powerful raspberry and bitter cherry flavors show a delicate touch and a hint of candied flowers. Silky and seamless in texture, finishing with excellent lift, smooth tannins and outstanding length. I underestimated this elegant wine last year. **92**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Sables De La Crau Vivid ruby. Fresh raspberry, spicecake and potpourri on the intensely perfumed nose. Offers spicy red fruit preserve flavors and a hint of bitter cherry, with a zesty mineral quality adding lift. Packs serious punch but comes off as lithe, finishing with excellent clarity and silky, well-knit tannins. This graceful Chateauneuf is quite appealing right now but has the balance to age positively over at least the next five years or so. **93**
(Import!, Madison, WI; Paul M. Young Fine Wines, www.pywine.com)

Chateau de Ruth

2012 Chateauneuf Du Pape Cuvee Emile Bright ruby. More fruit-dominated than the 2011 version, displaying scents and flavors of ripe blackberry and cherry and a touch of botanical herbs. Supple tannins add shape to the finish, which features dusty minerals and a jolt of lavender. **88-90**

2011 Chateauneuf Du Pape Cuvee Emile Bright ruby-red. Pungent cherry skin, redcurrant and smoked meat scents are complemented by licorice and dried flowers. In a wild, old-school style, offering medicinal red fruit flavors, silky texture and slow-building spiciness. Closes smoky and tight, with dusty tannins and lingering gaminess. **87**
(www.chateauderuth.com)

Domaine Roger Sabon

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Olivets Opaque purple. Suave, highly perfumed scents of fresh raspberry, smoky minerals, candied flowers and peppery spices. Sappy and mineral-driven, offering intense, well-delineated red fruit preserve and floral pastille flavors. Open-knit and supple in texture, with very good finishing persistence and only a hint of tannins. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Reserve Inky ruby. A highly aromatic bouquet evokes ripe blackberry, blueberry, spicecake, potpourri and musky herbs. Appealingly sweet and velvety, offering juicy dark berry flavors accented by sexy Asian spices and floral pastilles. Gains weight and power with air but maintains its energy, finishing with very good clarity and spicy persistence. **91-93**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Prestige Inky purple. Sexy, intensely perfumed cherry and dark berries on the nose. Smooth and seamless in texture, offering deep blackberry and cherry-cola flavors enlivened by bright acidity and a smoky mineral nuance. Smoothly blends richness and vivacity and finishes with excellent clarity and persistence--and just a hint of tannins. **91-93**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Le Secret De Sabons Inky ruby. Blackberry, singed plum, cassis, vanilla, bitter chocolate and potpourri on the intensely perfumed nose. Dense, concentrated, sweet and seamless, offering primary black and blue fruit and floral pastille flavors and a spicy oak accent. Finishes with broad, supple tannins, a suggestion of licorice and excellent length. **93-95**
(Eric Solomon Selections, www.europeancellars.com)

Saint Cosme

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Opaque ruby. Wild, smoke-tinged dark berry and cherry pit aromas are lifted by cracked pepper and fresh flowers. Spicy and powerful in the mouth, offering bitter cherry and cured meat flavors that become sweeter with air. Dusty tannins give a gripping quality to the forceful finish, which echoes the smoky note. **89-91**
(Craft+Estate/The Vintner Group, www.craftandestate.com; Cavatappi Distribuzione, www.cavatappi.com; Epic Wines, www.epic-wines.com)

Domaine Saint-Damien

2012 Gigondas Vieilles Vignes Saturated ruby. Ripe plum and cherry on the nose, along with deep notes of dark chocolate and roasted coffee. Broad and sweet on the palate, with a velvety texture to the ripe cherry and dark berry flavors. Finishes on a juicy note of blackberry, with a touch of spiciness and very good length. **90-92**

2012 Gigondas La Louisiane Saturated ruby. Assertive aromas of raspberry, cherry-cola and fresh lavender, with Asian spice and smoky mineral accents building with air. Juicy and precise on the palate, offering gently sweet red fruit flavors and a hint of candied flowers. Shows impressive energy and focus on the impressively long finish, which features suave spicecake and floral pastille nuances. **91-93**

2012 Gigondas Les Souteyrades Bright purple. Intensely perfumed scents of dark berry preserves, floral oils, incense and licorice, along with a spicy overtone. Sweet black raspberry and cherry-cola flavors show excellent clarity, a velvety texture and an exotic floral pastille quality. Smooth and expansive Gigondas, with excellent finishing freshness and floral persistence. **92-94**

2011 Gigondas Vieilles Vignes (\$34) Deep ruby. Aromas of black raspberry, potpourri and smoky minerals, with a touch of Asian spices gaining strength with air. Densely packed but light on its feet, offering sweet, oak-spiced dark berry flavors and a touch of cola. Fine-grained tannins add shape to the clinging finish. This has gained in energy since I tasted it a year ago. **90**

2011 Gigondas La Louisiane (\$34) Inky ruby. Black and blue fruits on the heady spicy, floral nose. Offers lush blackberry and mulberry flavors and a touch of mocha, picking up smokiness with air. Sweet and silky in texture, finishing with strong cut, clarity and cling. The fruit here seems to have already absorbed the tannins. **91**

2011 Gigondas Les Souteyrades (\$35) Vivid red. Highly perfumed aromas of candied red fruits and lavender, with a deeper cherry pit quality gaining power with aeration. Sweet and seamless on the palate, offering juicy raspberry and boysenberry flavors complicated by sassafras and allspice. In an exotic style, with plenty of upfront appeal. Finishes sappy and long, with gentle tannins adding grip. **91**

(Weygandt-Metzler Importing, www.weygandtmetzler.com)

Domaine Saint Gayan

2012 Gigondas Fontmaria Vivid ruby. Heady smoke- and spice-accented black and blue fruit aromas are complicated by notes of spicecake and potpourri. Stains the palate with sappy dark berry compote flavors and suggestions of floral pastilles and star anise. Finishes with excellent clarity and thrust, framed by supple tannins that fade quickly into the fruit. **91-93**

2011 Gigondas Bright ruby-red. Vibrant raspberry and cherry aromas are enlivened by blood orange and white pepper. Fresh red fruit flavors put on weight with air, with an exotic floral pastille quality contributing complexity. This lithe, balanced Gigondas finishes with good tangy cut, gentle tannins and spicy persistence. **90-91**

2011 Gigondas In Nomine Patris Deep ruby. Expressive aromas of musky cherry pit, blueberry and bitter chocolate. Plush, round and sweet, offering smoky blueberry, mineral and floral pastille flavors complicated by hints of white pepper and licorice. Finishes very long and smooth, with silky tannins coming on late. **91**

(Michael Skurnik Wines, www.skurnikwines.com)

Domaine de Saint Paul

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep red. Spice-accented aromas of cherry pit, licorice and cracked pepper. Silky, sweet and fruit-driven, with bitter cherry and blackcurrant flavors complicated by smoky mineral and herb nuances. Densely packed but lively thanks to fresh acidity, which gives lift and bite to the youthfully taut, tannic finish. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Jumille Bright purple. Pungent, mineral-laced cherry and cassis scents are slow to open. Chewy and precise, with good lift and cut to its sappy dark berry flavors. Dusty tannins give grip to the finish, which is a bit on the stern side right now. Plenty of material here but a tough read today. **88-90?**

(Serge Dore Selections, www.sergedoreselections.com)

Caves Saint-Pierre

2012 Gigondas Full ruby. An exotic, highly aromatic bouquet evokes dark berries, spicecake, potpourri and musky herbs. Appealingly sweet and velvety, offering plush dark berry flavors accented by Asian spices and white pepper. Gains weight with air but maintains its energy, finishing with excellent clarity and tension. **91-93**

Also recommended: 2011 Gigondas (85). (www.cavedesaintpierre.com)

Domaine Saint-Pierre

2012 Vacqueyras (60% grenache and 40% syrah): Opaque ruby. Expansive aromas of candied blackberry, cassis, licorice and cracked pepper. Round, seamless and supple in the mouth, offering spicy dark berry and cherry compote flavors accented by an herbal nuance. Supple tannins build on the finish, which leaves notes of bitter cherry and peppery spices behind. **90-92**

2011 Vacqueyras (60% grenache and 40% syrah): Dark ruby. Sexy dark berry liqueur, mocha and floral scents are lifted by a note of white pepper. Plush and open-knit, offering gently sweet blackberry and blueberry flavors that provide impressive palate coverage. Spreads out nicely on the finish, which is framed by smooth, slow-building tannins. This suave wine is delicious right now but has the depth to age. **91**

(Chemin des Vins; importers include Wine Warehouse, www.winewarehouse.com)

Chateau Saint-Roch

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Bright purple. Ripe cherry and candied plum on the nose, with a slow-building peppery quality adding energy. Sweet black and blue flavors show good depth and power, with tangy acidity adding lift and support. Round, gently sweet and seamless, with good finishing punch and late-arriving tannins. **88-90**

(Shaw-Ross International, www.shaw-ross.com)

Domaine Le Sang des Cailloux

2012 Vacqueyras Cuvee Azalais (70% grenache, 20% syrah and the rest mourvedre and cinsault): Saturated ruby. Pungent aromas of dried cherry, blackberry and musky herbs, with a subtle potpourri nuance building with air. Juicy, concentrated and expansive, offering bitter cherry and licorice flavors and a hint of smokiness. Dusty tannins shape the clinging finish, which features a touch of cured meat. **90-92**

2012 Vacqueyras Cuvee De Lopy (75% grenache and 25% syrah): Deep ruby. Deeply pitched aromas of cherry, cassis, Indian spices and *garrigue* are lifted by a bright mineral note. Juicy, sappy and concentrated, with excellent density to its blackcurrant, bitter cherry and candied lavender flavors. This powerful, somewhat imploded Vacqueyras finishes with strong mineral bite, youthful tannins and impressive length. **91-93**

2011 Vacqueyras Cuvee Doucinello (\$32) (70% grenache and 20% syrah, with 10% cinsault and mourvedre): Bright ruby. Pungent aromas of dried cherry, blackcurrant and musky herbs, with a sexy potpourri nuance building with air. Juicy, concentrated and expansive, offering smoky dark berry and candied licorice flavors and a hint of floral pastille. Dusty tannins shape the clinging, smoky finish, which leaves a sweet blackberry note behind. **90**

2011 Vacqueyras Cuvee De Lopy (\$49) (75% grenache and 25% syrah): Inky ruby. Assertive aromas of blackberry, cherry pit and fresh flowers, with peppery spice and woodsmoke accents building with air. Juicy and precise on the palate, offering concentrated dark fruit flavors and a hint of licorice. Shows impressive energy and clarity for its heft and finishes sweet, sappy and very long.

This is one of the most impressive wines of the appellation in 2011. **92**

(Kermit Lynch Wine Merchant, www.kermitlynch.com)

Santa Duc

2010 Gigondas Les Garancieres (\$30) Deep ruby. Heady cherry-vanilla, cassis and pipe tobacco scents are complemented by a smoky nuance and a hint of cola. Sweet and expansive on the palate, offering palate-coating black and blue fruit flavors and a building spicy quality. Finishes smooth and long, with mounting tannins and a whiplash of dark berries and smoky herbs. This hefty Gigondas drinks very well now, with some air time. **91**

(Robert Kacher Selections, www.robertkacherselections.com)

Domaine Santa Duc

2010 Chateauneuf Du Pape Habemus Papam (\$80) Dark purple. Heady dark berry compote, licorice and smoky Indian spice scents are enlivened by a peppery, spicy nuance. Offers intense black raspberry and bitter cherry flavors that become sweeter with air and show impressive depth. Supple tannins come on late and add shape to the long, smooth, smoke-tinged finish. This wine's opulent character reminded me a lot of a 2009 from the region. **91**

2011 Gigondas Prestige Des Hautes Garrigues (\$56) (80% grenache and 20% mourvedre):

Saturated ruby. Intense, deeply pitched dark fruit liqueur aromas are lifted by notes of fresh flowers and white pepper. Supple and expansive in the mouth, offering sweet boysenberry and cassis flavors that pick up smoke and mocha nuances with air. Velvety tannins frame the impressively persistent, palate-staining finish, which features notes of blueberry preserves and licorice. In a decidedly rich, broad-shouldered, very ripe style, especially for the vintage. **93**

(Robert Kacher Selections, www.robertkacherselections.com)

Domaine des Saumades

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Bright ruby. Ripe cherry, dark chocolate, fresh herbs, licorice and smoked meat on the nose. Chewy and moderately sweet, with good density to its medicinal cherry and bitter chocolate flavors. Shows good weight but the slightly warm finish comes up a bit short. I look forward to checking in on this rather wild wine after it has gone into bottle. **86-88**

Also recommended: 2011 Chateauneuf-du-Pape (85). (-)

Domaine des Senechaux

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Inky ruby. Exotic, highly aromatic bouquet of blackberry, blueberry, spicecake, incense and musky herbs. Sweet and velvety in the mouth, offering vivid dark berry flavors accented by Indian spices, vanilla and white pepper. Gains energy and power with air but maintains an elegant character, finishing with very good clarity and gentle tannic persistence. **91-93**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$60) (62% grenache, 20% syrah and 18% mourvedre): Deep ruby. Dark berries and cherry-vanilla on the assertively perfumed nose and palate. Shows good depth and appealing sweetness, picking up a lavender pastille nuance with air. The vanilla note repeats on the lingering finish, which is framed by smooth tannins. **90**

(Verity Wine Partners, www.veritywines.com)

Domaine de Saint Siffrein

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Dark ruby. Dried cherry, rhubarb, licorice and a suggestion of woodsmoke on the pungent nose. Firm and tightly focused, with dark fruit flavors accented by an earthy quality and notes of black tea, lavender and bitter chocolate. On the rustic side. **86-88**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Terre D'Abel Deep ruby. High-pitched raspberry, floral pastille and Asian spice aromas are complemented by deeper notes of cola and licorice. Silky and expansive on the palate, offering concentrated cherry and red berry flavors and a hint of spicecake. Finishes smooth and long, with exotic spice and floral notes and gentle, well-knit tannins. **91-93**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$25) Ruby-red. Dark berry, cola and *garrigue* on the nose. Offers gently sweet black raspberry and peppery spice flavors and picks up a touch of licorice with air. Closes with good energy and lift, leaving a bitter cherry note behind. Give this youthfully brooding wine a little air.

88

(Free Run Wines, Seattle, WA)

Chateau Simian

2012 Chateauneuf Du Pape Le Traversier (70% grenache from 50+-year-old vines, 20% syrah, 5% mourvedre and 5% cinsault; raised in large, old oak casks and concrete tanks): Deep ruby. High-pitched aromas of red berries, cherry skin and lavender, with a spicy nuance gaining strength with air. Lively and precise, offering fresh raspberry and bitter cherry flavors and a touch of licorice. The floral note comes back on the finish, which is framed by smooth, harmonious tannins. **89-91**

Also recommended: 2011 Le Chateauneuf-du-Pape Le Traversier (85). (Free Run Wines, Seattle, WA; Jenny & Francois Selections, www.jennyandfrancois.com)

Chateau Sixtine

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Bright purple. Fresh black and blue fruits on the perfumed nose and in the mouth. Fleshy and smooth in texture, displaying good spicy lift and finishing punch. Quite accessible already, with plenty of upfront fruit and good depth. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Manus Dei Inky ruby. Liqueur-like black and blue fruit aromas are given lift and focus by white pepper and smoky minerals. Offers palate-staining cassis and cherry

compote flavors, along with notes of licorice and allspice, picking up sweetness with air. Closes smooth and long, with lingering spiciness and harmonious tannins that come on late. **91-93**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$58) Saturated ruby. Black raspberry, potpourri and woodsmoke on the highly perfumed nose. Sweet and broad on entry, then more taut in the mid-palate, offering sweet red and dark berry flavors and a touch of spicecake. Puts on weight with air and finishes smooth and long, with lingering floral and spice notes. **91**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Manus Dei (\$39) Bright ruby-red. Spice-accented aromas of red fruit preserves and lavender, with a hint of orange pith in the background. Tangy and precise in the mouth, with bitter cherry and redcurrant flavors showing good cut. Closes with firm grip, a touch of bitterness and decent length. **88**

(Wines of France, www.winesoffranceinc.com)

Skalli

2012 Caves Saint-Pierre Vacqueyras (a blend of grenache, syrah and mourvedre): Dark ruby. Deep, smoke-accented cassis and blueberry aromas, with complicating notes of peppery spices and licorice. Powerful dark berry flavors show a slightly roasted character, with bright acidity coming up with air and adding energy. Finishes with youthfully gripping tannins and good smoky persistence. On the clenched side today but there's good depth here. **87-89**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape La Mitre Du Pape Bright ruby. Lively redcurrant, cherry and Asian spice aromas are deepened by notes of woodsmoke and anise. Taut and linear on entry, then fleshier in the mid-palate, offering fresh red fruit flavors and a hint of succulent herbs. Shows good energy and a slightly tart edge, finishing on a note of bitter cherry, with lingering spiciness. **89**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Tiare Imperiale Bright ruby. Pungent aromas of cherry pit, cured meat, woodsmoke and musky herbs. Fresh, tangy and pliant, offering chewy red fruit flavors and a subtle note of candied flowers. Bright acidity adds lift to the smoky, persistent finish, with the meaty note repeating. In a slightly funky style. **87**

Also recommended: **2011 Caves Saint-Pierre Vacqueyras** (86). (www.skalli.fr)

Domaine de la Solitude

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$46) Vivid ruby. Blackberry, cherry pit and dried flowers on the nose. Bitter cherry and cracked pepper flavors open slowly, with notes of anise and candied lavender emerging with air. Closes on a spicy note, with good energy and a hint of sweet dark berries. **88**
(Langdon-Shiverick, www.shiverick.com)

Domaine La Soumade

2011 Gigondas (\$29) Inky ruby. Highly perfumed aromas of blackberry and blueberry compote, candied licorice and cola. Lush, broad and liqueur-like, offering weighty cherry and dark berry flavors and a touch of fruitcake. Finishes long and sweet, with a floral note clinging tenaciously. Nothing shy here, but I would have scored this wine higher if it showed more vivacity. **89**
(Grape Connections, www.grapeconnections.com)

Domaine La Source des Romarins

2012 Gigondas Rose Light orange. Lively red berry and floral aromas show good clarity and subtle herbacity. Taut and brisk, offering tangy redcurrant and orange zest flavors and a touch of white pepper. Finishes dry and slightly tart, with good cut and spicy persistence. **87**

2012 Gigondas Deep red. Spicy raspberry and blood orange on the nose, with zesty minerality adding vibrancy. Brisk red fruit flavors show good clarity and sweetness, with a snap of tangy acidity on the back half. No excess fat here. Closes on a slightly bitter note, with good focus and supple tannins. **88-90**

(-)

Bertrand Stehelin

2012 Gigondas Inky ruby. Blackberry and cassis aromas are complemented by strong notes of dark chocolate and coffee. Sweet and concentrated, with good power and breadth to its flavors of black and blue fruits, mocha, licorice and bitter chocolate. Finishes with chewy tannins and good lingering dark fruit character. Distinctly masculine in style. **88-90**

2011 Gigondas (\$31) Bright violet color. Youthful black and blue fruit scents show good energy and spicy lift. Juicy and seamless in texture, offering sweet boysenberry and blueberry flavors and a touch of bitter chocolate. Closes with zesty mineral cut, silky tannins and very good sappy persistence. **90**

(Wines of France, www.winesoffranceinc.com)

Domaine du Terme

2012 Vacqueyras (80% grenache and 20% syrah): Opaque ruby. Sexy black and blue fruit aromas are complicated by white pepper and lavender. Fleshy cassis and blueberry flavors are lifted and sharpened by juicy acidity. Gains sweetness and depth with air, finishing with very good energy and slow-building tannins. **90-92**

2012 Gigondas Etiquette Blanche (White Label) Bright ruby. Intensely perfumed blackberry, plum and candied licorice aromas are accented by a spicy nuance. Smooth, sweet and deep, with tangy mineral and dried flower notes adding complexity to the plump dark berry flavors. Velvety and broad, with juicy blackberry and boysenberry flavors lingering on the smooth, gently tannic finish. **89-91**

2012 Gigondas Etiquette Noire (Black Label) Saturated ruby. Powerful, expansive aromas of black and blue fruits, licorice and cola, with a smoky topnote. Plush and seamless in texture, offering sappy blueberry and cassis flavors and a hint of smoky Indian spices. Finishes sweet and very long, with smooth tannins coming on late and adding shape. **90-92**

2011 Vacqueyras (\$23) (80% grenache and 20% syrah): Ruby-red. Expressive aromas of cherry compote, dark chocolate and licorice are lifted by a floral topnote. Smoky and open-knit, showing good depth to its sweet cherry-cola, cassis and bitter chocolate flavors. Supple tannins come on late and add shape to the clinging, spicy finish. **89**

2011 Gigondas Etiquette Noire (Black Label) Bright ruby-red. Smoky, spice-accented aromas of blackberry and cherry compote, with a hint of anise in the background. Densely packed but energetic, offering nicely focused black and blue fruit flavors and a touch of herbacity. Juicy acidity adds finishing lift and bite to the smooth, subtly tannic, persistent finish. **89-90**

(Langdon-Shiverick, www.shiverick.com)

Domaine de la Tete Noire

2012 Gigondas Opaque ruby. Aromas and flavors of cherry compote, licorice and dark chocolate. Dense, sappy and full, showing energy as well as heft. Finishes on a spicy note, with good power and chewy tannins. **88**

Other wines tasted: 2012 Vacqueyras Tradition (?). (www.latetenoire.fr)

Eric Texier

2010 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Vieilles Vignes (\$59) Deep ruby. Complex, highly perfumed bouquet of ripe red berries, lavender, peppery spices and smoky minerals. Juicy, focused and pure, offering incisive red fruit flavors that take a darker turn with aeration. Powerful yet lithe, finishing with superb clarity and length and smooth, even tannins. **93**

(Louis/Dressner Selections, www.louisdressner.com)

Domaine Les Teyssonieres

2012 Gigondas Rose Light orange. Lively aromas of fresh red berries and jasmine, with a mineral note adding lift. Dry, nervy and refreshingly brisk, offering tangy redcurrant and orange pith flavors and a suggestion of ginger. Finishes bright and silky, with an echoing floral note and moderate length. **88**

2011 Gigondas Bright ruby-red. Pungent aromas of dried cherry, blackcurrant and musky herbs, with a suave potpourri nuance building in the glass. Juicy, concentrated and focused, offering smoky cherry-cola and dark chocolate flavors and a hint of lavender pastille. Dusty tannins give shape to the clinging, smoky finish, with the bitter cherry note echoing. **90**

2011 Gigondas Cuvee Alexandre Opaque ruby. Smoky black and blue fruit and floral aromas pick up a peppery element with air. Juicy, penetrating blueberry and bitter cherry flavors display

impressive energy and put on weight in the glass. Notes of exotic Indian spices and cola appear on the tenacious finish, which is framed by smooth, velvety tannins. **92**
(www.domaine-les-teyssonnieres.com)

Tour de l'Isle

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Opaque ruby. Fresh red berries and peppery spices on the pungent, incisive nose. Tangy and sharply focused, offering lively redcurrant and bitter cherry flavors that show a slightly tart edge. Closes with firm grip and cut, leaving a subtle licorice note behind. **86-88**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Bright ruby-red. High-pitched aromas of cherry, redcurrant and fresh flowers are lifted by a peppery element. Spicy red fruit flavors show a smoky nuance and pick up floral and spicecake qualities with air. Finishes with good focus and smooth, well-knit tannins. **88**
(-)

Domaine Tour Saint Michel

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Des Deux Soeurs Bright violet color. Smoky cherry and singed plum aromas are accented by licorice and tobacco. Sweeter on the palate, with cherry and blackcurrant flavors complemented by suggestions of smoked meat and espresso. Chewy tannins firm the finish, which echoes the smoke and cherry notes. **88-90**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Du Lion Inky ruby. Youthful cherry and dark berry aromas are energized by zesty mineral and spice nuances. Deeply pitched bitter cherry and boysenberry flavors expand and brighten in the glass, picking up a hint of licorice. Finishes peppery and long, with a lingering note of bitter cherry pit. **89-91**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Feminessance Inky ruby. Deep, brooding aromas of medicinal cherry, cassis and licorice. Rich and expansive but also energetic on the palate, which offers chewy dark fruit flavors that open to show a spicy quality. Finishes smoky and persistent, with slow-building tannins and a jolt of heat. **87-89**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Des Deux Soeurs (\$42) Bright ruby. Showing more depth and dark fruit character than at this time last year, offering aromas and flavors of black raspberry, bitter cherry and candied flowers. Becomes spicier with air and picks up a hint of black pepper. The floral note comes back on the finish, which shows very good energy and gentle tannic grip. **90**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Du Lion (\$55) Vivid ruby. Black and blue fruits on the deeply pitched smoke- and spice-accented nose. Cherry-vanilla and blueberry flavors coat the palate and pick up notes of anise, black cardamom and succulent herbs, along with a peppery nuance. Closes sweet and very long, with sneaky tannins and lingering smokiness. **91**
(Wines of France, www.winesoffranceinc.com)

Domaine de la Tourade

2012 Gigondas Cuvee Font Des Aieux Brilliant ruby. Pungent redcurrant and cherry on the nose, with a mineral quality adding complexity and focus. Bitter cherry and floral pastille flavors show very good depth, with juicy acidity adding lift and cut. Aeration brings up deeper cassis and licorice notes, which linger on the persistent, gently tannic finish. Distinctly elegant and approachable now. **90**

2012 Vacqueyras (80% mourvedre and 20% syrah; no new oak): Inky ruby. Explosive aromas of black and blue fruit preserves, licorice and pipe tobacco, with a spicy overtone. Fleshy and broad in the mouth, offering liqueur-like blueberry and cherry compote flavors braced by juicy acidity. The spicy note comes back on the vaguely jammy finish, which clings with very good tenacity and supple tannins. These vines are reportedly over 80 years old. **88-90**

Also recommended: 2011 Gigondas Cuvee Morgan (86). (J et R Selections, www.jjimporters.com)

Domaine Tourbillon

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Bright ruby-red. Ripe cherry and dark berries on the nose, with sexy incense and potpourri nuances adding complexity. Supple and broad, showing dense blackberry and cherry compote flavors, a seamless texture and slow-building gaminess. Fine-grained tannins give grip to the long, sweet finish, which features an exotic apricot nuance. **89-91**
(www.domaine-tourbillon.com)

Chateau des Tours

2011 Vacqueyras Bright red. Intensely perfumed aromas of red fruit preserves, smoky minerals and peppery spices, with a lively mineral overtone. Bright and sharply focused, offering intense red fruit and floral pastille flavors lifted by an exotic touch of blood orange. Finishes with sweet, silky tannins that fade quickly into the wine's juicy fruit. Distinctly elegant, in the style of the house and winemaker. **91-92**

(Martine's Wines, www.mwines.com)

Chateau du Trignon

2011 Vacqueyras (\$29) Deep ruby. Cherry, dark berries and lavender on the fragrant nose. Fleshy and concentrated yet lively, offering silky blackberry and bitter cherry flavors and a hint of white pepper. Finishes juicy and smooth, with supple tannins and very good spicy persistence. **90**

2007 Gigondas Alwenn (\$60) Ruby-red. Smoke- and mineral-accented red fruit compote scents pick up notes of licorice and floral oils with air. Broad and fleshy on the palate, offering sweet black raspberry and spicecake flavors and a hint of cola. At once rich and energetic, finishing with excellent clarity and fully absorbed tannins. This is a one-time release for the domain. **91**

2007 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Nolandra (\$120) Dark ruby. Potent blackberry compote, cherry-cola and woodsmoke aromas are brightened by suggestions of candied flowers, white pepper and zesty minerality. Distinctly ripe and weighty, in the style of the vintage, but comes off as surprisingly lively, offering intense dark berry and bitter cherry flavors and a touch of vanilla. Closes smooth and long, with sneaky tannins adding grip. Like its sibling, the Alwenn Gigondas, this is a one-time, one-vintage release. **92**

(David Milligan Selections, www.davidmilliganselections.com)

Domaine des 3 Cellier

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Alchimie Bright ruby-red. Pungent aromas of red berries, anise and fresh flowers, with a spicy topnote. On the palate, lively raspberry and bitter cherry flavors pick up a smoky nuance with air. Silky and smoky on the lively, persistent finish, which features notes of allspice and candied flowers. **89-91**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Eternelle Bright ruby. Expansive, spice-accented aromas of candied red fruits, lavender, incense and smoky minerals. Fleshy and broad on entry, then tighter in the middle, offering lively black raspberry and bitter cherry flavors and hints of allspice and floral pastilles. Shows darker fruit character on the finish, which is firmed by supple, fine-grained tannins. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Marceau Bright violet color. Ripe black and blue fruit preserve scents are complicated by incense, dried flowers and licorice. Sappy and expansive on the palate, offering sweet cassis and blueberry flavors and a hint of candied lavender. Closes with appealing sweetness and gentle tannic grip, leaving a warm floral pastille note behind. In an ample style that I suspect will provide plenty of immediate appeal on release. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Privilege Bright purple. Vibrant blackberry and cherry aromas are complicated by nuances of spicecake and candied flowers. On the palate, chewy dark berry and bitter cherry flavors are enlivened by cracked pepper and smoky minerality. The long, focused finish features fine-grained tannins, a hint of candied licorice and lingering spiciness. **90-92**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Alchimie Vivid ruby. Fresh red and dark berry scents are complemented by notes of potpourri and allspice. Offers sweet black raspberry and cola flavors and a hint of bitter chocolate, with a peppery note adding lift and cut. Closes sweet and long, with sneaky tannins and very good, floral persistence. I underestimated this wine last year. **90**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Eternelle Deep ruby. Blackberry and dried cherry on the deeply scented nose. Chewy dark fruit flavors gain weight and sweetness with air and pick up a sexy floral nuance. Showing more flesh and give than it did last year, finishing with velvety tannins and an echo of floral pastilles. **88**

(Free Run Wines, Seattle, WA)

Domaine Raymond Usseglio & Fils

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Girard (\$45) Deep ruby. Smoky cherry and blackberry preserve aromas show very good clarity, with suggestions of licorice, musky herbs and lavender

adding complexity. Lush and creamy in texture, offering gently sweet dark berry liqueur and floral pastille flavors and a hint of cracked pepper. A smoky quality comes up on the persistent finish, which is framed by chewy tannins. **91**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Cuvee Imperiale Vignes Centenaires (\$60) Deep ruby. Pungent, smoke-accented aromas of dark berry preserves, licorice, *garrigue* and minerals. Rich but lively on the palate, offering sweet black and blue fruit flavors and notes of lavender and black tea. Shows excellent clarity and lift on the finish, which features supple tannins and a late jolt of white pepper. **92**

(Weygandt-Metzler Importing, www.weygandtmetzler.com)

Cuvee du Vatican

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Full ruby. Pungent aromas of blackberry and cherry liqueur, with complicating notes of dark chocolate and licorice. Fleshy and smooth in texture but lively too offering tightly focused dark berry and bitter cherry flavors and a hint of black pepper. Finishes with firm grip and spiciness, the cherry and licorice notes repeating. **90-92**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Saturated ruby. Blackberry, musky herbs and sandalwood on the perfumed nose. Smooth and open-knit, offering sweet dark fruit flavors and a hint of candied violet. Finishes spicy and very long, with strong thrust and silky, building tannins. I underestimated this wine last year. **90**

(www.chateau-sixtine.com)

Chateau de Vaudieu

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Bright ruby. Intense, floral aromas of raspberry and lavender, with subtle star anise and incense nuances adding complexity. Juicy, finely etched red berry flavors show very good power and focus, with a late note of licorice adding depth. The supple, sweet finish is nicely firmed by fine-grained, harmonious tannins. **90-92**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Val De Dieu Brilliant ruby. Deeply pitched black and blue fruit aromas are lifted and sharpened by notes of peppery spices and smoky minerals. Fleshy but lively and precise on the palate, with sweet black raspberry and boysenberry flavors that put on weight with aeration. Silky tannins give shape to the finish, which features a suave floral pastille nuance and noteworthy power. **91-93**

2012 Chateauneuf Du Pape Amiral G Bright violet color. Deep, mineral-accented aromas of black raspberry, raspberry, cherry and incense, with exotic allspice and cinnamon nuances. Supple and velvety on the palate, offering sappy flavors of red berries, cherry compote, candied lavender and blood orange. Closes bright and very long, with resonating spiciness and sneaky, fine-grained tannins. **92-94**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$55) Saturated ruby. Raspberry, allspice, potpourri and woodsmoke on the perfumed nose. Fleshy and expansive, offering open-knit red berry preserve and spicecake flavors and a hint of candied rose. Smooth tannins come on late and add shape to the long, sweet, penetrating finish. This is already delicious. **91**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Val De Dieu (\$86) Saturated ruby. Blackberry compote, licorice and smoky herbs on the deeply scented nose. Chewy black and blue fruit flavors show very good depth and pick up zesty mineral and spice elements with aeration. Closes sweet and very long, with subtle vanilla and anise qualities and smooth, mounting tannins. **92**

(Eric Solomon Selections, www.europeancellars.com)

Domaine de Verquiere

2012 Vacqueyras (70% grenache, 20% syrah and 10% cinsault): Inky ruby. Rich, smoky dark berry and plum aromas, with a hint of peppery spices adding lift. Lush and supple on the palate, offering densely packed black and blue fruit flavors and a subtle bitter chocolate nuance. This velvety, pliant wine finishes with slow-building tannins and good persistence. **89-91**

2011 Vacqueyras (70% grenache, 20% syrah and 10% cinsault): Opaque ruby. Dark berries, potpourri, anise and Indian spices on the nose. Stains the palate with intense black raspberry and boysenberry flavors, with a smoky quality emerging with aeration. Closes broad and sweet, with velvety tannins lending shape and grip. **90**

(www.domaine-de-verquiere.fr)

J. Vidal Fleury

2012 Vacqueyras (50% grenache, 30% syrah and 20% mourvedre): Dark ruby. Blackcurrant, cherry and pipe tobacco on the pungent nose. Chewy, broad and dry, offering bitter cherry and dark berry flavors that show a slightly hard edge. Finishes with an echo of cherry, good length and drying tannins. **85-87**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Deep ruby. Deep, brooding aromas of medicinal cherry and blackcurrant. Rich and plush but lively and a touch bitter, offering chewy dark fruit flavors that slowly open to show a peppery quality. Possesses good volume and finishes with decent energy and a hint of spiciness. **86-88**

2011 Vacqueyras (\$16) (50% grenache, 30% syrah and 20% mourvedre): Vivid ruby. Floral pastilles, raspberry and licorice on the perfumed nose. Juicy and seamless on the palate, offering gently sweet red fruit flavors and a touch of bitter herbs. Closes on a spicy note, with good clarity, dusty tannins and a hint of cola.

88

(Deutsch Family Wines, www.deutschfamily.com)

Domaine du Vieux Lazaret

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape (\$40) Deep ruby. Blackberry and cherry scents are deepened by hints of candied licorice and smoky minerals. Dense and chewy in texture, offering sweet cherry and dark berry preserve flavors, with a floral note coming up with aeration. Shows appealing sweetness on the finish, which is firmed by dusty, slow-building tannins. **89**
(David Milligan Selections, www.davidmilliganselections.com)

Domaine du Vieux Telegraphe

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Telegramme Deep red. Vibrant red berry, lavender and mineral aromas, with a subtle *garrigue* quality building in the glass. Bright, racy and pure, offering fresh raspberry and bitter cherry flavors that put on weight with air. Sweeter and fuller on the finish, which features soft tannins and a late kick of white pepper. Distinctly elegant Chateauneuf with no excess weight; in fact, there's something pinot-like going on here. **91-93**

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape La Crau Bright ruby. Intense raspberry and cherry aromas are complicated by hints of lavender, spicecake and blood orange. Juicy and fruit-driven, with palate-coating flavors of sweet, spice-tinged red fruits and candied flowers. Quite suave and seamless, boasting striking purity to its red fruit- and mineral-driven finish. Those who decry the ripeness and heady character of most Chateauneufs owe it to themselves to try this wine. **92-94**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape La Crau (\$75) (65% grenache, 15% syrah and 15% mourvedre): Bright ruby-red. Black raspberry, cherry compote, potpourri and Asian spices on the highly perfumed nose. Juicy red and dark berry flavors stain the palate, showing terrific clarity and spicy lift. The spicy quality comes back strong on the finish, which is framed by silky, harmonious tannins. In a graceful, almost weightless style, with zero excess fat but noteworthy flavor intensity. I underestimated this wine last year. **93**

(Kermit Lynch Wine Merchant, www.kermitlynch.com)

Vignerons de Caractere

2012 Domaine De La Curniere Vacqueyras (made from grenache, syrah, mourvedre and cinsault): Dark ruby. Ripe cherry and cassis aromas are complicated by notes of licorice and pipe tobacco. Plummy and broad on the palate, with good weight and a touch of superripeness to its black and blue fruit flavors. Finishes with good cling, soft tannins and a slightly warm quality. **86-88**

2012 Seigneur De Fontimple Vacqueyras (a blend of grenache, syrah, mourvedre and carignan): Opaque ruby. Powerful aromas of ripe blackberry, blueberry and licorice, complicated by hints of violet and white pepper. Lush, intensely flavored and supple in texture, offering smoky dark berry and cherry compote flavors enlivened by a sexy floral nuance. Finishes spicy and long, with resonating smokiness, a hint of licorice and well-knit tannins. **89-91**

2012 Domaine De La Soleiade Vacqueyras (a blend of grenache and syrah): Inky ruby. Expressive aromas of black raspberry and cherry-cola, with a smoky topnote. Tangy and precise on entry, then fleshier and deeper in the mid-palate, offering ripe dark berry flavors and a zesty touch

of peppery spices. Finishes with good breadth and length, leaving a bitter cherry pit note behind.

88-90

2012 Domaine Bessons Dupre Vacqueyras (a blend of grenache and syrah): Bright violet color. Smoky blackberry and cassis on the nose, with a dark chocolate quality building in the glass. Youthfully taut dark berry flavors show good depth and chewy texture. Becomes spicier on the firmly tannic finish, with the deep dark fruit flavors echoing.

87-89

2012 Chateau Des Hautes Ribes Vacqueyras (a blend of grenache, syrah, cinsault and mourvedre): Saturated ruby. Rich and deep on the nose, with dark berry and violet aromas and a hint of mocha. Blackberry and cassis flavors are accented by a hint of licorice and peppery spices. Lush, warm and open-knit, finishing with very good power and smooth, even tannins that add shape.

88-90

2012 Vacqueyras Vieilles Vignes (a blend of grenache and syrah): Opaque ruby. Ripe and smoky on the nose, displaying scents of cassis, cherry liqueur and licorice. Broad, weighty and chewy, with dense dark berry flavors and a hint of sweet mocha on the back half. Finishes smooth and spicy, with pliant tannins and a touch of lingering warmth. **88-90**

2012 Gigondas (\$29) Vivid ruby-red. Raspberry, candied flowers and blood orange on the perfumed nose. Silky and focused, offering tangy red fruit flavors and a touch of allspice that builds with air. The taut finish is hardened by a hint of dusty tannins. **87**

2012 Les Pierres Du Vallat Gigondas (\$27) Bright ruby-red. Pungent red berries and cherry on the nose, with a mineral quality adding complexity and lift. Energetic cherry and raspberry flavors show very good concentration, with tangy acidity adding cut. Aeration brings up deeper blackberry and licorice notes, which carry through a persistent, youthfully tannic finish. **90**

2012 Gigondas Cuvee Prestige (\$28) Opaque ruby. Youthfully medicinal aromas of cherry, blackberry, licorice and herbs. Juicy and energetic on the palate, offering bitter cherry and dark berry flavors and a peppery nuance. Finishes with chewy tannins, repeating spiciness and a suggestion of dark berry preserves. **88**

2012 Domaine De Carobelle Gigondas (\$32) Vivid ruby-red. Fresh red berries, lavender and Asian spices on the perfumed nose. Supple, open-knit raspberry and floral pastille flavors show very good depth and become spicier with air. Quite approachable already, with plush red fruits and a floral note clinging on the long, juicy, subtly tannic finish. This sexy Gigondas has an attractive pinot thing going on. **90**

2012 Domaine De La Maurelle Gigondas (\$29) Bright ruby. Vibrant cherry and blueberry on the perfumed nose, with hints of white pepper and dried lavender adding complexity. Silky and pliant in texture, with ripe dark berry and bitter cherry. Youthfully firm tannins add grip to the juicy, persistent finish. **90**

(Terrisson Wines, www.terrison-wines.com)

Domaine de Villeneuve

2012 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Vieilles Vignes Bright violet. Spicy black and blue fruit aromas are brightened by white pepper and dusty minerals. Juicy dark fruit flavors show very good depth, with a spicy nuance building in the glass. The spicy character carries through the long, sappy finish, which also features a lingering blackberry note. **89-91**

2011 Chateauneuf-Du-Pape Les Vieilles Vignes (\$52) (75% grenache and 15% mourvedre, with cinsault, syrah and clairette): Bright ruby-red. Redcurrant and cherry on the nose, with subtle floral and mineral qualities adding complexity. Taut red fruit flavors are tangy and sharply focused, with floral pastille and blood orange notes building on the back half. Finishes with a touch of smoky minerality, good clarity and tangy persistence. In a linear, nervy style that benefits from aeration.

88

(Martin-Scott Wines, www.martinscottwines.com)

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