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## Guigal And Their Iconic La La Wines

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## Love the La La's

**F**or our cover story in this issue, Kristen Bieler, senior editor and lead taster on the wines of France's Rhône Valley, visited Philippe Guigal and his family at their winery and labyrinth of underground cellars in Ampuis.

Philippe is the son of Marcel and grandson of Etienne Guigal, the namesake of family-owned wine business E. Guigal. While the Guigals own estates throughout the Rhône Valley, including in Châteauneuf-du-Pape and Tavel, and also source grapes for their popular Côtes du Rhône, the family is deeply rooted in the Northern Rhône appellation of Côte-Rôtie.

It is in Côte-Rôtie that Etienne first set his sights on La Mouline, a steep, terraced vineyard of old Syrah vines. Coupled with the family's subsequent single-vineyard cuvées of La Landonne and La Turque, the three Guigal bottles pictured on our cover are together known as the "La La" wines and are among the most coveted trophy wines from the Rhône. The 2019 cuvées, the current vintage release, achieved two 96-point scores and a 97 in recent *Wine Spectator* blind tastings, once again affirming their reputation for excellence and collectability.

In contrast to these lavish wines, which retail for around \$700 each, Bieler found the hardworking Guigal family to be humble about their accomplishments. "What I find as impressive as their success is their reputation throughout France. Friends, competitors and neighbors not only admire and respect them, but feel a genuine fondness for the Guigal family. Their integrity and humility are second to none."

Indeed, the producers of the Rhône are collectively indebted to the Guigals for laboring to raise the prestige of the region across many decades. In tasting nearly 650 wines for our annual Rhône Valley report (beginning on page 46), Bieler found a wide range of quality across the 2021 vintage, which was fraught with challenges, including spring frost, rain and cool weather. She rates the overall vintage 87 in the North and 88 in the South.

A vintage like this requires selectivity in buying, but bright spots do exist among winemakers who declassified fruit to bolster their lesser wines or practiced highly selective sorting. The best wines show elegance, and optimism remains for many of the top producers who have yet to release their 2021s.

**T**he 2021 vintage delivered challenges of a different nature in Washington state, where senior editor and lead taster Tim Fish chronicles the hottest growing season on record. However, his initial tastings are encouraging, with a projected vintage rating of 90–93 and a number of vibrant Rhône-style red blends and Syrahs topping the list.

Beginning on page 80, Fish profiles Yakima native and screen actor Kyle MacLachlan, who is also a hands-on wine producer.



His Washington label, Pursued By Bear, has earned the admiration of fellow winemakers and consistent scores of 90 points or higher in *Wine Spectator's* blind tastings.

Finally, I'd like to direct your attention to an exciting update from Ireland and the world of whiskey. The current renaissance taking place in Ireland has resulted in scores of new and innovative distilleries. At the same time, veteran producers like Bushmills and Jameson are upping the ante with luxury whiskeys aged in excess of 20, 30 and even 40 years. Jonny McCormick, contributing editor and senior taster for our sibling magazine *Whisky Advocate*, has rounded up some of the superpremium pours that may change your perception of this spirit.

I hope you enjoy this issue and share it with your friends.

Marvin R. Shanken  
Editor and Publisher



# THE ENDURING GREATNESS OF Guigal

With a new “La La” cuvée and an expanding foothold in the Southern Rhône, Côte-Rôtie’s most important family writes its next chapter

BY KRISTEN BIELER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY THILO WEIMAR







Philippe Guigal in the historic, old-vine La Mouline vineyard, the first of the family's "La La" sites for single-vineyard Syrah, debuting in 1966.



**T**he story of Guigal begins with La Mouline, a small plot of ancient vines that cling to the steep slopes of Côte-Rôtie in the Northern Rhône. Wine lovers recognize the name as one of the most cultish, cherished wines in the world—it’s the original of Guigal’s trio of icon wines, followed later by La Landonne and La Turque (together referred to as the “La La” cuvées).

Long before La Mouline fetched more than \$500 a bottle upon release, and even many decades before its 1966 debut vintage, which kick-started Côte-Rôtie’s revival, this parcel of vines captured the imagination of a 14-year-old Etienne Guigal. It was the 1920s and he was working as a migrant farm laborer, hired to pick apricots nearby, when he first set eyes upon the gnarled old Syrah vines held in place by Roman-built terraces. At the time, Côte-Rôtie’s vineyards had been largely abandoned—they were considered too difficult to farm and there was no market for the wines in a war-ravaged France.

“Etienne was bored with apricots—he was fascinated by the hill-sides and the vines,” says Philippe Guigal, Etienne’s grandson, who today is at the helm of Famille Guigal. “Locals would say that the vines in La Mouline made better wines, so it became his dream to one day own that vineyard.”

With a tenacity that turns out to run in the family, Etienne worked tirelessly for decades, and by 1946 he’d saved enough money to start his own domaine, E. Guigal. Two decades later, in 1966, he and his son, Marcel, finally made good on his childhood vow to purchase the 1-hectare La Mouline plot on the Côte Blonde hillside of Côte-Rôtie. “We are a family of workaholics,” Philippe confesses. “My grandfather made wine for 67 vintages, and even two hours before his death in 1988 he was still tasting in the cellars.”

The rebirth of Côte-Rôtie and its ascendance to the pantheon of the world’s most rarefied wines can be credited largely to Etienne, Marcel and Philippe Guigal. Today they own 10% of Côte-Rôtie’s vineyards and their empire has expanded well beyond those borders, with estates throughout the Northern and Southern Rhône. The Guigals have also built a thriving négociant business, buying grapes and young wines from a network of growers. In recent years, growth has only accelerated, with the 2017 purchase of Châteauneuf-du-Pape’s Château Nalys and Château d’Aqueria in Tavel in 2022. All together, the Guigal family produces close to









10 million bottles a year, about 3% of all Rhône wine.

"When I became winemaker in 1997, we were at 2 million bottles; we owned just 9 hectares of land and now we have 250 hectares," Philippe shares, adding that he's careful not to boast of the company's exponential expansion under his leadership. Years ago, Philippe's father bragged to his own father, Etienne, when he reached the 1 million bottle mark. Etienne's response: "I grew the company from zero to 17,000 bottles. No one can beat that rate of growth."

**G**UIGAL'S TOP CUVÉES are opulent, commanding, hedonistic and showy, but the family is the opposite of all these things. Success and succession have done remarkably little to change the family's culture and connection to their humble origins. "We are people that always have a little bit of earth on the bottom of our shoes; we are very close to our land and our soils," Philippe explains.

Watching Philippe trek up the vertiginous terraced vines of the La Reynarde vineyard—the fourth and yet-to-be-released La La cuvée in the family—it's easy to see why locals had wanted to ditch vineyard work for factory jobs and fruit trees. Côte-Rôtie's slopes are pitched at more than 45 degrees in many places and vines appear to defy gravity. Navigating the zig-zag pattern of stone walls in the La Moulaine vineyard feels like climbing an upright corn maze; La Reynarde's rows are much more orderly by comparison. But it's all still extreme viticulture, requiring difficult and time-consuming hand labor.

Philippe explains how the La Reynarde site had lain fallow for a century before he decided to plant vines here in honor of the birth of his twin boys, Etienne and Charles, in 2010. Flanked on both sides by vineyard parcels owned by the Jamet brothers, La Reynarde offers stunning views of the Rhône river below and the small town of Ampuis, the Guigals' spiritual and literal home.

The new La La vineyard serves another strategic purpose, Philippe shares: to engage the fourth generation in the family business. It's a trick he stole from his forebears. "My father and grandfather were very smart—they planted La Landonne when I was born, and always told me that it was my vineyard, so as a child I always wanted to walk there and felt a deep sense of pride for that place."

## THE ICONIC LA LA TRIO BECOMES A QUARTET



These single-vineyard cuvées put Côte Rôtie on the map for wine collectors decades ago. Comparing and contrasting each wine's profile and personality has become a sport for many wine lovers. Stay tuned, fans: In 2026, the inaugural release of a fourth La La will join the lineup. ▶



## La Mouline

**THE BACKSTORY:** A tribute to the first generation, it's the original "La La" and the single-vineyard wine that changed the course for Côte-Rôtie with the debut 1966 vintage.

**THE VINEYARD:** The oldest vineyard site in Côte-Rôtie, a 1-hectare parcel on the Côte Blonde with vines dating to 1893.

**THE WINE:** Considered the most finessed and elegant of the three La La cuvées, thanks to Blonde's lighter soils and the addition of 11% Viognier. Spends 42 months in new oak. Philippe describes it as the "most Burgundian" of the trio.

**IN ART:** Philippe compares La Mouline to *The Birth of Venus* by Sandro Botticelli, which shows the goddess of love and beauty arriving on land, illuminated with divine light and showered with roses. "This classical painting illustrates the subtle balance of La Mouline, its delicacy and elegance," says Philippe.



## La Landonne

**THE BACKSTORY:** Planted in 1975 by Marcel to commemorate the birth of Philippe; the first vintage was 1978. "Because it was planted for my birth, I've always seen it as my cuvée," says Philippe.

**THE VINEYARD:** In the La Landonne *lieu-dit*, on the Côte Brune and planted to 100% Syrah in iron-rich soils. With southeasterly exposure and 45 degree incline, grape skins grow thicker.

**THE WINE:** Brooding, massive and firmly structured, the most powerful of the La Las, with incredible longevity in the cellar. The only one of the three to be fermented with 100% whole cluster, and this extra tannin structure explains the power and weight. It's also the only La La named for the specific *lieu-dit* it is in (the others are cuvée names).

**IN ART:** Philippe compares La Landonne to *Girl with a Pearl Earring* by Johannes Vermeer, a simple portrayal of beauty featuring a mysterious girl before a dark background with a direct gaze. "Classical illustration of a local character, we are seduced by the simplicity and the power that this painting provides. It reminds me of the famous sentence: an iron fist in a velvet glove. So typical of La Landonne," says Philippe.

## La Turque

**THE BACKSTORY:** The third La La, this launched with the 1985 vintage and honors the "genius of the second generation."

**THE VINEYARD:** Acquired with the purchase of Vidal Fleury in the early 1980s and planted to 93% Syrah and 7% Viognier. *Terroir* is Côte Brune, but it's very close to the Côte Blonde side, which imparts elegance.

**THE WINE:** In between La Mouline and La Landonne in terms of power, with pronounced spicy character. Powerful, with deeper color and richer profile than La Mouline, and velvety tannins.

**IN ART:** Philippe compares La Turque to *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* by Hokusai, an intense yet simple illustration of a tsunami in motion, with a sharp foam tip. "The representation of Hokusai is not as classical as it seems, expressing the energy, the dynamic, of La Turque," says Philippe.



## La Reynarde

**THE BACKSTORY:** The fourth La La to join the family, planted for the birth of Philippe and Eve's twin sons, Charles and Etienne, in 2010. Named after the stream that runs between *lieux-dits* Côte Brune and Côte Blonde.

**THE VINEYARD:** Parcel of 100% Syrah located on the Côte Brune side in the *lieu-dit* of Fongeaunt, nestled between plots owned by Jean Paul Jamet and Jean-Luc Jamet.

**THE WINE:** Philippe wanted to wait until a "great vintage" to bottle the first release. The debut 2022 will be released in 2026. Forty months in new *barriques*. "For me, it's between La Turque and La Landonne in style," says Philippe. Silky, polished tannins and a lot of dark, smoky power and density.

**IN ART:** Philippe compares La Reynarde to *The Kiss* by Gustav Klimt. A hymn to love, it's a dreamlike scene filigreed with gold of an abstract couple, evoking passion and tenderness. "The harmony of this famous painting highlights the echo between the couple, balancing density, power and extreme refinement in La Reynarde," says Philippe.





Philippe and Marcel sample in the cellar



Twin brothers Etienne (left) and Charles with their dad, Philippe, at La Reynarde vineyard

Collectors won't be able to get their hands on a bottle of La Reynarde until 2026, when the inaugural 2022 vintage will be released. Barrel tastings in Guigal's cellar already reveal a wine with extraordinary concentration and depth—highly unusual for vines so young. “Terroir expresses very quickly from this site, even in young vines,” Philippe explains. “La Reynarde has shown me that vine age is important, but not totally essential, particularly in such special *terroirs*.” Like the other La La cuvées, La Reynarde will possess nearly unmatched aging potential, he is confident; longevity is a Guigal hallmark.

Of course, achieving character and complexity at this apex comes at a cost: In addition to being expensive to farm and harvest (Philippe estimates labor costs are three to six times higher here than on flatlands), the soils are unstable and terraced stone walls are required to keep vines from eroding and washing down the slope in a rainstorm.

“We employ a team of 18 people year-round to rebuild all of our walls—it is a crazy, never-ending job because they are always crumbling in places,” he explains. “We spend 700,000 euros a year on wall construction—it's a cost that no other region has.” A living monument to the Côte-Rôtie, the walls are a patchwork of history, with original parts built by the Romans, Art Deco-style sections dating to the 1920s, and some stretches just completed. “This is difficult viticulture. But if you don't do it, you will lose your vineyard. If you don't invest in walls, you are not investing in your future.”

It's a ROI calculation that makes sense with the prices Côte-Rôtie cuvées fetch today, but must have seemed like insanity in Etienne's early days when he was trying to revive the hillside viticulture and





Clockwise from top: Vidal Fleury harvest 1935; Marcel and his mother, Marcella, 1956; Marcel and Etienne, 1977.

one-man locomotive in an appellation that stalled for decades. While he busily replanted vines and acquired new hillside plots, three-quarters of Côte-Rôtie's vineyards remained deserted. The price of orchard fruit continued to command more than twice the price of wine grapes. Yet he remained convinced of the region's greatness, observing firsthand how grapes from the slopes yielded more intensely flavored, concentrated wines than those harvested on the valley floor. Literally translated as "roasted slope," Côte-Rôtie benefits from maximum sun exposure and wind protection, which allows Syrah to ripen in an unusually cool climate.

When Etienne went blind in the early 1960s, his only child, Marcel, left school to take over in the cellar. He was just 17 years old. "This was the worst time for the appellation," Marcel, now 80, recalls. "Everyone said Côte-Rôtie was finished." While Hermitage, the other famous slope in Northern Rhône, was enjoying increasing international celebrity, the wines of Côte-Rôtie remained largely invisible.

Changing this equation would require massive quality upgrades, Marcel knew. "I



the market for the wines was nonexistent. But hardship and hard work were not foreign for Etienne. Working since the age of eight, he never attended a single day of school. "My grandfather told me stories of tending cattle barefoot in the snow, because they had no money for shoes," Philippe recalls.

Etienne landed a job working as a cellar hand at Vidal Fleury in 1924 when he was just 14 and eventually climbed the ranks to cellar master. He married Marcella, a maid at the nearby historic Renaissance manor of Château d'Ampuis, and was later forced to take a break from making wine to fight in WWII on the Tunisian front.

After launching E. Guigal upon his return, Etienne became a

wanted to continue with my father's vision, but the few producers here were not focused on quality. We would have to work very hard to change the reputation."

**I F THERE WAS AN INFLECTION POINT** for the region, it was Marcel's decision to bottle the grapes from La Mouline as a single-vineyard wine, after an unusually long *élevage* in new oak. This would become Côte-Rôtie's first trophy wine—though certainly not overnight.

"In the 1960s we were selling Côtes du Rhône for \$1.99 a bottle and Côte-Rôtie for \$4.95," recalls Guigal's first U.S. importer, Fred





Château d'Ampuis

Ek. “I tasted the first vintage of La Mouline in barrel and it was very good, but we had to charge \$12.95 a bottle for it—and that was expensive, so it was a hard sell in the U.S.” Ek had discovered the Guigal family by accident, on a detour making his way from Burgundy to Châteauneuf-du-Pape, and they developed a lifelong friendship. “The Guigals are a very special family, very remarkable people—incredibly loyal and humble. The secret to their success? Hard work. The pressure on their business is extraordinary, but they have not changed in character since they began.”

Their style of wine has also remained unaltered. “I found old books from the beginning of the last century that described how Côte-Rôtie’s best wines were aged for a very long time in new oak barrels,” Marcel recalls. “I knew that long *élevage* was very important for these wines.” The debut 1966 vintage of La Mouline spent 40 months in oak barrels—long by today’s standards, but decidedly radical back then. This is exactly how the wine is made today.

Meanwhile, Etienne’s intuitive understanding of *terroir* remained his superpower, despite his lack of eyesight. While Marcel was busy upping quality in the cellar, Etienne was hunting for prime *terroir*. He tracked down the multiple owners of a steep, abandoned vineyard in the La Landonne *lieu-dit* on the iron-rich soils of Côte Brune, purchasing small parcels bit by bit in order to connect a 1.8 hectare plot. Marcel and Etienne planted its vines in 1975, to celebrate the birth of Philippe, and the first vintage of their La Landonne was 1978. The *lieu-dit* has become one of the most famous in the Rhône, and Guigal’s vineyard has many famous neighbors today, including Delas, Gerin and Rostaing, who all make single-vineyard La Landonne cuvées. In 1985, La Turque was born,

“The first vintage of La Mouline [1966] was very good. But we had to charge \$12.95 for it. That was expensive.” —Fred Ek, importer

completing the La La trilogy. By then the world was taking notice and the tectonic shift for the region was in motion.

With interest in Côte-Rôtie growing, Marcel knew the appellation had to expand in size in order to accommodate the new vigneron. In the 1980s, he persuaded the head of the INAO (the French organization that regulates wine regions) to allow Côte-Rôtie to grow by 5% each year—French law limits growth to 1% annually. “Growing five times the national average—this is how we made the appellation,” Marcel says. “You need a young generation, it was essential for the Côte-Rôtie. And I was very pushy.”

The Guigal family’s advocacy for the region is not lost on their neighbors across the Rhône. “Their influence on the Northern Rhône is second to none. I have so much admiration,” says Marc Perrin of Château de Beaucastel. “They care only about the long term. They never compromise on quality and cultivate their own style—they are one of the greatest families in the world of wine.”

Success funded additional acquisitions. In 1984 the Guigals bought Vidal-Fleury, where Etienne had started working when he was 14, and in 1995 they acquired Château d’Ampuis where Etienne’s wife, Marcelle, had once labored as a maid. Today, this is the personal home of Philippe and his family, as well as the name



## THE MUSEUM OF LE CAVEAU DU CHÂTEAU

"To fully understand Côte Rôtie you have to understand the past," says Philippe. "And you appreciate wine more when you understand how much effort it takes to produce it." In 2019 the Guigals opened their wine museum in Ampuis, which introduces visitors to the history of vineyards and winemaking in the Rhône dating back to Roman times. The collection was built over 60 years by the Guigal family and contains historical tools and memorabilia connected to winemaking—worth a stop for any visitor in the region. Post-tour tastings are a must: Walk-ins can sample around 30 wines from across the Guigal range in the Tasting Room, and themed tastings for small groups with top cuvées can be arranged in advance. | 6 Route de la Roche, Ampuis



of an important cuvée. They tripled their vineyard holdings in 2001 with the purchase of Domaine Jean-Louis Grippat and Domaine de Vallouit, which enabled them to craft their first Hermitage in 2001: the Ex-Voto white and red, produced only in exceptional years. In 2006 they purchased a Côte-Rôtie neighbor, Domaine de Bonserine. Guigal owns in almost every Northern Rhône appellation. "All that is missing is Cornas," Philippe says, adding, "We will buy in Cornas."

**CÔTE-RÔTIE** is often described as the most Burgundian of the Rhône *crus*. While Guigal's wines—muscular, powerful, richly structured—sit decidedly outside the Burgundy paradigm, the approach to viticulture is analogous. "People talk about the many distinct *lieux-dits* in Burgundy, but the diversity of *lieux-dits* in Côte-Rôtie is unmatched," says Philippe. Whereas in Burgundy the differences in *terroir* have been cataloged over centuries by Cistercian monks, the specificity and uniqueness of Côte-Rôtie's 77 *lieux-dits* are still being discovered.

Syrah is the red grape of all Northern Rhône appellations, from Hermitage to St.-Joseph to Cornas, but it expresses itself differently in Côte-Rôtie, showcasing the grape's signature blackberry, raspberry and violet matched with a distinctive, earthy savoriness marked by wet leaves, smoked bacon fat and a wild gamy character. It's the only Northern Rhône appellation that permits a small

amount of the white Viognier grape to be co-fermented with Syrah, which explains the exotic floral note that many wines possess.

Yet Guigal's wines occupy their own stylistic sphere, on the far right of the powerhouse spectrum, their individuality emblazoned by their long *élevage* in barrel, carried out in the name of longevity. Barrel aging is so important to their wines that the Guigals built their own cooperage at Château d'Ampuis in 2003 to have full control over the entire barrel-making process.

"Our vision for long *élevage* is what we believe gives our wines the ability to age for many decades—but it also means they need a lot of time before they are ready to drink," says Philippe. While many producers have evolved their winemaking to craft wines that are more accessible upon release, Guigal has never wavered. "New oak is not something we seek out, but what we feel works with the balance of our wine."

This oak signature melds into the framework of the wine with time in bottle, becoming less pronounced. La Landonne, which spends three and a half years in new oak, can require more than a decade in bottle to reveal its extraordinary potential. Guigal's top cuvées are not for the impatient collector.

What was once a modern approach now places Guigal firmly in the traditionalist camp. In many fine wine regions, there is a shift away from excessive new oak, which detractors feel obscures the imprint of *terroir*. "It's true that some people find the oak



intrusive, but I do think they manage to preserve the character of the place,” says Patrick Will, vice president at Vintus, who has known the Guigal family for decades. “Marcel is very reflective and thoughtful about the use of oak. It’s important for him that oak not get in the way of origin—Côte-Rôtie should taste like Côte-Rôtie. As they age, you see how the *élevage* actually elevates the character of the wine.”

Regardless of one’s palate, it’s impossible to deny the rare beauty of an aged La La. Philippe opens a bottle of the 1978 La Landonne, its first vintage, which now has spent four and a half decades in bottle, for the family’s mid-day meal. Not exactly a lunch wine, it somehow pairs perfectly with his mother’s black truffle scrambled eggs and *cervelas*, a smoked sausage unique to Lyon. “What I love about this wine is that it’s not over yet,” Philippe observes. “There is still so much life and freshness; the wine continues.”

**T**HAT PHILIPPE should be so immune to succumbing to the whims of winemaking fashion surprises no one who knows him—his chief hobbies outside of work are competitive ballroom dancing and antiques restoration. Still, when he joined the family business in 1997, having studied biochemistry at University of Lyon and enology in Burgundy, followed by a masters degree where he traveled the world for two years making wine in 17 countries, he returned with a desire to mix things up in the cellar. “I came back with a lot of new ideas,” he shares. “But over time I learned that what was done here was very solid.”

Marcel encouraged Philippe’s experimentation. Introduce concrete tanks in place of stainless steel? Sure, try it, son. Why aren’t we doing *délestage* (the rack-and-return process of draining red wine from the skins and pumping it back to soften tannins and extract flavor)? I don’t think it’s the best for Syrah, Marcel would say, but invited Philippe to see for himself through trial. “Each time I would return and report to my dad that he was right, the way he had long been working was better for these wines.”

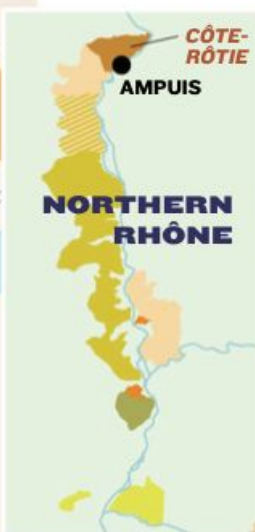
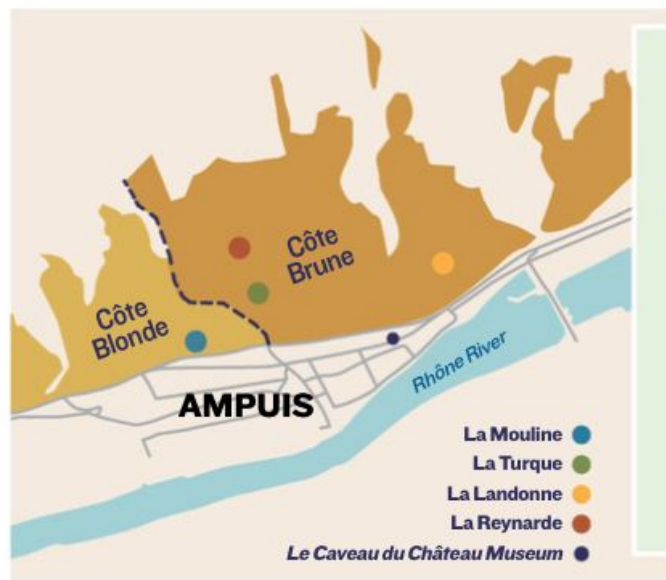
There is a remarkable closeness between father and son. “We are



Head winemaker Jacques Desvernois

extremely different but we are extremely close—and we have the same vision for the wines. Our palates are totally aligned, we don’t even need to speak when we taste together,” Philippe describes. He

## GUIGAL IN CÔTE-RÔTIE



### CÔTE BLONDE VS. CÔTE BRUNE

Côte-Rôtie’s historic center is famously divided into two sides. **Côte Blonde** in the south and **Côte Brune** in the north, which yield very different styles of Syrah. Expect more elegance, delicacy and silkiness in wines from granite and gneiss soils in Blonde (often with the addition of Viognier), while the iron-rich, schist vineyards in Brune give brawnier, fuller-bodied and more muscular reds. Legend has it that these two adjacent hillsides were named by the 16th-century owner of Château d’Ampuis, who had two daughters, one blond and one brunette. Guigal created its “Brune et Blonde” cuvée with an aim to harness the best of both *terroirs* in a single blend.





Marcel in the winery office in Ampuis

grew up in the winery, as a young child following his grandfather from barrel to barrel in the family's serpentine cellar under Ampuis, pipette in hand. When he got older, he joined his father and grandfather in the cellar for their 90-minute tasting each day.

In the main office connected to the family home, there is a triangular desk with one corner for Marcel, one for his wife, Bernadette, (she joined the business when they married in 1973) and one for Philippe. He met his wife, Eve, in Corsica where she was born and raised, and she has become a commanding presence at the estate, juggling everything from French sales to marketing to winery tours. With 64 vintages under his belt, Marcel still proudly beats everyone to the office, seated at his desk by 5 a.m. every day.

**WHILE THE GUIGALS' TOP CUVÉES** give them prestige status, it's their success with Côtes du Rhône which has made the business a powerhouse. "Côtes du Rhône is 50% of what we do—5 million bottles in most years," says Philippe. "I truly love working on the Côtes du Rhône, there is so much fantastic opportunity and the challenge is keeping the quality high with volume. Consistency is everything for us."

Every year, they audition around 150 different growers across the

## SELECTED RECENT RELEASES FROM E. GUIGAL

WineSpectator.com members can access complete reviews using the online Wine Ratings search.

SCORE	WINE	PRICE
97	Côte-Rôtie La Landonne 2019	\$700
97	Ermitage Ex Voto 2019	\$650
97	Ermitage White Ex Voto 2019	\$350
96	Côte-Rôtie La Mouline 2019	\$700
96	Côte-Rôtie La Turque 2019	\$700
95	Côte-Rôtie Château d'Ampuis 2019	\$210
94	Condrieu La Doriane 2022	\$150
94	Hermitage 2020	\$118
94	St.-Joseph Vignes de l'Hospice 2020	\$155
93	Côte-Rôtie Brune et Blonde 2020	\$105
92	Châteauneuf-du-Pape 2018	\$62
92	Crozes-Hermitage 2020	\$35
92	Gigondas 2020	\$42
89	Côtes du Rhône 2020	\$19
88	Côtes du Rhône Rosé 2022	\$19
88	Tavel 2022	\$25

“[The Guigal family’s] influence on the Northern Rhône is second to none. I have so much admiration.” —Marc Perrin of Château de Beaucastel



Southern Rhône, tasting an extraordinary amount of young wine samples for weeks on end in order to find the best sources to build their Côtes du Rhône, often selecting just 1.5% of what they taste, and getting the wines in house as fast as possible in order to control the *élevage*. “My grandfather had a strange habit, he would taste the Côtes du Rhône in old glass mustard jars. They are terrible

glasses for tasting wine! When people asked why, he would say, ‘If a wine tastes good in a mustard glass, then it’s a really good wine.’”

In challenging years, they keep quality high by selecting only the best and simply making less wine—production fell by 80% in the difficult 2021 vintage, for example. “It’s mind-blowing how much work it is to build this wine from scratch,” says Vintus’ Will. By comparison, many *négociants* simply purchase large tanks of finished wines and bottle directly. “That they have the same standards here that they do for their top *cuvées* is testament to their integrity as producers, it’s emblematic of their whole approach,” says Will. In 2018 they hired the immensely talented Jacques Desvernois, formerly of Jaboulet, as head winemaker.

Quality hinges on access to the best growers, relationships they have spent decades building. “The Guigals have great respect for their sources and always paid them well,” explains Ek. “Most other companies would work on credit with long terms for paying the growers, but the Guigals pay when they purchase the wine, which is extremely unusual.”

**AFTER YEARS OF HUNTING** for the ideal property in the Southern Rhône, the Guigals finally found their foothold with the 2017 purchase of the historic yet under-achieving Château Nalys in Châteauneuf-du-Pape. Ralph Garcin was installed to craft the wines, which already shine brightly, and a massive construction project is currently underway to transform the winery into an architectural showpiece. Next, they snatched

“I am very happy the Guigal family has landed in Châteauneuf and Lirac. They will be a steam engine for these appellations.”

—Pierre Fabre of Mont-Redon

up another Southern Rhône gem with the purchase of Château d’Aqueria with holdings in the *crus* of Tavel and Lirac. “I am very happy that the Guigal family has landed in Châteauneuf and Lirac,” says Pierre Fabre, the fourth generation to helm Châteauneuf’s Château Mont-Redon. “They have an immense sense of work and effort and they will be a steam engine for these appellations, especially

Lirac which is clearly underrated.”

They are expanding in the opposite direction as well, pioneering cooler vineyard sites in St.-Cyr-sur-le Rhône north of Ampuis, which was long considered above the limit where Syrah could sufficiently ripen. “Two decades ago you could not ripen grapes here, but with the warming climate, which we all see, it’s impossible to work the same way as the past, we need to be thinking of the best sites for the future,” Philippe says.

Like his father and grandfather, Philippe seems unable to resist the siren call of the next great vineyard. He’s also motivated, he admits, by an ever-so-slight chip on his shoulder. “We are in a dynamic region but I’m convinced we still have a lot of things to prove. People speak of Bordeaux and Burgundy with a reverence you don’t hear about when they speak of the Rhône. Rhône doesn’t have the same magic—not yet.”

All the ingredients are there, he believes, with icon wines from Condrieu, Côte-Rôtie, Châteauneuf and Hermitage. “And we have great Côtes du Rhône at affordable prices—this is something that is disappearing in Burgundy.”

Compared to top Burgundy, of course, even the La La wines are affordable luxuries. Elite wines from more revered regions are often purchased for investment or for status, rather than pure enjoyment in the glass. Wine lovers seek out Guigal wines to collect and to drink foremost because they are delicious and reflect the soul of a region and an incredibly passionate family. The world is a better place for wines like this. □



Rendering of future Château Nalys site





Marcel and his wife, Bernadette, flank Philippe's wife, Eve, Philippe, and their sons Etienne (left) and Charles at Château d'Ampuis.