

BRUSQUIERES

COURTIL - THIBAUT

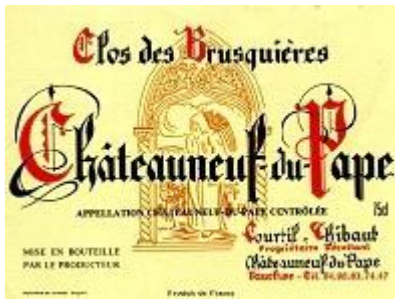
Châteauneuf-du-Pape

How to account for the birth of a wine legend? Wine critic Robert Parker had already established himself as one of the world's foremost authorities on the Rhone before importer Alain Junguenet introduced him to the man Parker soon called "the great master of Châteauneuf" and "one of the most compelling wine personalities on planet earth." When Robert Parker writes, the wine world pays attention, and soon Henri Bonneau and his "Cuvée Célestins" had a cult following.

From the first words he wrote about Bonneau (in the October, 1990 issue of his *Wine Advocate*), Parker characterized Bonneau's as "perhaps the only wines that represent the true, old, blockbuster style of Châteauneuf du Pape that is increasingly falling out of fashion in favor of earlier bottlings and softer, fruitier wines."

So imagine Alain Junguenet's excitement when one day Bonneau suggested they should poke their heads into another old cellar and taste what Bonneau's godson was up to at Domaine Courtil - Thibaut. Young Claude Courtil, it transpired, was something of a chip off the old block. A new legend, perhaps? The estate's Clos des Brusquieres enjoys a superb location, at the north end of the appellation, near Mont Redon, and Henri had been "helping out".

Alain found wines, in Bonneau-typical fashion, still in barrel at ages from six to twelve years, wines with a complexity impossible without the long sojourn in cask, but concentrated in a way wine must be simply to *stand up to* such a long time in wood. Then Alain did something that is also typical Bonneau: nothing. He kept quiet and he kept an eye on the wines, tasting and waiting.



Finally, Henri and Alain decided to bottle. You can bet we're not selling these wines before their time (and it's not the bank that said "it's time"). Which "new" wines are we selling? Oh, only 1990 and 1995. If you're not excited at this point, not only should you not read further, you should also find another line of work.

1990. Parker wrote: "a fabulous vintage ... quintessential ... super-concentrated ... This is a great vintage!" (*Wines of the Rhone*, 2nd edition) If you've tasted Henri Bonneau's 1990 "Cuvée Célestins", which Parker rates "100 points", then you have some idea what's in store inside a bottle of Courtil - Thibaut. On the one hand it's phenomenally complex in the manner of a more mature wine. On the other, it's vigorous to the point of galloping out of the glass. Hm. We think you just have to try riding a bottle for yourself.

1995. Okay, now we know you're going to assume this is the weak stalemate of the 1990. Parker merely calls this vintage "exceptional". So you can skip it, right? Your customers will never forgive you, and neither will you. This has a personality all its own, equally mysterious, but sappier, juicier, more overtly spicy. And look at the price!

There will be future vintages of Courtil-Thibaut Clos des Brusquieres. The 1996 is currently under advisement. Guigal was happy to buy all of Claude's wine from the rainy 1997

vintage. Then, yes - eventually! - there will be '98 to enjoy. But it is unlikely there will ever be a "double bill" like this one on offer! Vintner Select has cornered a significant share of the production, but it won't last long.

Clos des Brusquieres Châteauneuf-du-Pape

Varieties: 80% grenache, the rest Syrah and Mourvedre
Average production: 2001 is the first year wine was bottled, rather than being sold off in bulk. One 350-case fuder each of '90 and '95 was bottled. The entire production of '90 is being sold in the United States. Claude Courtil is marketing 200 cs. of the '95 him self in France.
Vinificatory details: Extended maceration with stems, long aging in older fuder

**1990 Châteauneuf-du-Pape
Clos des Brusquieres
Suggested retail \$ 44.99**

**1995 Châteauneuf-du-Pape
Clos des Brusquieres
Suggested retail \$ 34.99**