

France, Rhone: Domaine de la Janasse



Christophe and Isabelle Sabon

One of the benchmark estates in the Rhône Valley, Domaine de la Janasse is run by the talented brother/sister pair of Christophe and Isabelle Sabon. Located in the northeastern portion of the region, near Courthézon, they produce an incredible range of wines, from their Vin de Pays, to their Côtes du Rhône and world-class Châteauneuf du Papes, all of which are noteworthy. For this tasting, we started with the 1990s and went up through their 2007s. At this point, the '98s through the 2004s are all in varying degrees of full maturity, and drinking brilliantly. In addition, it's also worth pointing out that these wines have the fruit and texture to dish out immense pleasure in their youth, so don't be afraid to crack these new releases either.

Starting out, and the first vintage where the Sabon's released all three cuvées, the **1990 Châteauneuf du Pape** is fully mature and evolved, with plenty of truffle, tobacco leaf and cigar to go with a medium-bodied, beautifully textured profile on the palate. Downright sexy, I'd drink bottles ASAP, but I suspect it will continue to evolve gracefully. Less expressive aromatically, yet richer and more concentrated, the **1990 Châteauneuf du Pape Cuvée Chaupin** sports a ruby/amber color to go with mature cherry, currants, licorice and olive-like aromas and flavors. Rich, full-bodied and layered, it opens up nicely in the glass and is a beautifully mature effort to drink over the coming couple of years. Also full-bodied and still layered and concentrated, the **1990 Châteauneuf du Pape Vieilles Vignes** gives up plenty of sweet fruit, olive, mint, tobacco and cured meats in its textured, ripe and fully mature profile. As with all three of these 1990s, it offers plenty of pleasure, but is evolved and should be consumed.

As a whole, the 1995s show more freshness than the '90s, yet are still fully mature, evolved and ready to go. Showing more freshness than the 1990, the **1995 Châteauneuf du Pape** is no doubt an outstanding wine, yet I suspect it was better a few years ago. Exhibiting plenty of sweet kirsch, licorice, olive tapenade and Asian spice, it is medium-bodied, elegant, and balanced, with a mature, evolved feel. Drink it over the coming couple of years. In the same style, the **1995 Châteauneuf du Pape Cuvée Chaupin** gives up ripe aromas and flavors of chocolate, fruit cake, spice and assorted darker-styled fruit to go with a full-bodied, supple, layered, yet completely resolved feel on the palate. There's a rocking core of sweet fruit here, but it needs to be consumed over the coming couple of years. A decent step up over the other two cuvées, the **1995 Châteauneuf du Pape**

Vieilles Vignes is a complete, full-bodied, layered and balanced wine that's drinking beautifully. Giving up loads of chocolate-laced dark fruit, cured meats, spice and sweet *garrigue*, it's fully mature, yet has the concentration and depth to continue drinking nicely for 3-5 years.



Old Vines of Chapouin, in the northeast part of the Appellation

While I wasn't able to taste the traditional cuvée, the **1998 Châteauneuf du Pape Cuvée Chaupin** is a smoking effort that's still drinking beautifully (I still remember tasting this wine shortly after release and it has never failed to impress)! Full-bodied, voluptuously-styled, layered and decadent, it possesses mature Châteauneuf aromas and flavors of *garrigue*, fruit cake, soy, licorice and spice to go with a core ripe fruit. As with the other vintages tasted here, this beauty is at full maturity, but will continue to evolve gracefully. Nevertheless, I don't see any upside here and would drink up. Also fully mature, yet richer and more concentrated, the **1998 Châteauneuf du Pape Vieilles Vignes** boasts loads of spiced fruit, truffle, spice and hints of *garrigue* to go with a full-bodied, hedonistic style. I love it, yet like the Chaupin, would plan on drinking bottles over the coming couple of years while it still possess its core of sweet fruit.



Christophe Sabon

Both of the 1999s were drinking beautifully, and are up near the top of the vintage. The **1999 Châteauneuf du Pape Cuvée Chaupin** has a fresh, lively feel with plenty of violets, mint and floral qualities to go with exotic spices, fruit cake and mature fruit. Medium to full-bodied on the palate, it's drinking spectacularly, but will continue to evolve gracefully going forward. Rock-star stuff, especially in the vintage, the **1999 Châteauneuf du Pape Vieilles Vignes** is full-bodied and concentrated, yet shows the focused, fresh style of the vintage. Smoked earth, tobacco, spice and kirsch and blackberry-styled fruits are present in spades, and it opens up in the glass, showing some maturity, yet enough depth and richness to continue to hold for another 4-5 years.

Moving to the 2000s, I found that from this point forward, the wines started to show more freshness and vibrancy. Looking specifically at this vintage, these are still mature wines, yet they're drinking beautifully. The **2000 Châteauneuf du Pape** is knockout stuff that's still youthful in color and with plenty of life. Loaded with kirsch, sassafras, *garrigue* and sweet spice, it's full-bodied, textured, rich and long. My notes finish with "wish I had a case." The **2000 Châteauneuf du Pape Cuvée Chaupin** is another knockout vintage for this cuvée, and at present, it's drinking the best of the mature vintages. Still deep ruby/purple, it has classic kirsch liqueur, sappy herbs, white pepper and licorice to go with a full-bodied, beautifully textured profile on the palate that carries awesome fruit, notable freshness and plenty of length. Drink it through 2020. Lastly, the **2000 Châteauneuf du Pape Vieilles Vignes** is even better, with another layer of texture and depth. Chocolate-laced fruits, cured meats, spice, crushed rock and sweet spice all show from this perfumed, up-front, sweetly fruited Châteauneuf, and it still has a core of concentrated fruit and solid tannin structure. I see no reason to hold off, but it too will thrill over the coming 3-5 years.

Like the 2000s, the 2001s show some maturity, yet still have youthful, concentrated and structured profiles. Starting out, the **2001 Châteauneuf du Pape** has a dark ruby/purple/semi-opaque color to go with a seamless, supple and classical feel. Possessing notes of kirsch, ground pepper, *garrigue* and new leather, it's drinking at point, yet still has plenty of grip and focus on the palate. Also classic in style, yet still structured and lively, the **2001 Châteauneuf du Pape Cuvée Chaupin** started out tight and reserved, yet opened up beautifully in the glass to show complex crushed flowers, white pepper, *garrigue* and kirsch. Like the traditional cuvée, it has plenty of grip and structure, and will have another 3-5 years of solid drinking. Lastly, the **2001 Châteauneuf du Pape Vieilles Vignes** is still opaque and deeply colored, with killer blackcurrants, smoked meats, orange-tinged chocolate, roasted herbs and serious minerality all soaring from the glass. Just at the early stages of full maturity, this full-bodied, deep, rich and concentrated effort should be consumed over the coming 4-6 years.



The estate's old vines in La Crau

Moving to the 2003s, these were harvested very late, after the rains that came on the 10th of September, which was critical for getting full phenolic maturity. The **2003 Châteauneuf du Pape** showed fabulously well, giving up plenty of sweet kirsch, blackberry, dried *garrigue* and spice in its sexy, forward, voluptuous and textured personality. It should be consumed over the coming couple of years. Even better, the **2003 Châteauneuf du Pape Cuvée Chaupin** was smoking good, with awesome *herbes de Provence*, pepper, *garrigue* and sweet Grenache-driven fruit. Full-bodied and rich, with sweet tannin, I loved it, and would plan on drinking bottles over the coming couple of years as well. A wine I've had more than a case of, sometimes with irregular results, the **2003 Châteauneuf du Pape Vieilles Vignes** was drinking about as good as it gets on this occasion. As usual, it's made in a deeper, richer style than the Chaupin and offers thrilling texture, a smoking mid-palate and nothing but gorgeous Grenache fruit on the finish. Loaded with notions of blackberry liqueur, kirsch, fruit cake and spice, enjoy this knockout effort over the coming 2-4 years or so.

Some of the wines of the vintage, the **2004 Châteauneuf du Pape Cuvée Chaupin** has a classic, textbook style, with its *garrigue*, white pepper, kirsch and spring flowers flowing to a medium to full-bodied, layered and sweetly fruited palate. It's drinking at point now, and there's no reason to delay gratification. Showing even better than when I tasted it for the 2004 retrospective earlier this year, the **2004 Châteauneuf du Pape Vieilles Vignes** is about as rich and textured as they come in the vintage. Blackberry, licorice-laced cherries, sugared *garrigue* and crushed flowers all emerge from this full-bodied, supple and yet beautifully balanced wine. As with the Chaupin, it's entering its prime drink window, and will continue to evolve gracefully. I'll say again though, it's drinking beautifully now.

Kicking off the 2005s, the straight **2005 Châteauneuf du Pape** is superb and shows that you don't have to chase these top cuvées to get spectacular wines. Still structured and concentrated, it gives up ample roasted herbs, scorched earth, black licorice, chocolate and black fruits to go with a full-bodied, decadent style on the palate. Give it another year or so and drink bottles through 2025. Getting a big "stunning" in the notes, the **2005 Châteauneuf du Pape Cuvée Chaupin** has the voluptuousness of the estate (and Grenache), yet stays gorgeously pure, lively and fresh. Blackberry, ground herbs, pepper, spring flowers and exotic spice all emerge from this beauty, and it has full-bodied richness, high, but sweet tannin, and a blockbuster finish. Drink it anytime over the coming decade or so. The **2005 Châteauneuf du Pape Vieilles Vignes** was slightly off at the tasting, but I was able to taste it stateside, from a magnum no less. Stunning on all accounts, with awesome elegance and purity that's backed up by serious richness and depth, it gives up loads of roasted herbs, black licorice, charred meats and black fruits to go with a full-bodied, layered and silky profile on the palate. I've been lucky enough to have been through numerous bottles of this over the past few years, and it's just now starting to shed some of its baby fat, integrate its tannin (which are still present) and open up. Give it another year in the cellar and enjoy it over the following decade.

As with a lot of wines in the vintage, Janasse's **2006 Châteauneuf du Pape** is drinking great today. Open, perfumed and yet still classic in style, it gives up loads of blackberry fruit, *garrigue*, spice and leather to go with a rich, layered and balanced palate profile. It's another wine I wish I had a case of in the cellar as it can be consumed anytime over the coming decade or more.

A breakout vintage here, these 2007s are pretty much spectacular across the board. Starting out, the **2007 Châteauneuf du Pape** is an incredible wine in every way (including value). Possessing a classic Southern Rhône style in its blackberry, cassis, licorice, roasted herb and cured meat-styled aromas and flavors, it has full-bodied richness, no hard edges and blockbuster length. Count yourself lucky if you purchased a bunch of this on release. Showing a smidge of worrisome volatile acidity, the **2007 Châteauneuf du Pape Cuvée Chaupin** nevertheless has off-the-hook levels of richness and depth. Spring flowers, blackberry, cassis, licorice, violets and white pepper are all

present here, and it's a massive wine on the palate, with big fruit, a voluptuous texture and a great finish. After this tasting, I pulled a bottle from my cellar (purchased on release), and it was firing on all cylinders, with not a hint of VA, so this appears to be an isolated issue. The finest wine I've ever tasted from the Sabon's (although the 2010 gives it a run for its money), the **2007 Châteauneuf du Pape Vieilles Vignes** is a flawless example of what this estate is capable of in a great year. Full-bodied, decadent and layered, with incredible purity and freshness, it boasts heavenly notes of blackberry, chocolate, licorice, red wine marinade and roasted meat. It's a monumental wine that offers a singular, yet hedonistic drinking experience that should not be missed.



**2012 Domaine de la Janasse
Chateauneuf du Pape Cuvee
Vieilles Vignes**

Up in the top handful of wines in the vintage (which should come as no surprise to anyone who follows this estate), the 2012 Châteauneuf du Pape Vieilles Vignes is a full-bodied, beautifully concentrated, rich and layered Châteauneuf that doesn't put a foot wrong. Made from 85% Grenache, 10% Mourvedre and the rest Syrah, it offers blockbuster notes of blackberry, liquid-violets, spice and serious minerality to go with awesome mid-palate depth and layers of sweet tannin. Like the Cuvee Chaupin, it will be better in another handful of years and thrill through 2027.

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Importer(s): Eric Solomon. European Cellars, 2129 E Seventh St., Char...

- Jeb Dunnuck (October, 2014)

**2012 Domaine de la Janasse
Chateauneuf du Pape Cuvee
Chaupin**

The 2012 Châteauneuf du Pape Cuvee Chaupin, which I was able to taste (and drink) from multiple bottles, is a beautiful Grenache that comes from the cooler, northeastern edge of the appellation. Coming almost all from the Chapouin lieu-dit (it gets a small bit from La Janasse), it gives up the classic notes of black berries, spring flowers, violets, and licorice that I always seem to find in this cuvee. Building nicely on the palate, it is medium to full-bodied, beautifully textured, has tons of sweet fruit and solid, if not firm, tannin that come out on the finish. It will be better in another couple of years and have 15+ years of overall longevity.

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**2012 Domaine de la Janasse
Cotes du Rhone les Garrigues**

Even better, and the 2012 Côtes du Rhône les Garrigues is, as one famous winemaker put it, a giant-slayer. Coming from 80+-year-old Grenache vines (the same region as the Terre d'Argile) and checking in a 15.3% alcohol, it's an incredible Cotes du Rhone that has fabulous kirsch, licorice, roasted meats and toasted spice aromas and flavors. Full-bodied, ripe and hedonistic, yet still pure, balanced and lively, it's about as good as Cotes du Rhone gets and will drink well for a decade.

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- Jeb Dunnuck (October, 2014)

**2013 Domaine de la Janasse
Cotes du Rhone Blanc**

The 2013 Côtes du Rhône Blanc (Mostly Grenache Blanc but with smaller parts Clairette, Viognier, Roussanne and Bourboulenc) is a clean, mineral-laced effort that has impressive citrus blossom and white-flower-like aromas and flavors. Medium-bodied, crisp and refreshing, it's a wine to buy by the case and drink over the coming year or two.

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**2013 Domaine de la Janasse
Chateauneuf du Pape Cuvee
Prestige Blanc**

Even more rich and textured, yet still every bit as fresh, pure and precise, the 2013 Châteauneuf du Pape Cuvee Prestige Blanc is a 70/30 mix of Roussanne and Grenache Blanc. Seeing no new oak, it's a medium to full-bodied, rich, layered and decadent beauty that boasts phenomenal notes of golden fruits, brioche, white flowers and a subtle saltiness that comes out more on the palate. It's one of the top 2-3 wines in the appellation and should not be missed.

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**2013 Domaine de la Janasse Vin
de Pays Orange Rose**

The roses here are always well-made, with their IGP Rose, the 2013 Vin de Pays Orange Rosé, showing slightly more freshness and zip than the 2013 Côtes du Rhône that possesses more fruit. Both are excellent.

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**2013 Domaine de la Janasse
Cotes du Rhone**

The 2013 Côtes du Rhône (40% Grenache, 20% Mourvedre, 20% Carignan and the balance Syrah and Cinsault) is superb in the vintage. Medium-bodied, juicy and peppery, with plenty of spice and character, drink it over the coming couple of years.

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**2013 Domaine de la Janasse
Cotes du Rhone Villages Terre
d'Argile**

Still in barrel, the 2013 Côtes du Rhône Villages Terre d'Argile offers sweet cassis, ground herbs and spice in its medium-bodied, balanced and elegant personality. It has good concentration and depth, and will drink well on release. There was no Les Garrigues produced in the vintage.

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**2013 Domaine de la Janasse
Chateauneuf du Pape Cuvee
Vieilles Vignes**

Incorporating 20% Mourvedre, 10% Syrah and 6% Clairette, the Grenache-dominated 2013 Châteauneuf du Pape Cuvee Vieilles Vignes is gorgeous. Slightly more rich and textured than the Cuvee Chaupin, it boasts tons of blackberry, cassis, ground herbs, crushed flowers and creamy licorice in its full-bodied, layered and ripe personality. The tannin quality here is first-rate, and this will benefit from short-term cellaring and evolve for over a decade.

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**2012 Domaine de la Janasse
Cotes du Rhone Villages Terre
d'Argile**

The 2012 Côtes du Rhône Villages Terre d'Argile is a modern-styled beauty that gives up loads of creamy licorice, black raspberry, graphite and toast aromas and flavors. Medium+-bodied, with good concentration and sweet tannin, it's a hedonistic effort to drink over the coming 4-5 years.

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**2013 Domaine de la Janasse
Viognier VDP d'Orange**

The 2013 Viognier VDP d'Orange (which sees some new oak in its elevage) offers classic Viognier apricot, tangerine, buttered citrus and floral aromas and flavors. Seeing partial malolactic fermentation, it's medium-bodied, lively and pure on the palate, with bright acidity. It's another impressively made wine from this team that sells for a song.

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**2013 Domaine de la Janasse
Chateauneuf du Pape Blanc**

One of the top whites in the appellation, the Sabon's 2013 Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc is jaw-dropping good. A blend of equal parts Roussanne, Grenache Blanc and Clairette that goes through malo and is aged in 40% new oak, it boasts smoking notes of white peach, honeysuckle, brioche and salty minerality. Medium to full-bodied, ultra-pure and with building richness, it's a spectacular white that I'd recommend drinking over the coming 3-4 years, but it will certainly evolve for decades (I've had them back to the '80s and they always show beautifully).

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**2013 Domaine de la Janasse
Chateauneuf du Pape**

The 2013 Châteauneuf du Pape should be outstanding. Possessing a rocking purple color, it has classic black raspberry, toasted bread, licorice and spice aromatics, medium to full-bodied richness and a supple, elegant style. There's good concentration here and it makes the most of the vintage.

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**2013 Domaine de la Janasse
Chateauneuf du Pape Cuvee
Chaupin**

What could be one of the wines of the vintage, the 2013 Châteauneuf du Pape Cuvee Chaupin, which was harvested October 6-7, has beautiful depth and concentration to go with notes of blackberry, spring flowers, licorice and peppery herbs. Due to the horrible yields for Grenache, production here is down 35%. It should drink nicely on release and have 10-15 years of longevity.

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Chateauneuf du Pape**

The 2012 Châteauneuf du Pape (70% Grenache and 15% each of Syrah and Mourvedre) is beautiful, with medium to full-bodied richness, lots of sweet black raspberry fruit, graphite, bouquet garni and licorice aromatics, and sweet, building tannin that comes through on the finish. It shows the purity and balance of the vintage, and will dish out loads of pleasure over the coming decade or more.

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