

DOMAINE DE  
L'ORATOIRE  
ST-MARTIN  
Côtes du Rhône

Rhône

The Southern Rhône vineyards of Cairanne are high on the list of vines likely to be upgraded from Cotes-du-Rhone-Villages to a self-standing appellation contrôlée. Without question, the complex mixture of sand, clay, and stones in the steepest sites offers superb potential, and it is the quality demonstrated by the Alary family of l'Oratoire St.-Martin and a few others that is slowly convincing the wine authorities and a worldwide public of this fact.

Frederic Alary is a young man of vast imagination, invention and dedication. There are numerous separate cuvées and extensive experimental lots going in this cellar at all times, and all of them – white as well as red – making an overwhelming case for Cairanne terroir and Alary care and ingenuity.

The domaine's "basic" Cotes du Rhone (Grenache, with a bit of Syrah and also entitled to the village-appellation "Cairanne") sets the tone for the Alarys' entire collection: full, rich fruit. Youthful wine from a ripe vintage can smell like blueberry jam.

Beginning with the "Reserve" bottling, we are treated to old vines, as well as to some 30% Mourvedre, a grape which Frederic thinks adds depth and longevity as the wine develops, and certainly gives them a leathery, animal streak. At the "Prestige" level, in fact, the Syrah drops out and we're left with a 60:40 ratio of Grenache and Mourvedre. In the "Haut Coustias", Mourvedre dominates, with Syrah and Grenache each at 20%. Whites feature in order of significance Marsanne; Roussanne; Viognier.

I find myself inevitably gravitating toward Southern Rhone growers who respect the great Mourvedre grape famous from Provence. But for me I think it's not just a matter of complexity or ageability. Mourvedre is not easy to farm, and the windswept hills around Cairanne and Gigondas or rocky, sloping plains of Vacqueyras are in fact marginal terroir for this variety: any cooler and it fails to ripen to its potential. Thus, growers who



persist with Mourvedre are inevitably patient, viticulturally diligent folks willing to accept low yields to guarantee complete ripeness. And that, of course, is the sort of vintner with whom one wants to associate!

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"Domaine de l'Oratoire St.-Martin is one of the southern Rhone Valley's most conspicuous overachievers, making wines that are far above their humble appellations. The rise in quality began under Bernard Alary, but his son Frederic has pushed the quality further. This is the type of estate that brings smiles to consumers who happen upon their wines. They are reasonably priced and qualitatively equivalent to wines selling at two and three times the price."

**Robert Parker,**

*The Wines of the Rhone Valley (1997)*

"Even before my book on the Rhone was published last year I had been touting the wines from this exceptional estate in the Côtes du Rhone village of Cairanne. The newest releases are impressive wines that should be sought out by Rhone Valley enthusiasts, as well as readers looking for wines with considerable personality and flavor."

**Robert Parker, The Wine Advocate**

6/98; 2/03

**Côtes du Rhône - Cairanne**

Total acreage: 56 acres

Average production: 8,000 cases

Varieties: Grenache, Syrah, Mourvedre. A little Cinsault, Marsanne, Clairette, Roussanne, & Viognier. Vines for reds bottled under the village appellation range from 50 to 100 years of age. For the varietal proportions by cuvée, see the full text at left.

Vinificatory Highlights: Burgundian-style pigeage (with newly installed mechanical "feet") for all reds except the Grenache, which is vinified in more traditional Rhone regimen. Upbringing is in tank and (for prestige & Coustias) barrel. Wines are neither fined nor filtered.

**"P'tit Martin" (Cotes du Rhone)**

[This is the estate's occasional 2<sup>nd</sup> wine.]

**Cotes du Rhone (bl. & rg.)**

**Cotes du Rhone - Cairanne**

"Reserve des Seigneurs"

**Cotes du Rhone - Cairanne**

"Cuvée Prestige"

**Cotes du Rhone - Cairanne**

"Haut Coustias"

**Cotes du Rhone - Cairanne**

"Haut Coustias" BLANC

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