



The Chapoutier tasting room.



The wines enjoyed at Chapoutier.

PHOTOS: JIM BRYANT

Chapoutier Vineyards and Wines

ON JUNE 25, 2015, after a great tour and tasting at Guigal, we drove a short distance to Maison M. Chapoutier in the town of Tain-l'Hermitage. As I wrote extensively about these two producers in recent *Quintessential Barrington* issues, I will focus only on the tasting and lunch. After a very brief tour we sat at a U-shaped table in a classroom setting and began to sample these great wines.

Our first wine was the 2014 Invitare from the Condrieu appellation made 100 percent from the Viognier grape. One's first impression of the wine from the nose belies its minerality. Produced from vines grown in schist and granite soils, the wine is fresh and complex. On the nose, it is fruity evidencing exotic fruits, acacia blossoms, peach, apricots, and litchee. In the mouth it is rich and

full, with vanilla overtones from partial aging in oak barrels. It can be served as an aperitif, with goat cheese, or with Asian or Oriental foods.

The next wine was the 2014 Chante-Alouette Hermitage made solely from the Marsanne grape. This wine is full-bodied, yet soft in the mouth with elegance and good length. The nose is both complex and subtle with hints of nuttiness, quince, and ginger. Recommended food pairings include foie gras, crayfish, lobster, and rich fish.

The first red wine tasted was the 2013 Les Bécasses from the Côte-Rôtie appellation made 100 percent from Syrah grapes. Dark red in color, it had a nose of exotic spices, violets, rosemary, and black olives and raspberry. The mouth feel was rich and spicy with minimal levels of vanilla from oak aging. This wine would pair well with wild

game birds, venison, lamb, and beef with accompanying sauces.

Moving up in intensity we were served the 2012 Les Granits from the St. Joseph appellation. The wine is made from 60- to 80-year-old Syrah grapes grown on a 2.4 hectare plot of extreme steepness with very low yields. The wine has both organic and biodynamic certification. The wine is dark red with a nose showing black fruits, smoke, and significant minerality. It has a big mouth feel of high tannins with a long finish. If drunk young, it should be decanted and will age well for many decades. It should be paired with lamb or small game birds.

The final wine was the 2011 Le Méal from the Hermitage appellation. It is made from 100 percent Syrah, which is also certified both organic and biodynamic. Vines on the 1.37 hectare site are almost 100+ years old and produce 550 cases of wines. The wine is deep garnet red with a nose of ripe fruit and smoke. In the mouth it is smooth, even though the tannins are powerful. It will be increasingly wonderful to drink over the next 5-7 decades, but needs to be decanted in its youth. This wine matches well with great steak or lamb.

Following the fabulous Chapoutier tasting, we moved next door to their dining room for lunch and what a lunch it would be. The first course was a scallop and crab terrine with a chive sauce accompanied by a salad. By itself, the terrine was fabulous, but it was served with one of the greatest white wines in the world—Chapoutier's 2007 Ermitage Blanc De L'Orée. The wine's richness and depth perfectly matched the richness of the

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Jim Bryant and Greg Pearson at Chapoutier.

terrines. One of my fondest memories of the entire trip was sitting across from my long-term friend Kent Delucenay, who, although a huge fan of Rhône wines, had never had this wine! What a smile he made when he tasted this elixir.

De L'Orée is made from 60- to 70-year-old Marsanne grapes. The color is golden yellow. The nose is very intense, ripe with hints of toffee and lemon with overtones of white flowers, e.g. acacia and hawthorn. In the mouth, the feeling is big, long, and rich with the full body evidencing ripe fruits and spices and floral notes, as well as significant minerality. This wine is certainly capable of long aging of 30-50 or more years at minimum.

The main course was duck with tapenade, crûque ardechoise, and fried mushrooms. What a symphony of flavors, all of which were made even better with Emeritage Rouge "Les Greffieux". The old world flavors of earth, olive, artichoke, and fungus demanded a great wine such as this.

Ermitage Rouge, "Les Greffieux" is made from 100 percent Syrah grapes vinified in cement vats and matured for 14-18 months in 1/3 new casks

and 2/3 in second- and third-year casks. The wine is garnet red in color with a nose of black fruits and pepper. In the mouth, it is profound with powerful tannins. It will improve for decades and last 4-5 decades at a minimum. The vineyard is at the foot of Hermitage Hill and is made up of glacial alluvial deposits of shingles and clay.

The cheese course was goat cheese papillote with honey. Although a life-long fan of great Chateauneuf-du-Pape, I probably would not have chosen this wine with this course. To say the least, it was a learning experience.

The 2008 Chateauneuf-du-Pape Rouge "Barbe Rac" is made from Grenache grapes from 90-year-old vines. The wine is vinified in concrete tanks and matured in large vats for 16 months. The color is intense garnet with a nose of red fruits (strawberry), herbs, spices, and chocolate. The mouth feel is full, fleshy and round, with great density and length. It will improve with age and last for 2-3 decades at least. The complexity of the wine worked perfectly in reigning in the edges of the chevre and the honey.



Lee and Kent Delucenay enjoy De L'Orée at Chapoutier.

The dessert course was a caramel au beurre salé moelleux. The intense luscious flavors of the salted sweet caramel with butter paired perfectly with the 2003 Ermitage Blanc "Vin de Paille". This wine is made from Marsanne grapes, which are dried for two months on straw mats before pressing. The process produces a deep, golden-yellow wine with the nose of candied fruits and honey. It is well-balanced and very concentrated with great length. It can age well for five decades.

All good things must end, but the tastings followed by the great lunch at Maison M. Chapoutier ended one of the best gourmet/epicurean experiences of our lives. Kudos to Michel Chapoutier and his team for this, and most of all, for consistently making some of the world's greatest wines. À votre santé! 🍷



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSANO

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