

Domaine de la Charbonnière

THE RHONE REPORT by Jeb Dunnuck
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Current vintages hitting the shelves...

2008

A cooler, more difficult vintage, 2008 might be doomed to live in obscurity more due to coming after 2007 than due to the quality of the wines. While I wasn't able to taste many reds (there were some promising barrel samples, Barroche and Giraud both have seriously good '08s), the big news here is the quality of the whites! The cooler temperatures and resulting acidities are just what the doctor ordered and wine after wine showed amazing freshness paired with rich, pure fruit. Availability for these wines in the United States continues to be minuscule and what does show up is absurdly priced. But it seems to be the chicken and egg dilemma with importers and retailers not offering these wines due to a perceived lack of interest and consumers not buying them because they know nothing about them. These are leaving the domains at very reasonable prices and are perfect summer wines that are extremely versatile on the dinner and picnic table.

2007

"2007 is bad for business" – David Sabon, Clos du Mont Olivet

I almost laughed when I heard this. It wasn't until he lamented about customers tasting their '07s and then refusing to purchase any other vintage that it made sense. He even went as far as comparing the sweet fruit in the wines to drugs. While certainly an extreme example, there's a lot of truth to what he said and when tasting through older releases at almost any domaine, the sweetness, purity and freshness present in the '07s make everything else seem a little less glamorous.

There's no doubt the vintage has seen serious hype but after tasting through a large number of them, I'm convinced that most of it is justified. The wines offer up sweet fruit, amazing purity and seamless personalities. Even the inexpensive Cotes du Rhône possess a sweetness and texture that's hard to find in other vintages.

Weather wise, the vintage saw flowering occur in early May with a relatively rainy first part of the growing season. From late June up until the harvest, the weather was extremely dry and saw relatively cool temperatures. According to the weather station in Carpentras, this was the driest vintage in the last twenty years with only 35mm of rain registered between June 16th and the 15th of September. The average daily high temperature recorded in Orange, France from May 1st through Oct 1st was 80.3 degree Fahrenheit (26.83 Celsius). Compare this to 83.3 in 2006 (very hot July but cooler Aug/Sep), 81.5 in 2005 and 81.4 degrees in 2004 (2003 saw an average in the high 80's).

2006

This vintage produced excellent wines that in some cases equaled what was made in 2005 and 2007. The wines show more classic profiles (that seem even more classic when compared to 2007) with quality fruit, impressive concentration and fresh acids. Don't underestimate these wines. Due to the demand for the '07s, these are being sold at blowout prices. Readers who like more classic Chateauneufs with less ripeness will most likely prefer this vintage to the more hyped '07s and while the wines can be enjoyed early in their life, a good number of them have the structure and fruit to age beautifully. The growing season wasn't as hot or dry as both 2003 and 2005 but had a very hot early season with both June and July seeing almost 2003 temperatures. August saw a return to cooler temperatures and September saw early rains that forced the producers to wait for the vineyards to dry out prior to harvest.

Domaine de la Charbonnière

2008 Domaine de la Charbonnière Châteauneuf-du-Pape Blanc \$45

A stunning Rhone white, the 2008 Domaine de la Charbonnière Châteauneuf-du-Pape Blanc is a blend of 40% Roussanne, 40% Grenache blanc and 20% Clairette that has 30% seeing new barrels. Very crisp and mineral laced, this has pure peach, white flowers and barrique aromatics, medium body, beautiful balance and a long, textured finish. **(93 pts.)**

2007 Domaine de la Charbonnière Vacqueyras \$25

Perfumed and spicy, the 2007 Domaine de la Charbonnière Vacqueyras shows earthy garrigue, spice and incense notes that are wrapped around a mineral and fruit driven core. With air, this picks up an almost chocolatey richness. The palate is medium bodied, balanced and long with a smooth, elegant character. This should drink well for 8 to 10 years. **(91 pts.)**

2007 Domaine de la Charbonnière Châteauneuf-du-Pape \$30

A blend of 70% Grenache with the remainder an even split of Syrah and Mourvèdre, the 2007 Domaine de la Charbonnière Châteauneuf-du-Pape is a silky, elegant wine that displays pure, earthy, mineral laced fruit, violets, incense and dark chocolate nuances. These lead into a medium bodied, balanced and long palate. **(91 pts.)**

2007 Domaine de la Charbonnière Châteauneuf-du-Pape Cuvée Mourre des Perdrix \$45

Big and the most fruit driven of their '07s, the Domaine de la Charbonnière Châteauneuf-du-Pape Cuvée Mourre des Perdrix shows a spicy, crushed berry, purple fruit and violet driven bouquet to go along with a medium to full bodied palate. While ripe, this still possesses an overall elegant, smooth and balanced feel. Some fine grained tannins creep in on the finish and this shouldn't have any problem evolving for 10 to 12 years. **(92 pts.)**

2007 Domaine de la Charbonnière Châteauneuf-du-Pape Cuvée Vieilles Vignes \$45

My favorite wine from this estate, the 2007 Domaine de la Charbonnière Châteauneuf-du-Pape Cuvée Vieilles Vignes possesses beautiful, deep blackberry and raspberry fruit aromas that are intermixed with a meaty, seriously mineral and stone driven profile. Subtle garrigue and incense aromas show up with air and the wine has a traditional, deep, concentrated personality. Medium to full bodied, the palate has fantastic texture, solid structure and balance, and a long, clean finish. **(94+ pts.)**

2007 Domaine de la Charbonnière Châteauneuf-du-Pape Cuvée Spéciale Les Hautes Brusquières \$45

The 2007 Domaine de la Charbonnière Châteauneuf-du-Pape Cuvée Spéciale Les Hautes Brusquières has smoky, meaty dark fruit aromas that are intermixed with grilled herbs, minerals and subtle dark chocolate notes. These carry into the medium to full bodied palate and the wine is balanced, clean, textured and long. **(93 pts.)**

2006 Domaine de la Charbonnière Châteauneuf-du-Pape Cuvée Mourre des Perdrix \$45

Similar to the '07, the 2006 Domaine de la Charbonnière Châteauneuf-du-Pape Cuvée Mourre des Perdrix show big, upfront and fruit driven aromatics of blackberry, cassis, graphite, spice, chocolate and violets that carry over onto the palate. Medium to full bodied, the wine shows considerable finesse and purity, a streamlined, silky texture, ripe fruit and a long finish. This is an outstanding wine to drink over the coming 10 to 12 years. **(90 pts.)**