

# stirring the lees with james molesworth

## Day 4: A First-Time Visit and a Return to the Classics

### Château de Beaucastel / Perrin & Fils / Marc Perrin

This estate needs no introduction. The Perrin family continues to operate at a high level, with an ever expanding lineup of wines (for more on the Perrin family, see my colleague Mitch Frank's profile from the [Nov. 30 issue of Wine Spectator](#)).

For background on the wines, you can reference my most recent [blog entry from my November 2010 visit](#). You may also be interested in [my blog entry on the Perrins' joint venture in California, Tablas Creek](#), as well as a [vertical tasting of their Coudoulet bottling](#). Things are going so well for the Perrins these days, they are even the [first non-Bordeaux French wine to be offered on the place de Bordeaux](#).

Nothing seems to stand still here even the labels are being tweaked a little. Famille Perrin will now be the umbrella company for all the operations (except La Vieille Ferme), so don't be surprised when your next delivery of [Beaucastel](#) comes in with a new color rendering of the family crest on the label.

As the portfolio grows, one wonders if the burgeoning Perrin clan will take a breather, as too much growth can sometimes be a detriment.

"In one sense we have to stop and assess what we have and build up the vineyards that we recently purchased. We don't want to buy vineyards just to be in every appellation," said Marc Perrin. "But on the other hand, we are always looking for vineyards with a specific identity, in cooler spots from wind or altitude, that are top, top quality."

"You can't make wines the same way you used to," continued Marc. "In 1989 when I started and for those first few years, when the rains came in early September, that was it, the vintage was over. Now, look at what we have had since '00. The rains come, but you wait a few days and you get an Indian summer for several weeks. It's totally different. It's nice to have this, but we are very concerned about climate change and are trying to look ahead. Not enough people realize the need to adapt to this problem."

The 2010 lineup of reds from the former [Perrin & Fils](#) label (now Famille Perrin) starts with several top values, including the **2010 Côtes du Rhône-Villages**, with its taut red berry and hot stone notes and a racy, but still compact finish. The **2010 Côtes du Rhône-Villages Cairanne Peyre Blanche** is very smoky and dark, with roasted fig and blackberry crumble notes, offset by a grippy, but racy finish. It's that racy edge that starts to stand out as I taste through the full lineup.

"The main idea of 2010 is ripe, but fabulous balance," said Perrin. "We had the same

phenolics as '09, but 1.5 degrees of alcohol less in the parcels right around the winery, for example. It's back to the very classic style of the southern Rhône. And that ripeness includes the late-ripening varieties. So the wines are intense, but not heavy."

The **2010 Vacqueyras Les Christins** is also quite smoky, but with a firm feel from the start, as well as a broader mix of red and black fruit. Silky tannins frame the finish, but there's heft throughout. This has intensity but precision; weight but definition. "This really shows the style of '10," said Perrin.

The **2010 Côtes du Rhône-Villages Rasteau L'Andéol** is made from 100 percent Grenache, which shows in its pure silky texture, with lush cassis, blackberry and Damson plum fruit that sails along with finely beaded acidity through the long, pure finish. The **2010 Vinsobres Les Cornuds** is velvety and fleshy, with gorgeous mouthfeel to the cassis, crushed plum and anise notes. The long violet finish just sails on and on though it's not quite as aromatically expressive now as the others, it's longer and finer and should be a beauty when it settles in.

Of special note is the growing Gigondas lineup here, which starts with the **2010 Gigondas La Gille**, offering vivid blueberry paste, plum, anise and Linzer notes. It has impressive range, but stays elegant, with a pure floral, incense-tinged finish that shows latent grip. This wine seems to get better every year as the Perrins get a handle on the appellation.

"What's interesting is that in Gigondas we are still discovering things. It is very different from Châteauneuf," said Perrin. "The biggest difference might be stems more and more we are not destemming in Gigondas, which is the opposite of how we work in Châteauneuf. We see Grenache as a more Pinot Noir-like expression in Gigondas and the stems, when ripe, give that freshness. The '10 La Gille has 60 percent stems and in a really ripe year, I could see us keeping 100 percent."

The **2010 Gigondas Le Clos des Tourelles** is the first vintage to be bottled separately from the 2.5-hectare property the Perrins bought in '08. The 95/5 blend of Grenache and Syrah was fermented in wooden vat with stems and a light *pigeage*, then aged in *foudre*. There are only about 400 cases, but if you can find some, the wine is dense, but sleek, with a strong graphite edge from the start, and lots of dark currant, espresso and singed-iron notes filling in throughout. It's long and expressive.

"Gigondas is really the perfect spot to get into vineyard bottlings, with soils from different periods, different types of soils and different exposures. There is so much to choose from," said Perrin.

The hen's teeth bottling here is the **2010 Gigondas Vieilles Vignes**, sourced from a small parcel of very old vines. This is a strapping young wine, loaded with fig, blueberry and currant *pâte de fruit* notes, laced with graphite and loaded with latent grip on the finish. It's densely layered, but not heavy at all. Should take a decade to unwind. As with the La Gille, the Perrins seem to ratchet this wine up bit by bit every vintage.

Heading back to the Perrin's backyard, the **2010 Châteauneuf-du-Pape Les Sinards**, made from 60 percent Grenache, with 20 percent Mourvèdre and then smaller amounts of Syrah Counoise and others, included young vines declassified from Beaucastel as usual. It seems almost ebullient after the more reticent Gigondas trio, as it's crammed with cherry compote and plum sauce, all intertwined with sweet spice and fruitcake notes. The **2010 Châteauneuf-du-Pape Vieilles Vignes** is a new bottling, made from a nearly 1-hectare parcel located by the Châteauneuf itself. 100 percent Grenache, there are maybe 2,000 bottles worth set to be bottled, "but we always wanted to do a 100 percent Grenache Châteauneuf-du-Pape and '10 seemed like a good vintage to keep this parcel separate," said

Perrin. The wine is silky, but intense, with an iron edge weaving through the velvety blackberry and dark fig fruit. The long and perfumed finish is very persistent.

The **2010 Vinsobres Les Hauts de Julien** is sourced from the highest parcels of the Perrin's estate in this burgeoning appellation, made from a 50/50 Grenache and Syrah blend. The vines are interplanted and ripen at the same time, so they are harvested together and co-fermented. The wine is all precision and floral notes, with violet and spice sitting atop a supple core of black cherry and Damson plum fruit. It has great cut on the finish with a long, minerally edge.

Under the Beaucastel label of Famille Perrin, the **2010 Côtes du Rhône Coudoulet de Beaucastel** is dark, but inviting and more open than earlier vintages, with alluring fig and black currant notes. The telltale smoky, hot stone and charcoal hints remain in the background, with evident, but nicely polished tannins.

"The vineyards for Coudoulet are more susceptible to drought than our vines in Châteauneuf itself, so some vintages can seem severe, especially because of the Mourvèdre component. But in '09 and '10 the late-ripening varieties are so pure, so that's probably the reason for the change [the wine seemingly more accessible now]. When you can harvest Mourvèdre in mid-October, that's special," said Perrin.

The **2010 Châteauneuf-du-Pape** shown is a sample that is a fairly representative approximation of the final blend, according to Perrin, though some additional lots have yet to be blended in. It captures the purity and drive of the vintage, with seamless layers of cassis, blackberry and fig fruit woven with alluring spice, incense and anise notes. The long, sleek finish is deceptively approachable the grippy hints of tar and iron just an echo for now, but you can feel it building through the finish, which puts on considerable weight as it airs in the glass, without shedding a drop of purity.

The **2010 Châteauneuf-du-Pape Hommage à Jacques Perrin Grande Cuvée** is also about two-thirds of the way done on the blending process, but what winds up missing the cut here moves to the regular bottling. "They are intertwined as always, but I think the quality is evident even if these aren't the exact finished wines," said Perrin.

It delivers a stunning beam of Linzer and steeped black currant fruit, loaded with toasted spice, blueberry cobbler and singed apple wood. The texture is seamless, the purity undeniable and the balance is deft considering the latent power that sits in reserve. It's clearly classic in quality and seems destined to be one of the wines of the vintage.

Because it is a particularly late release this time around, I got one more look at the **2009 Châteauneuf-du-Pape Hommage à Jacques Perrin Grande Cuvée** before I taste it officially in a blind tasting in my New York office. The '09 shows more up-front heft than the 2010, with the blueberry paste, fig sauce and Linzer notes showing a fleshier, denser edge. It has more obvious grip too than the '10, though it's equally as long on the roasted mesquite-tinged finish. It provides a great contrast in vintages, contrasting the showier '09 with the more precise '10; it's splitting hairs but I'd give the edge to the '10.

In discussing the two differently styled vintages, Perrin noted, "It's interesting, when you are young and you make wine, you doubt yourself. When you are young and you're making wines that are meant to age, you put as much as possible into the wine, thinking the more at the beginning, the more there will be at the end. But when you have experience and less doubt, you can bottle wines with balance, because you realize that balance is the key. It's the *terroir* that determines the aging, not the winemaking. I realized this when I recently drank the '89, which could have been considered a 'soft' wine at harvest time, so it would have been easy to pack it with more extraction, thinking that would help it to age. As it turns out, it

didn't need anything. And that's why family-run businesses are the best, because without the experience of my father and uncle when I started, I would never have known that."