

THE SOUTHERN RHÔNE

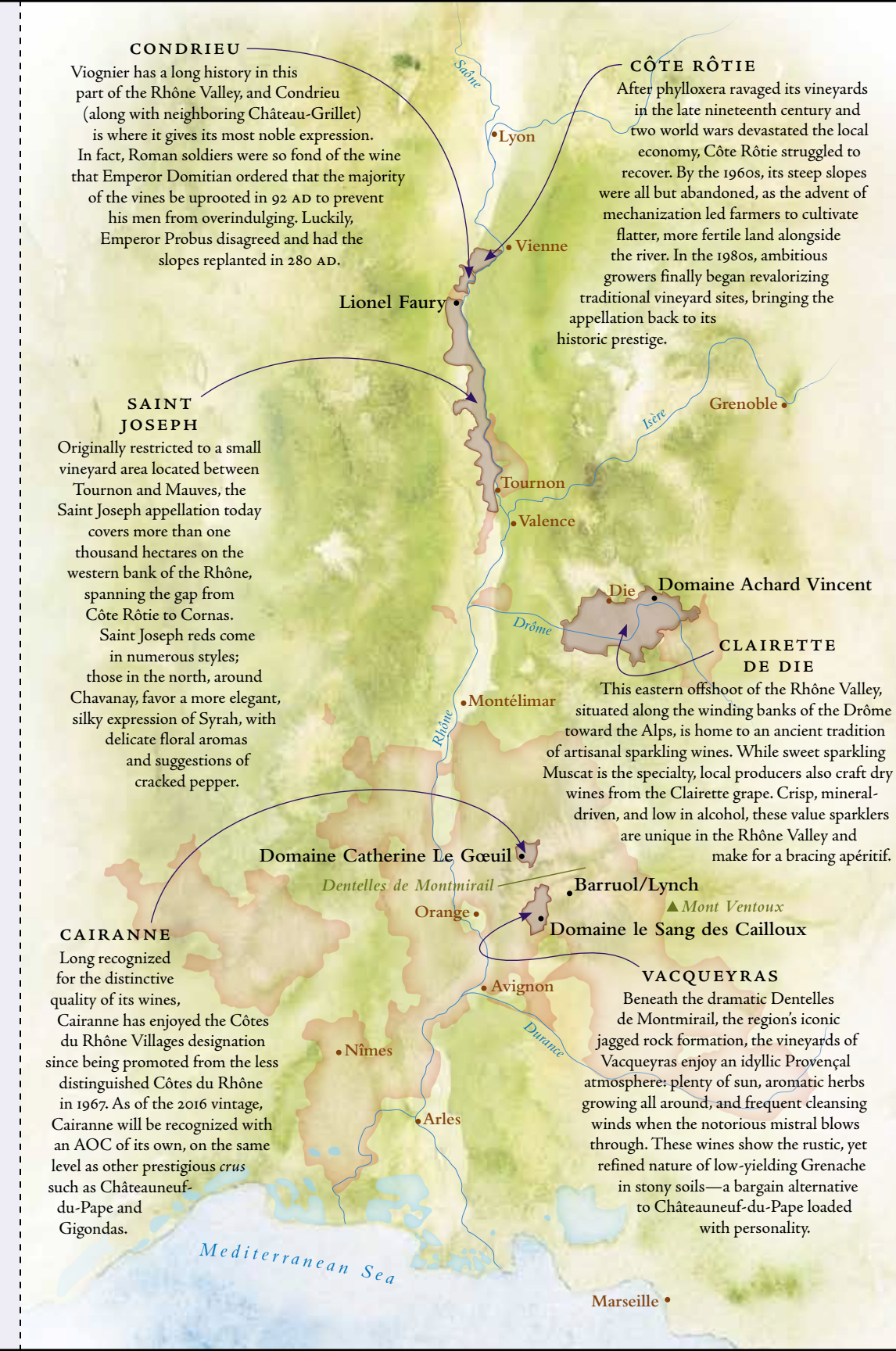
The landscape of the southern Rhône is much vaster than that of the northern Rhône, as the valley widens and its steep riverbanks yield to expansive views of gentle hillsides and broad plateaus. Though considered a distinct wine region from Provence to the south, the southern Rhône is a part of Provence in every other sense: its sunny, mistral-swept skies could come straight from a watercolor painting; olive, cypress, and plane trees decorate the land; and the people speak with a soulful accent not heard anywhere else.

This habitat is ideal for the vine, and viticulture has thrived here since Roman times. The arrival of the popes in the fourteenth century saw plantings increase significantly around modern-day Châteauneuf-du-Pape, where Pope John XXII had his castle built, and the celebrated local wine eventually became one of France's first to earn *appellation d'origine contrôlée* (AOC) status in 1936.

This is Grenache country, but due to the tradition of blending, a number of additional varieties are found: Mourvèdre, Syrah, Cinsault, Carignan, and a handful of others typically complement the noble Grenache. Most wine is red: bold, generous, ripe, spicy, and often a touch rustic, reflective of long hours of sunshine and the fragrance of aromatic *garrigue*. The rare whites—made from a host of grapes including Grenache Blanc, Roussanne, Clairette, and Bourboulenc—can also reach great heights, displaying an opulent texture with characteristic notes of stone fruit, flowers, hay, and honey.

Terroir is the key to fine wines in any color, and the best sites of the southern Rhône feature arid, stony soils of alluvial nature, such as the famous *galets roulés* of Châteauneuf, or limestone and clay deposits, like those beneath the stunning cliffs of the Dentelles de Montmirail or at the foot of majestic Mont Ventoux.

The southern Rhône is home to countless delicious country quaffers offering tremendous everyday value as well as more powerful, structured wines that take years to reveal their deep complexity. In either case, you can expect a hearty dollop of Mediterranean sun and a jovial accent singing a southern tune with every glass you pour.



CONDRIEU

Viognier has a long history in this part of the Rhône Valley, and Condrieu (along with neighboring Château-Grillet) is where it gives its most noble expression. In fact, Roman soldiers were so fond of the wine that Emperor Domitian ordered that the majority of the vines be uprooted in 92 AD to prevent his men from overindulging. Luckily, Emperor Probus disagreed and had the slopes replanted in 280 AD.

CÔTE RÔTIE

After phylloxera ravaged its vineyards in the late nineteenth century and two world wars devastated the local economy, Côte Rôtie struggled to recover. By the 1960s, its steep slopes were all but abandoned, as the advent of mechanization led farmers to cultivate flatter, more fertile land alongside the river. In the 1980s, ambitious growers finally began revalorizing traditional vineyard sites, bringing the appellation back to its historic prestige.

SAINT JOSEPH

Originally restricted to a small vineyard area located between Tournon and Mauves, the Saint Joseph appellation today covers more than one thousand hectares on the western bank of the Rhône, spanning the gap from Côte Rôtie to Cornas.

Saint Joseph reds come in numerous styles; those in the north, around Chavanay, favor a more elegant, silky expression of Syrah, with delicate floral aromas and suggestions of cracked pepper.

Domaine Achard Vincent

CLAIRETTE DE DIE

This eastern offshoot of the Rhône Valley, situated along the winding banks of the Drôme toward the Alps, is home to an ancient tradition of artisanal sparkling wines. While sweet sparkling Muscat is the specialty, local producers also craft dry wines from the Clairette grape. Crisp, mineral-driven, and low in alcohol, these value sparklers are unique in the Rhône Valley and make for a bracing apéritif.

Domaine Catherine Le Gœuil

Dentelles de Montmirail

CAIRANNE

Long recognized for the distinctive quality of its wines, Cairanne has enjoyed the Côtes du Rhône Villages designation since being promoted from the less distinguished Côtes du Rhône in 1967. As of the 2016 vintage, Cairanne will be recognized with an AOC of its own, on the same level as other prestigious *crus* such as Châteauneuf-du-Pape and Gigondas.

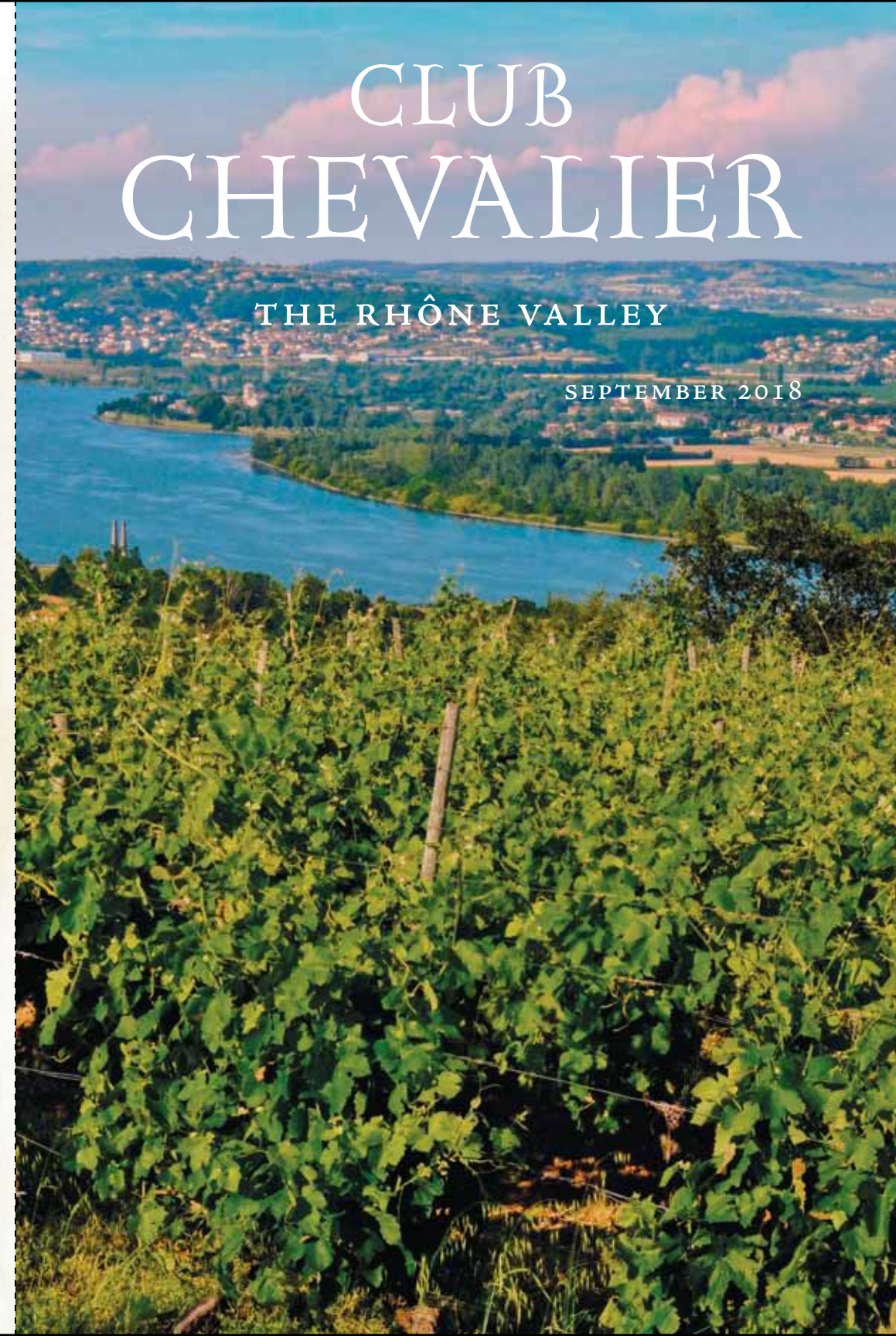
VACQUEYRAS

Beneath the dramatic Dentelles de Montmirail, the vineyards of Vacqueyras enjoy an idyllic Provençal atmosphere: plenty of sun, aromatic herbs growing all around, and frequent cleansing winds when the notorious mistral blows through. These wines show the rustic, yet refined nature of low-yielding Grenache in stony soils—a bargain alternative to Châteauneuf-du-Pape loaded with personality.

CLUB CHEVALIER

THE RHÔNE VALLEY

SEPTEMBER 2018



THE NORTHERN RHÔNE

About the wines of the northern Rhône, Kermit wrote in *Adventures on the Wine Route*, “The best combine a reminder of the sunny Mediterranean with the more self-conscious, intellectual appeal of the great Burgundies farther north, which is not a bad combination.” As with the wines of Provence, Burgundy, and Beaujolais, Kermit was introduced to this region by Richard Olney, an influential American ex-pat known for his fine taste in French cuisine and wine.

Within the Rhône Valley, much differentiates the north from the south. In the northern sector, between Vienne and Valence, the climate is more continental than in the Mediterranean-influenced south, with colder and rainier winters. The valley is narrow, and vines are planted on steep hillside sites along the riverbanks, which were first terraced during Roman times. The appellations are thus geographically confined and significantly smaller than in the south:

Cornas has fewer than 300 acres planted to vine, and Hermitage around 345. The area planted is minute when compared to Gigondas (3,000+ acres) and Châteauneuf-du-Pape (nearly 8,000 acres). Overall, only 5 percent of Rhône wine comes from the north.

Soils are predominantly composed of poor, rocky, well-draining granite, with the exception of schist in Côte Rôtie and occasional pockets of sedimentary and alluvial origin. Syrah reigns: 95 percent of the region's wine is red, ranging from the delicate, ethereal, and perfumed to bold, powerful wines of grandiose structure. Syrah reaches aromatic nirvana in the northern Rhône with explosive, captivating suggestions of black pepper, violets, black fruit, smoke, and meat. Whites, made from Viognier, Marsanne, and Roussanne, feature a luxurious texture, voluptuous body, and a typical nose of orchard fruit, wildflowers, and honey.

While scarce, the top wines from the northern Rhône rank among France's most remarkably fine, long-lived, and hauntingly aromatic.



NV CLAIRETTE DE DIE *BRUT*
◆ DOMAINE ACHARD VINCENT \$25



A NARROW *ROUTE NATIONALE* follows the meandering Drôme River east from where it flows into the Rhône, flanked on either side by hills and eventually small mountains—a precursor to the mighty Alpine peaks found not too far away. The local specialty here is Clairette de Die, a somewhat sweet Muscat crafted via

the *méthode Dioise ancestrale*, which supposedly outdates the production of all other sparkling wines. This *brut* bottling, however, is a dry wine made exclusively from Clairette, crafted by the *méthode traditionnelle* that is also used in Champagne. With refreshing citrus and a hint of honeysuckle on the nose followed by a delicious-with-anything palate, this minerally sparkler ensures palate stimulation with every sip.

2016 CONDRIEU ◆ LIONEL FAURY \$59

FOR MANY YEARS CONDRIEU WAS CONSIDERED one of the premier white wines of France. It is the birthplace of the beguiling Viognier grape and the home of its greatest expression. Lately, the appellation has suffered from global warming, coupled with a shift toward more new wood and a general preference for riper, more obvious wines. The result has been an increasingly one-dimensional wine in Condrieu—decadent and unctuous but lacking in delineation, balance, and refreshment. The humble and authentic Condrieu produced by Lionel Faury in Chavanay turns this unfortunate trend completely on its head. Vintage after vintage, he produces highly perfumed, well-balanced, utterly delicious Condrieu with its elegance intact—rounded, freshening, deep, fine, and exotic.



2015 CÔTES DU RHÔNE VILLAGES CAIRANNE
◆ DOMAINE CATHERINE LE GŒUIL \$28

RHÔNE VALLEY, old-vine Grenache at the top of a plateau, riverbed stones . . . If you think that sounds like a recipe for success, you'd be correct. Stones aren't unique to Châteauneuf, by the way. They are also located in humble, off-the-beaten-path Cairanne, an often-overlooked appellation with superb *terroir*. Catherine Le Gœuil set up shop in Cairanne a little more than twenty years ago and hasn't looked back. During that time, she converted her vines to organic viticulture and honed her winemaking craft. The grapes are harvested by hand, fermentation is natural, and the wines are bottled without filtration. What ends up in your glass is greater than the sum of the parts: an inky, royal purple robe gives way to aromas of black licorice and Provençal olives. The palate has meatiness, with grain and texture—it sinks in and lingers, serving as a reminder that you've found a wine not simply of great value but of true quality from one of the village's best.

2016 VACQUEYRAS *ROUGE* "CUVÉE FLOURETO"
◆ DOMAINE LE SANG DES CAILLOUX \$34



DIP YOUR NOSE into a glass of Serge Férigoule's Vacqueyras: you'll find the liquid reincarnation of the stony *terroir* from which this red hails. *Garrigue*—wild thyme, rosemary, and, judging from the scent, some lavender—grows copiously around the vineyard, adding an almost smoky, resinous perfume to the wine, as if the baking summer sun had liberated its aromas and the mistral had swept them off

to flavor the grapes. Aged in large, neutral *foudres*, this wine has chewy tannins that are amazingly elegant, while it contains no shortage of depth and density for extensive bottle aging, if desired. Cuvée Floureto's mineral finish keeps things very fresh, providing a tension rarely evident in Grenache-based blends. It almost seems as though the wine has been filtered through stones—but don't worry, that's the only kind of filtration we would allow this Vacqueyras to endure.

2016 SAINT JOSEPH *ROUGE*
◆ LIONEL FAURY \$34



SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY MONKS in the region wrote about the wine from these hills as being "fresh and delicate," and, indeed, the Faurys have always accentuated Syrah's potential for making elegant wines of real finesse. Their Saint Joseph *rouge* in particular stands out as a thing of purity and grace. Vinifications are gentle, with about one third of the fruit going through whole-cluster fermentation for textural and aromatic lift. *Élevage* takes place in *foudres* and *demi-muids* to preserve the wine's inherent vitality and avoid any flavors not born from grape or *terroir*, and the wine undergoes neither fining nor filtration.

Suggestions of violets, black olive, blackberry, and peppery spices soar from the glass, and the wine graces the palate with a featherweight touch—that's the Faury signature. From its floral nose to the bright, supple finish, this Syrah is a perfect example of traditionally styled Saint Joseph.

2016 CÔTE RÔTIE "LA BOISSELÉE"
◆ BARRUOL/LYNCH \$80

LOUIS BARRUOL goes to great lengths to select favorable vineyard sites planted solely to Serine, an ancient clone of Syrah that fell out of favor due to its low yields but is known for its beguiling aromatics. The vinification and *élevage* also reflect this respect for tradition, with 100 percent whole-cluster fermentation and aging in neutral barrels followed by an unfinned, unfiltered bottling in a reverent nod to the past greats of the Roasted Slope.

La Boisselée is a blend of barrels Kermit selects each vintage in Louis's cellar. This 2016 marries the *lieux-dits* La Viaillère, Fongeant, Besset, Semons, Le Plomb, and Nève, offering a captivating overview of the appellation. You'll find all the dark, savory, exotic intensity that makes Côte Rôtie magical: lilies, smoke, graphite, leather, roasted spices . . . On the palate, this wine is ample, with a full, mouth-filling texture, and the tannins are smooth as silk. As good as La Boisselée is now, it will be glorious in ten years.



NV Clairette de Die Brut Domaine Achard Vincent DRÔME	Clairette	35-year-old vines (average) Limestone, marl, scree	Serve <i>cold</i> 46–52° F Do not decant	Orchard fruit, rainwater, honeysuckle Delicate, vivacious, mineral, bracing	Drink now
2016 Condrieu Lionel Faury NORTHERN RHÔNE	Viognier	Vines planted between 1976 and 2007 Granite	Serve <i>cold</i> 48–54° F Decant optional	Peach pit, flowers, apricot, lychee Voluptuous, round, exotic, classy	Drink now
2015 Côtes du Rhône Villages Cairanne Catherine Le Gœuil SOUTHERN RHÔNE	50% Grenache, 18% Syrah, 18% Mourvèdre, 7% Carignan, 7% Counoise	50-year-old vines Sandy <i>molasse</i> , limestone, clay	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant optional	Licorice, spicy <i>garrigue</i> , ripe blackberry Lush, generous, fleshy	Drink now through 2022
2016 Vacqueyras Rouge "Cuvée Floureto" Domaine le Sang des Cailloux SOUTHERN RHÔNE	70% Grenache, 20% Syrah, 10% Mourvèdre and Cinsault	35- to 40-year-old vines Clay, limestone, <i>galets roulés</i>	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant 1–2 hours	Leather, Provençal herbs, black cherry Chewy, stony, dense, focused	Drink now through 2035
2016 Saint Joseph Rouge Lionel Faury NORTHERN RHÔNE	Syrah	Vines planted between 1979 and 2007 Granite	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant optional	Violets, black olive, cracked pepper Supple, medium-bodied, with silky tannins	Drink now through 2022
2016 Côte Rôtie "La Boisselée" Barruol/Lynch NORTHERN RHÔNE	Syrah	30- to 50-year-old vines Schist	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant 1–2 hours	Graphite, eucalyptus, roasted spices, smoked meat Tightly knit, powerful, fine-grained	Drink now through 2035

cover: Lionel Faury's vines above the Rhône
inner panel: Côte Rôtie. Photo © Gail Skoff
far left top: Clairette vines. Photo © Achard Vincent
far left bottom: Faury's cellar. Photo © Lionel Faury

middle: Serge Férigoule of Domaine le Sang des Cailloux. Photo © Clark Z. Terry
near left: Faury's Saint Joseph vines. Photo © Gail Skoff