

Wine Spectator Insider

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Marvin R. Shanken, *Editor and Publisher*

FIRST LOOK AT OUR EDITORS' MOST EXCITING NEW WINES

Marcel and Philippe Guigal made headlines earlier this year when they released the prices for their three 2003 single-vineyard Côte-Rôties, collectively known as the “La Las.” The three tiny-production cuvées are the highest priced wines to ever come from the Rhône Valley. This edition of the *Wine Spectator Insider* features James Molesworth’s first look at these rare and highly sought-after wines, and they’ve earned some of their highest scores ever. Molesworth reports that the Guigals took what their vineyards offered in the wild 2003 vintage, which was about 35 percent of a normal year’s yield. Due to the greatly reduced crop, the wines show enormous concentration and power, along with the vintage’s exotic, heavily roasted and nearly overripe character. Yet the Guigals managed to keep their wines balanced and genuinely structured. But while their *terroir* and individual profiles are still intact—most clearly in the La Mouline—they are very extreme in style.

And from a region of France where pricey wines are more the norm, Bruce Sanderson reviews 10 vintage Champagnes, the best of which, the 1996 Krug Brut, matches the aforementioned La Mouline for top score in this issue. You’ll find it among the Hot Wines, on page 4.

For values, Kim Marcus looks to southwest France, more specifically, the wines of Alain Brumont. Four outstanding wines priced less than \$30 are included among Marcus’ reviews in this week’s *Insider*, including one 90-point wine priced at just \$12.

France / Champagne

Krug

Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne Clos du Mesnil 1996
96 points | \$800 | 817 cases made | Sparkling

Offers fine depth and complexity, showing aromas of coffee, mushroom and candied citrus. This is laserlike on the palate, focusing its citrus, honey and mineral flavors and coralling them to a long finish. Best from 2010 through 2030.—*B.S.*

Ruinart

Brut Rosé Champagne Dom Ruinart 1996
93 points | \$400 | NA cases made | Sparkling

A fresh, elegant rosé, with just a hint of strawberry and cherry flavors, while the citrus and smoke notes dominate. Very refined and well-integrated, with a firm aftertaste of cherry and spice. Best from 2010 through 2030.—*B.S.*

J. de Telmont

Brut Champagne O.R 1735 1997
93 points | \$145 | 75 cases imported | Sparkling

Excellent harmony and a refined mousse set the stage for nut and mushroom aromas, whole-grain bread and apple flavors. This is intense yet stylish, with a lingering finish. Drink now through 2020.—*B.S.*

J. de Telmont

Brut Champagne Consécration 1997
91 points | \$110 | 110 cases imported | Sparkling

An intense bubbly, showing apple, honey, citrus and grilled nut aromas and flavors. Very firm and racy, with the potential for a long evolution. Has fine complexity. Best from 2008 through 2020.—*B.S.*

Moët & Chandon

Brut Champagne Cuvée Dom Pérignon 1999

90 points | \$150 | NA cases made | Sparkling

There's a high-toned, minty graphite accent to the aroma, with a citric edge on the palate. The structure is overlaid with lemon and dough notes. This is tight and crisp on the finish, so break out the sole or shellfish, or wait a few years. Best from 2008 through 2020.—*B.S.*

J. de Telmont

Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne Cuvée Grand Couronnement 1998

90 points | \$97 | 140 cases imported | Sparkling

This is rich yet firm, creating a backdrop for the lemon, apple, ginger and mineral notes. Still tight and slightly hard on the finish, so enjoy this with food now or give it some time on the cork. Best from 2009 through 2020.—*B.S.*

Perrier-Jouët

Brut Champagne Fleur de Champagne Belle Epoque 1999

89 points | \$125 | 16,000 cases imported | Sparkling

A toasty style, with a nice range of bass notes to offset the citrus and ginger. Yet this is crisp and compact, with a chalky sensation on the finish. Drink now through 2015.—*B.S.*

Perrier-Jouët

Brut Rosé Champagne Fleur de Champagne Belle Epoque 2002

89 points | \$200 | 4,000 cases imported | Sparkling

Strawberry, candied cherry and citrus notes are allied to a vibrant structure in this rich rosé, which is nicely balanced with a lingering finish. Drink now through 2015.—*B.S.*

J. de Telmont

Brut Champagne Grand Vintage 2001

89 points | \$61 | 400 cases imported | Sparkling

Offers flint and chalk aromas and flavors, with flowers and a hint of chamomile tea. Nicely balanced and generous for the vintage, with a firm, mineral finish. Best from 2008 through 2018.—*B.S.*

France / Northern Rhône

E. Guigal

Ermitage Ex Voto 2003

97 points | \$490 | NA cases made | Red

Exotic, with a gorgeous, mocha-infused fig aroma and rich, flashy flavors of spice, blackberry confiture and licorice. Additional notes of spice cake, incense and loam fill out the finish. This is loaded with structure, but the tannins are silky. Drink now through 2027.—*J.M.*

M. Chapoutier

Ermitage L'Ermite 2004

94 points | \$250 | 85 cases imported | Red

Shows a mix of dark bramble notes and a zesty wild berry profile, with dark cocoa, tar and graphite in the background. The muscular edge on the finish is atypical for the vintage. Best from 2008 through 2017.—*J.M.*

M. Chapoutier

Ermitage Le Méal 2004

93 points | \$202 | 85 cases imported | Red

Has fine purity for the vintage, with silky red cherry, raspberry and plum fruit flavors intertwined with mineral, light cocoa and floral notes. Gains weight through the lengthy finish. Best from 2008 through 2017.—*J.M.*

M. Chapoutier

Ermitage Le Pavillon 2004

93 points | \$225 | 85 cases imported | Red

Shows a supertight focus, with black currant, plum and blackberry fruit harnessed by supple tannins, dark cocoa and a buried minerality. The long finish really fleshes out nicely in the glass. Best from 2008 through 2017.—*J.M.*

M. Chapoutier

Ermitage Les Greffieux 2004

93 points | \$NA | 55 cases made | Red

Juicy, this is almost high-toned, showing bright floral notes backed by red plum and red currant fruit, with red licorice and a tangy minerality. The long, taut finish needs to unwind a bit, but this has superb precision for the vintage. Not imported into the U.S. Best from 2008 through 2017.—*J.M.*

Alain Voge

Cornas Les Vieilles Vignes 2004

93 points | \$50 | 1,415 cases made | Red

Really zesty, with lots of red currant and bramble notes bouncing ahead of dark olive and sage flavors. The structure is briary on the finish, with an encore of red fruit and mouthwatering acidity. Drink now through 2017.—*J.M.*

M. Chapoutier

St.-Joseph Les Granits 2004

91 points | \$51 | 80 cases imported | Red

Nice lacy tannins support bright mineral, red cherry and grilled herb flavors. The long finish lets the minerality stretch out. This should put on some weight in the cellar. Drink now through 2013.—*J.M.*

M. Chapoutier

Crozes-Ermitage Les Varonniers 2004

90 points | \$50 | 100 cases imported | Red

Nice black cherry, red plum, tobacco and mineral notes run through this focused, medium-weight Syrah. The elegant, mineral finish has nice length. Drink now through 2011.—*J.M.*

France / Southwest

Domaine Bru-Baché

Jurançon L'Eminence 2003

93 points | \$77 | NA cases made | Dessert

An intensely honeyed, rich and seductive sweetie, with a concentrated core of ripe pear, apple and butterscotch flavors, which are joined by smoke and spice notes on the cream- and meringue-filled finish. Drink now through 2030.—*K.M.*

Montus Bouscassé

Madiran La Tyre 2003

92 points | \$90 | 500 cases made | Red

Luscious, with extracted dark cherry, raspberry and red plum flavors and plenty of cassis. Ripe and powerful, this coats the mouth with seductive, silky tannins. Chocolate and mocha notes fill the long finish. Drink now through 2015.—*K.M.*

Domaine Bellegarde

Jurançon Sec La Pierre Blanche 2004

91 points | \$28 | 100 cases imported | White

Unctuously rich and ripe, with concentrated ripe pear, honey and almond flavors, with candied apricot and plenty of spicy notes. The long, structured finish features peaches and cream. Drink now through 2016.—*K.M.*

Château Lagrézette

Cahors Cuvée Dame Honneurs Cru D'Exception 2003

91 points | \$70 | 450 cases imported | Red

Very suave and spicy, with a toasty aroma and loads of dark plum, blackberry and cassis flavors. The luscious finish echoes the fruit and features lots of meat, dark chocolate and stone. Impressive for the vintage. Malbec with Merlot. Drink now through 2015.—*K.M.*

Montus Bouscassé

Madiran Château Montus 2003

91 points | \$23 | 13,500 cases made | Red

A ripe, heady aroma, with concentrated flavors of dark plum, cassis, mocha and chocolate. There are plenty of tannins, which are balanced out by an ironclad structure and a long, long, spice- and smoke-filled finish. Best from 2008 through 2015.—*K.M.*

Domaine Bellegarde

Jurançon Cuvée Thibault 2004

90 points | \$26/500ml | 350 cases imported | Dessert

A rich, dessert-style white, with luscious ripe pear, cream, honey and butter notes, with plenty of almond and spice notes that linger on the long, infused finish. Drink now through 2020.—*K.M.*

Domaine Bru-Baché

Jurançon Sec 2004

90 points | \$12 | NA cases made | White

Deep golden in color, with a honeyed aroma and ripe, vibrant flavors of golden delicious apple, ripe pear, smoke and spice. The long, lush finish features vanilla and mocha, with hints of chocolate. Distinctive and powerful. Best from 2009 through 2015.—*K.M.*

Montus Bouscassé

Madiran Château Montus Cuvée Prestige 2003

90 points | \$62 | 2,000 cases made | Red

Ripe, concentrated flavors of blackberry, dark chocolate and dark cherry fill this robust red from southwest France. The powerfully tannic yet balanced finish shows licorice, spice and cream. A fine match for grilled flank steak. Drink now through 2014.—*K.M.*

Montus Bouscassé

Madiran Château Bouscassé Vieilles Vignes 2003

89 points | \$37 | 2,000 cases made | Red

Ripe and rich-tasting, with dense flavors of dark cherry, bittersweet chocolate, smoke and spice. There's also a distinctive minty touch, with meaty notes on the tannic finish. Drink now through 2015.—*K.M.*

HOT WINES

These are the most exciting discoveries from our editors' most recent tastings, published exclusively in Wine Spectator Insider. They are high-scoring, low-production wines from around the world that may be difficult to find, but are worth seeking out.

Krug

Brut Champagne 1996

99 points | \$250 | 10,000 cases made | Sparkling

A powerful, majestic Champagne. Deep and compelling, with aromas of whole-grain toast, coconut and dried citrus that draw you in. Lean and racy on the palate, with a creaminess that's yet to be integrated. A classic 1996, with ripe, exotic aromas and a steely structure. This is still a baby, with the long, resonant finish confirming its potential. Best from 2009 through 2040. *From France.*—B.S.

E. Guigal

Côte-Rôtie La Mouline 2003

99 points | \$490 | 230 cases made | Red

Racy and defined, with a torrent of pure red currant and raspberry ganache that pours out from the core, around which a mouthwatering mineral note swirls. Has a terrific spine, with iron and spice notes mingling with the endless stream of raspberry fruit. Purer than the La Landonne and the La Turque in 2003, without the vintage's extra roasted power. A really stunning display of fruit and precision. Drink now through 2030. *From France.*—J.M.

E. Guigal

Côte-Rôtie La Landonne 2003

98 points | \$490 | 500 cases made | Red

Plush and smoky, with loads of flesh carrying black olive, fig, tobacco, currant and game notes. The broad, powerful finish shows a very roasted quality, with dark, smoky bacon and fig notes and an exotic hint of spice. This is a huge wine that only shows bits of what it will eventually offer. Best from 2010 through 2030. *From France.*—J.M.

E. Guigal

Côte-Rôtie La Turque 2003

98 points | \$490 | 210 cases made | Red

Incredibly dense and concentrated, with a polished layer of mocha-infused toast pushed by blackberry, black currant, black tea and dark olive flavors. This has tremendous power, but is also really suave, with sweet, exotic fruit notes that linger endlessly on the long, fleshy finish. Leaves an almost dehydrated impression. Best from 2010 through 2030. *From France.*—J.M.

Wine Spectator's Tastings

Wine Spectator reviews more than 12,000 wines each year; our senior editors comprise the most experienced staff of professional wine tasters of any publication in the world. Each editor specializes in the wines of specific regions; their initials identify the taster of each wine reviewed.

We always taste wines blind, in our offices in San Francisco, Napa, New York and Tuscany, and in the vineyard regions of Europe. This is your guarantee that a wine's reputation or price does not influence its score. We score wines using our 100-point scale, explained below.

James Laube Senior editor, Napa

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1983. Tasting beat: California

Kim Marcus Managing editor, New York

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1988. Tasting beat: Austria, Greece, Portugal, southern France

Wine Spectator's 100-Point Scale

95-100	Classic
90-94	Outstanding
85-89	Very good
80-84	Good
75-79	Mediocre
50-74	Not recommended

Thomas Matthews Executive editor, New York

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1988. Tasting beat: New York, Spain

James Molesworth Senior editor, New York

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1997. Tasting beat: Loire Valley, Rhône Valley, South Africa, South America

Bruce Sanderson Tasting director, New York

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1993. Tasting beat: Alsace, Burgundy, Champagne, Germany

Harvey Steiman Editor at large, San Francisco

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1983. Tasting beat: Australia, New Zealand, Oregon, Washington

James Suckling European bureau chief, Italy

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1981. Tasting beat: Bordeaux, Italy, Port

Tasting staff: **Jo Cooke** (Veneto), **Daniel Sogg** (New Zealand)