

LE VIEUX DONJON

Châteauneuf-du-Pape

If there is a picture to epitomize Châteauneuf du Pape, it is of huge, gnarled vines rising from a mound of large smooth stones. And if one estate epitomizes these *vieux ceps* and *cailloux*, then surely it is the small domain of Lucien and Marie-José Michel. Their oldest vines exceed eighty years and are so lodged in heavy stones that it takes a special tractor to work the “soil”.

Those old vines, together with late harvesting, make for quite low yields and that makes for wonderfully concentrated vinous raw material which the Michels guide through a very traditional Châteauneuf cellar upbringing. (See highlights at right.) The mix of grapes, too, is quite traditional, leaning overwhelmingly on Grenache. However, Michels harvest their grapes parcel by parcel, according to strict standards of ripeness (tasting!), rather than by grape variety. Vines of three sorts are mixed together anyway.

A tiny bit of superb white wine is also made nowadays, but the red is the Michels understandable pride and joy. Seldom blockbuster wines in their youth, but always well-defined and shapely so that they may be enjoyed right away, Vieux Donjon Châteauneufs nevertheless age slowly and magnificently. Yet, the estate is so small and modest that, when they assembled a vertical collection for Stephen Tanzer's *International Wine Cellar* in Spring of 1995, there were numerous holes. Apparently, not only do the Michels not keep any prisoners in dungeon (“Donjon” - which was apparently just Lucien's take on what remains of the Popes new summer castle seen on the label) but they don't



keep many bottles of their own wine in their cellar!

“I have been buying the wines of Le Vieux Donjon for well over a decade, and I continue to be impressed by how consistently classic they are. [This] continues to be the most underrated great estate of the appellation.”

Robert Parker, The Wine Advocate
[8/96]

“The style of the wines is unashamedly „traditionelle” - vins de garde with plenty of backbone and muscle to them. However, these are no clumsy blockbusters, but wines with real definition and elegance underneath powerful exteriors. These are well-constituted wines with great depth and extract, which manage to retain finesse. This is relatively rare in an appellation where size and clumsiness abound and one frequently looks in vain for subtlety. Sales of Le Vieux Donjon are not a problem for Marie-José and Lucien Michel. One can taste why.”

Remington Norman,
Rhone Renaissance (1996)

Le Vieux Donjon Châteauneuf-du-Pape

Varieties: 70% Grenache (half of that very old vines), 20% Syrah, 10% Cinsault and Mourvedre.

Total acreage: 29 acres, all but two in red varieties

Average production: 3,200 cs.,

Vinificatory details: *Extended maceration with stems, long aging in older foudres. The individual varieties are not vinified separately the way they would be at most Châteauneuf estates.*

Châteauneuf-du-Pape Blanc

Châteauneuf-du-Pape (rouge)