

White Châteauneuf-du-Pape

Say the name and people's first thought is of this southern Rhône region's famed reds. But the quality and stature of Châteauneuf blanc can be just as impressive, says Matt Walls



Outside Burgundy and other sacred sites of Pinot production, there aren't many great terroirs that produce white and red wines of equal standing. There's Pessac-Léognan, Rioja, Hermitage... and what about Châteauneuf-du-Pape? After a recent blind tasting of 87 whites from the 2016 and 2017 vintages, I would say it's certainly on its way.

Like its more common red counterpart (just 7% of the appellation's output is white), Châteauneuf blanc both benefits and suffers from having so many possibilities

when it comes to production. The six white grape varieties (Grenache Blanc, Roussanne, Clairette, Bourboulenc, Picpoul and Picardan) can be used in any proportion, and the four principal soil types each have their own influence. This adds up to a mosaic of different styles that's hard to summarise simply.

At one end of the scale there are lean, unoaked wines which can be easy to digest but sometimes lack character and interest. At the other end, there are deep, rich, oaked iterations that are bombastic and luxurious but can lack drinkability and refreshment value – archetypal

'one-glass wines'. But generally speaking, this hot, dry, expansive appellation produces full-bodied wines that are ripe and opulent, but dry.

Historically it's a style of wine that's been charged with being over the top: too rich, too oaky, too alcoholic, too full-bodied. I tasted many wines that displayed one, two, or even all of these eccentricities. It remains a style to buy on recommendation, rather than buying blind. But balance is possible at every point on the spectrum.

The most rewarding wines are the emerging style that's restrained, fresh and drinkable but still generous and unmistakably Châteauneuf. A new generation of winemakers at Domaine la Barroche, Domaine du Banneret, Chante Cigale and Domaine Julien Masquin are leading the way, and I've concentrated on wines that represent this style in my selection.

Producers were able to submit their 2016 or 2017 whites to this tasting. You can buy both vintages with

confidence. The 2016 vintage in Châteauneuf was superb for reds, but also very good for whites. The wines are concentrated, vibrant and well balanced. The 2017s are marginally more intense in fruit but perhaps not quite so fresh. Both are a better bet than the 2015 vintage, which more often resulted in flabby wines that lack freshness.

Châteauneuf whites can age impressively, notably Domaine de Beurenard, Clos des Papes and Château de Beaucastel – up to 30 years in the best vintages. But they often go through awkward stages. To be safe, drink within a few years of release when youthful and vibrant. If you are brave enough to age them, leave for at least eight years before broaching.

The evolution of Châteauneuf blanc towards a fresher, more drinkable style is welcome, but this will always be a powerful, rich, generous wine – one that works naturally at the dinner table. Try using it like you would a Meursault. Preferably while wearing an ermine cloak.

Matt Walls is a *Decanter* contributing editor and DWWA Regional Chair for the Rhône



Domaine la Barroche, Pure 2016 96
£50 (ib) Gauntleys, Justerini & Brooks
First vintage; 100% Clairette grown on sand on lieu-dit Le Pied Long, no new oak. Pure lime blossom aromas. No excess fat and lovely fresh, vibrant acidity. A contemporary, highly drinkable and pure expression. Biodynamic. **Drink 2019-2026 Alc 14%**



Domaine de Beurenard, Boisrenard 2017 95
£68.72 (2016) Tannico
Six varieties on various soil types, no new oak. Lifted aromatics and a vibrant palate, harmonious and unforced. Good energy and precision. Creamy finish adds subtle opulence. Biodynamic. **Drink 2019-2028 Alc 14%**



Château de Beaucastel, Tradition 2016 94
£51.80 Lay & Wheeler
Fermented and aged in concrete and old oak. Enticing citrus aromas, and a touch of florality. An energetic style with freshness, balanced acidity and a focused finish. A contemporary rendition. **Drink 2019-2020 Alc 14%**



Domaine Giraud, Les Gallimardes 2017 93
POA Gauntleys
Full-bodied but not excessive, with bright acidity and a subtle, structural, fennel bitterness on the finish. A lovely unoaked style of Châteauneuf blanc with opulence, purity and balance. **Drink 2019-2023 Alc 14.5%**



Domaine l'Or de Line, Tradition 2017 93
£26.76 Nethergate Wines
Fermented then aged for five months in stainless steel. Attractive nose, with faintly nutty, woody, floral elements. A good sense of freshness gives drinkability. Lots to enjoy here. Organic. **Drink 2019-2022 Alc 14%**



Brotte, Les Hauts de Barville 2017 92
£20.77 (2016) Winebuyers
Mostly grown on chalk; fermented and aged in stainless steel. Piercingly fresh floral aromas. Very full-bodied, but a clear mineral seam lends straightness and tension. Contemporary, unoaked style. **Drink 2019-2023 Alc 13.5%**



Domaine Chante Cigale, Extrait 2016 94
£44.99 Mill Hill Wines
Fermented and aged in concrete and old oak. Lime blossom and almond – fresh like washed linen. Full-bodied, but shot through with ripe limey acidity. Buzzes with energy; great purity and focus. **Drink 2019-2026 Alc 14%**



Domaine du Banneret, Le Secret 2017 94
N/A UK www.domaine-banneret.fr
Second vintage. Piercing lime, fennel and pickled ginger notes. Medium-bodied but has good acidity and mineral dimension. Very drinkable; great definition and cut. Purity and finesse. **Drink 2019-2026 Alc 13.5%**



Domaine du Vieux Télégraphe, Clos La Roquette 2017 94
£30.05 Christopher Piper
A subtle, lifted fennel nose. Perilously full and broad on the palate, but then finishes fresh and taut thanks to brisk acidity and a coiled energy. An intense wine with a glinting mineral line. Organic. **Drink 2019-2024 Alc 13.5%**



Château de la Font du Loup, Tradition 2017 92
N/A UK www.lafontduloup.com
North-facing, sandy vineyards bring freshness and finesse. Gorgeous nose: jasmine, violet, peach. Remarkable concentration of flavour, shot through with juicy acidity. Unmistakably Châteauneuf. **Drink 2019-2025 Alc 13.5%**



Domaine André Mathieu, Tradition 2017 92
N/A UK www.domaine-andre-mathieu.com
Fermented and aged in stainless steel except for 7% in new oak. Lovely nose – subtle nutty hints over lime leaf. Perfectly judged acidity and an appealingly savoury finish. An elegant style. **Drink 2019-2021 Alc 13.5%**



Domaine Duseigneur, Catarina Blanc 2017 92
£38 The Solent Cellar
100% Clairette. A lightly floral expression with quince and aniseed. Well balanced with a floral flourish on the finish. It's concentrated, but has a lightness of touch that brings elegance. Biodynamic. **Drink 2019-2021 Alc 13%**



Domaine Julien Masquin, Montplaisir 2017 94
£35 (2015) La Marchande
Grown on the sandstone of lieu-dit Rayas, no new oak. Gorgeous mango and jasmine nose. Full-bodied; finishes dry and gently mineral. Marries a straightness of profile with a hedonistic side. **Drink 2019-2027 Alc 13.5%**



Domaine Les Cailloux, Tradition 2017 94
POA Gauntleys
Jasmine, lily and apricot, a lifted and defined nose. Really vibrant, intense, fresh style with great verve and energy. Long, concentrated finish. So concentrated, yet so fresh. Just a joy. Organic. **Drink 2019-2026 Alc 13.5%**



Domaine de Fontavin, Les Immortelles 2016 93
£29.99 (2015) The General Wine Co
Welcoming aromatic profile, with subtle citrus and blossom. Full-bodied but not fat; generous but not heavy. A detailed, delightful and drinkable contemporary Châteauneuf Blanc. **Drink 2019-2024 Alc 13.5%**



Domaine Pierre Usseglio, Tradition 2017 92
POA Gauntleys
Pink grapefruit and fennel. Medium- to full-bodied, with bright acidity and a firm, defined, focused finish. This has real edge and precision which makes for a highly drinkable style. Long finish. **Drink 2019-2021 Alc 14.5%**



La Fagotière, Tradition 2017 92
£22.10 3D Wines
Aromas of apple, pear and hawthorn blossom. An unusual, crystal clear style that makes it drinkable, despite the weight on the mid-palate. Piercing acidity and a mineral finish. A shame they have less than a hectare of white grapes. Organic. **Drink 2019-2021 Alc 13.5%**



M Chapoutier, La Bernardine 2017 92
£35.27 (2016) Winebuyers
Fresh, slightly nutty style. Rounded, medium-bodied palate. Lovely freshness and incisive acidity keep things drinkable. A tailored style without undue excess and considered use of oak. Mineral finish. **Drink 2019-2022 Alc 13.5%**