



France, Northern Rhône: Part 1 – Unprecedented Success

featuring Domaine Jean-Louis Chave
reviewed by Joe Czerwinski

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2018 Hermitage

As virtually all of the various components of Chave's 2018 Hermitage were still separate, I've given a rating that reflects the variability I saw when tasting through the barrels and made a guess regarding Jean-Louis's blending sensibilities and available volumes. For example, the Pélérat (92 - 94), a pretty, red-fruited element could add freshness but is likely to be a small portion of the blend (if it's even included). More impressive were the lush, mouthfilling Les Beaumes (95 - 97) and stony, elegant Le Méal (94 - 96). Lots from L'Ermite (98 - 100) and Les Bessards (98 - 100) will likely make up the bulk of the blend, oozing with liquid stone, intense blueberry and cassis fruit, and possessing firm yet ripe structures. (**97-100 points**)

2018 Hermitage Blanc

The 2018 Hermitage Blanc was still in its various components, so my rating and description is something of a composite, based on barrel-tasting lots from Pélérat, Les Rocoules and L'Ermite. There's incredible weight, ripeness and richness throughout, with hints of toast and crocuses accenting white peach, melon and pineapple fruit, yet also a sense of vibrance and briny freshness on the lengthy finishes. (**95-97 points**)

2018 Saint Joseph

Still in component parts, the 2018 Saint Joseph should be another winner. The least concentrated, yet still exceptional Chalaix (92 - 94) displayed enticing notes of violets, blueberries and licorice; the Dardouille (93 - 95) was lusher and suppler, loaded with black

cherries; and the Bachasson (94 - 96) was the most complex, mixing herbs and licorice with plummy fruit. **(93-95 points)**

2018 Saint Joseph Le Clos Florentin

To date, this is the only single-parcel wine Chave has released from Saint Joseph. The 2018 Saint Joseph Le Clos Florentin boasts wonderfully pure blueberries on the nose, with just the slightest hints of herbs and Asian five-spice powder. Full-bodied, it's deep and rich, supple on the mid-palate, then silky and fine on the finish. In less than a generation, Jean-Louis Chave has created one of Saint Joseph's top wines. **(94-96 points)**

2017 Hermitage

Jean-Louis Chave had done some preblending of the 2017 Hermitage at the time of my visit, meaning several parcels had already been combined with others, so there were fewer components to taste. A sample that included some L'Ermite, Les Beaumes and Pélérat was fragrant, loaded with peppery spice and came across as slightly open-knit (93 - 95). A second component, mostly Le Méal, was richer and riper-tasting, with lush fruit and hints of roasted meat (97 - 99). Finally, a sample Jean-Louis described as "more the core of the blend" (mainly Les Bessards) was simultaneously firm and generous, with notes of crushed stone, cassis and licorice (98 - 100). **(96-99 points)**

2017 Hermitage Blanc

In the end, I'm unable to definitely say that the 2017 Hermitage Blanc is better than the stupendous 2016. Of course, I sampled it just three days after it was bottled, so I've appended the + to my rating, as there's a possibility the wine may have been affected by that process. It's gently toasty but dominated at this stage by forward melon and pineapple fruit. Full-bodied and incredibly rich yet balanced, it unfolds in waves of flavor and texture, lingering for what seems like minutes on the finish. Hit it soon to enjoy its youthful opulence, or put it aside for 10-12 years. **(98+ points)**

2017 Saint-Joseph

Just a wonderfully fun, joyous expression of the appellation, Chave's 2017 Saint Joseph was set to be bottled the day after my visit. It blends lots from Chalaix, Dardouille, Les Oliviers, Bachasson, and Le Clos Florentin into a medium to full-bodied wine loaded with cherries and delicate herbal nuances. Silky and crisp on the finish, it can be enjoyed now and anytime over the next 5-6 years. **(91-93 points)**

2017 Saint Joseph Le Clos Florentin

Crushed stone, menthol and Asian five-spice powder notes accent blueberry fruit on the nose of the 2017 Saint Joseph Le Clos Florentin. Bottled just hours before I tasted it, it's full-bodied,

plush and creamy in texture, finishing soft, elegant, long and complex. Enjoy it anytime over the next decade. (**94+ points**)

2016 Hermitage

Chave's 2016 Hermitage isn't the most intense or biggest wine this estate has produced, but it's a wonderfully charming, approachable effort from a vintage where quantities were halved by hail damage. Perfumed and spicy, with notes of black olives and black cherries, it's full-bodied, cuddly-soft and velvety in texture, with a long, harmonious finish. I expect it will firm up a little over the next year or two in bottle, but it's delicious now and should mature gracefully for at least 15 years, probably longer. (**96+ points**)

2015 Hermitage

I had the opportunity to retaste the wonderful 2015 Hermitage and have taken this opportunity to up my rating of it a couple of points, more in line with how I thought it would turn out from barrel than when I first tasted it from bottle last year. Yes, it's closed up pretty tight, but the potential is clearly enormous, with pungent, peppery aromas accenting espresso, black olive and blackberries. Full-bodied, dense and supremely concentrated, with a tremendously long finish, this is a vintage to put away and forget for at least 5-6 years, maybe a decade. (**99 points**)

2003 Hermitage

Chave's 2003 Hermitage, like the most successful Burgundies from that anomalous vintage, somehow retains a sense of mineral freshness that balances this wine's remarkable concentration and massive fruit. Tasted at the domaine, it's even floral and perfumed on the nose, an incredible feat when faced with that summer's implacable heat. Full-bodied, massively rich and decadently creamy in texture, it delivers waves of mixed red and black fruits that avoid any overtly raisiny character, finishing vibrant, peppery and long. (**100 points**)