



The wines tasted at Château de Beaucaze.



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

Barrington resident Jim Bryant is pursuing his passion and love of wine as an international wine consultant. This follows a 30-year career in senior financial and general management positions at two Fortune 100 companies. He is the owner of James R. Bryant L.L.C.; contact him at profwino@comcast.net.

More Rhône Adventure Highlights

FOLLOWING THE DOMAINE DU PEGAÛ, I wrestled with how to follow such an opening experience on a perfect day in one of my favorite wine regions in the world. Foreseeing this challenge, I had arranged a visit to my favorite wine producer, not only from this appellation, but perhaps worldwide. Although I had visited Château de Beaucaze previously, I asked my friend Dan Klieman, vice president of sales for On Premise for Heritage Wine Cellars, to help ensure a memorable tasting. And so he did! We arrived after a short drive from Domaine du Pegau. We toured the beautiful grounds in awe and admiration of the beauty, as well as in appre-

ciation of the apparent ancient vines surrounding the château on all sides.

We then had a comprehensive tour of the cellars which need to be seen live to be appreciated. They are very extensive and are filled with the best vintages going back many decades. In fact, on a prior visit, I asked our guide as to what was the most amazing wine he had experienced during his 10 years at the winery. He said that one of the Perrin brothers (owners) had brought up a bottle of the Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc Vieilles Vignes (V.V.) from five decades previous and it drank like a newly made wine.

We went to the tasting room and started our great adventure. The first wine served was the Coudelet Rouge 2012. The wine is generally considered as one of the best Côtes du Rhône. It is separated from the Beaucaze Châteauneuf du Pape vineyards by a narrow dirt road, but because it is not contained within the Châteauneuf du Pape appellation, it is sold for 40 percent or so of the Châteauneuf du Pape. It also contains only four of the permitted varieties but what a deal! The Coudelet was followed by the 2012 Beaucaze



A view of the vines and galets (large round stones).

Blanc Châteauneuf du Pape. What a wine. It is a blend of Rousanne and Marsanne and is rich and complex. Our good fortune continued as we were able to taste one of my favorite wines in the world, the 2013 Châteauneuf du Pape Beaucaze Blanc V.V. This wine or the 1996 version was, according to Robert Parker, his favorite wine of all time. Vinified 100 percent from 100-year-old Rousanne wine grapes, this is a mesmerizing wine. It is very viscous, rich, and sophisticated. Until two years ago, almost all of the very limited production went to the world's greatest restaurants. Now it is occasionally possible to find a bottle for \$150 or so and I advise you to do so. This has become my favorite



Dining at l'Oustalet in Gigondas.

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Dick and Barb Smith overlooking the Château de Beaucastel vineyards after lunch.

wine with my favorite fish recipe, halibut served with a Beurre Blanc sauce (on the Internet from a Crystal Symphony recipe).

We finished this great tasting with two vintages of the Beaucastel Châteauneuf du Pape, the 2012 and the 1998. The wines were similar because of the blend of the 13 permitted varieties, but the 1998 demonstrated the ability of the wine to age and the 2012 showed with its exuberant youthful power. In my opinion, this complex wine pairs best with rack of lamb, venison, or steak au poivre. My closest wine friends consider this to be “my” wine and I agree. The only better wine is the extremely rare Châteauneuf du Pape made only in exceptional years, the Hommage à Jacques Perrin. It, along with Domaine du Pegau’s du Capo, are perhaps the all-time Châteauneuf du Papes but both come at 4–5 multiples in price of the base wine (\$500 vs. \$100).

After purchasing 15 bottles of the rare Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc V.V., we went to the small village of Gigondas to dine for lunch at L’Oustalet, a fantastic restaurant owned by the Perrin family. We were very fortunate to have a perfect summer day so we could dine outside. Everything about this place was perfect. We sat at several long tables with splendid views of the village and some of the people fortunate to live or visit here. Our meal began with amuse bouches with Champagne and an appetizer followed by a large portion of Turbot with asparagus in a broth of morelles, pea tendrils, and févettes. The rich flavors were complex and perfectly paired with Yves Cuilleron’s “La Petite Côte” Blanc 2012 Condrieu (Viognier).

For the main course we had roasted lamb served with several vegetables au jus with summer truffles. We decided to substitute for the Châteauneuf du Pape I had chosen, a great 2011 Gigondas, “Domaine des Bosquets” in light of the great time we were having in Gigondas. What a great wine made essentially from Grenache and it paired perfectly with the lamb.



A cellar at Château de Beaucastel.

For dessert we had a strawberry macaroon and a green menthol sorbet. To accompany this excellent and refreshing course, we had the Domaine Durban 2011 Muscat de Beaunes de Venise, a light dessert wine from nearby which paired perfectly.

Although we hated to leave this restaurant and village, all good things must come to an end. After a brief stroll to the bus, we boarded and headed for our last wine tasting of the day at Domaine de La Janasse. It was a traditional degustation, standing around wine barrels with a great atmosphere for the event. We had three whites, a Côtes du Rhône and one IGP (indication géographique protégée; IGP wine is wine with a stated geographical origin but made to less strict specifications than appella-

tion contrôlée wines) as well as a Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc, all from 2013. All were very good examples of wines from this area. There were five red wines and two Côtes du Rhône all 2013, followed by the Châteauneuf du Pape tradition and finally by the Châteauneuf du Pape Vieilles Vignes 2012. The Châteauneuf du Papes were the highlight for me, especially the excellent V.V. Excellent now, it will reward extended cellaring.

We had a short trip back to the château to clean up, exercise, and rest for the evening meal at a one star guide Michelin restaurant Couteaux et Fourchettes. We ate outside and had a wonderful meal starting with Fois Gras duo with pineapple chutney. This was paired with a Côtes du Rhône Villages Cairanne Blanc from Domaine de la Présidente “Galifay” 2012. The fish course was Breton sea bass, and zucchini flowers stuffed with vegetables served with the juice of sweet peppers. This very delicate dish paired well with a Vacqueyras Blanc Domaine le Sang des Cailloux “Un Sang Blanc” 2013. The main course was a Filet of Bull, with green asparagus, roasted potatoes, and au jus reduction sauce. This course paired very well with the Gigondas Rouge, Château St. Cosme “Traditon” 2013.

Our cheese course was an assortment produced by Josiane Déal, as well as fresh chèvre from Barroux. With these we drank the Rasteau Rouge Domaine de la Sourmade “Confiance” 2011. Although this wine paired well, we also tried my favorite wine from the region, Rasteau Rouge Jerome Bressy, “Gourt de Mautens” 2009 which was fantastic. Finally came a selection of desserts inspired by the chef. These included cream of chocolate, nougat ice cream, praline pnade confiance pastries, fresh strawberries with balsamic vinegar, and cherries with absinthe. To accompany the desserts we enjoyed the Muscat Beaumes de Venise from Domaine des Bernadins 2014. After this action-packed day and this meal, you can imagine the silence on the bus on the return ride.

A Votre Santé! U



The courtyard of Château de Beaucastel.