



2008 Clos Saint-Jean Chateauneuf du Pape Vieilles Vignes

A Proprietary Blend Dry Red Table wine from Chateauneuf du Pape, Southern Rhone, Rhone, France

Review by Robert Parker

Wine Advocate # 185 (Oct 2009)

Rating: (91-93)

Drink -

Cost:

The 2008 Chateauneuf du Pape Vieilles Vignes, which is a selection made only for the American importer, Peter Weygandt, is essentially the same as the traditional cuvee, but with a higher percentage of old vine Grenache. The vines for this cuvee range in age from 50-100 years as the Maurels still sell all young vine Grenache to negociants, particularly Tardieu-Laurent. This beautiful Chateauneuf du Pape possesses abundant amounts of kirsch liqueur, licorice, and sandal/balsam wood notes, a big, full-bodied mouthfeel, and the best depth and richness of any 2008 I tasted. (Not yet released) What can I write that will give proper acknowledgment to what has occurred at this extraordinary estate since 2002, when brothers Pascal and Vincent Maurel took control of Clos Saint-Jean, and had the foresight to bring in the gifted wine consultant/oenologist, Philippe Cambie. Their first vintage (2002) was the worst year for Chateauneuf du Pape since 1932, but they survived it to go on a make an incredible succession of wines starting with some of the finest 2003s. Those were followed each vintage with remarkable efforts, ending with what may be the finest 2008s I tasted on my recent trip. This is an old, very large estate (110+ acres) with fabulous old vine holdings throughout the appellation. They possesses vineyards in some of Chateauneuf du Pape's finest areas, including the plateau on the west, the famed La Crau on the east, and some sensational old vine parcels just north of the village. There is considerable history at Clos Saint-Jean, with the first estate-bottled wines being produced in 1910, but Vincent and Pascal's father sold the wines as they were bottled, so frequently the wines were oxidized and tired by the time they were bottled. Now, everything is bottled at the same time, essentially after 12-15 months of aging. The same winemaking philosophy is used for all the cuvees, which are different blends from different parcels. However, Vincent, Pascal, and Philippe Cambie only age their Grenache in tank. The Syrah and Mourvedre are aged in one- and two-year-old demi-muids, and occasionally smaller barrels. With the construction of a new winery in 2009, this estate appears set to have an even more efficient operation, with more space than they had in their old, turn of the century facility. The 2008s have turned out well, primarily because the Maurels waited to achieve full maturity in this challenging vintage. There was lots of culling out of the mildewed grapes as well as enormous labor-intensive efforts at the winery's triage tables. The 2007 tastings prove that if you have been doing this long enough, at some point you will experience a level of profoundness that can still surpass anything done in the last 30+ years. The tasting of the five 2007 cuvees must rank among the greatest single tasting in the southern Rhone I have ever done in 30+ years of wine tasting. Last year (see Issue #179) I sensed something special was happening, and the bottled 2007s confirm that something rare had occurred in the vineyards and cellars of Clos Saint-Jean. Two separate tastings, one week apart, confirmed that Clos St.-Jean's 2007s represent an achievement and level of experience that

will forever be difficult to replicate. Importer: Peter Weygandt, Weygandt-Metzler, Uniontown, PA; tel. (610) 486-0800
