

CHEVALIER

SEPTEMBER 2021



L'AUTOROUTE DU SOLEIL

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Planning a tasting trip to France can be tricky. How do you decide on an itinerary when there are so many incredible wine regions from which to choose, scattered across all four corners of the country?

One possibility is to take the road traveled by countless French (and German, and Belgian . . .) vacationers each year: *l'Autoroute du Soleil*. This “Highway of Sunshine” is a north–south artery that links Paris and Marseille, infamous for its brutal traffic jams in the summer months when northerners pack up their swimsuits, beach chairs, floaties, children, and puppies on a quest for a tan, some seaside recreation, and a chance to eat frozen fish at one of Provence’s many coastal tourist traps.

What’s peculiar about this annual pilgrimage is that, unbeknownst to most of those on holiday chugging along the highway, this nearly five-hundred-mile-long thoroughfare traverses many of France’s great wine regions. In fact, from the air-conditioned comfort of your very own rental Citroën, you can catch a glimpse of the storied vineyards of Burgundy, Beaujolais, the Rhône Valley, and Provence simply by looking through your windshield!

A mere two hours southbound on the A6 from the capital’s chaotic cobbled streets, you’ll find a much



more bucolic scene: the sloping vineyards of Chablis, their gray, limestone-littered soils echoing the typically overcast skies above. Another hour and a half longer on the road, and the freeway drops down into the heart of the Côte d’Or: you have reached Beaune, a wine mecca surrounded by the most famous vineyards in Burgundy.

Roughly an hour’s drive later, the rolling hills of the Beaujolais become visible in the distance. While Valentin Montanet—who bottles under the La Sœur Cadette label—has his cellar in Vézelay, closer to Chablis, he sources fruit from Juliénas, providing the perfect opportunity to taste bright ruby, chilled Gamay in the cozy setting of a local bistro.



Past Lyon on what is now the A7, the autoroute offers a truly stunning sight: steep terraces dotted with densely packed, vertically trellised vines rising tall above a river, welcoming you to the incredible landscape that is the Northern Rhône.

Continuing the journey past Valence, something magical happens: the sky

opens up and sunshine flows in from all sides. The vegetation changes, as olive trees, cypresses, and sunflower fields signal that you have truly reached *Le Sud*. Eventually, vineyards appear on either side of the highway, and not just any vineyards: you are in the Southern Rhône, driving directly adjacent to the stony, *garrigue*-covered plateaus that produce Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

You have finally reached Provence. The sun is shining, the mistral is blowing, and the cicadas are chirping their hearts out. But just shy of Marseille, we veer eastward, toward Nice, merging onto the A50, which hugs the coastline. The Mediterranean comes into view at Cassis, and only twenty minutes later, you exit for the final destination of our road trip: Bandol, the home of Mourvèdre.

—Anthony Lynch

2019 PETIT CHABLIS ♦ ROLAND LAVANTUREUX \$29

THE SLEEPY VILLAGE OF CHABLIS, about midway between Beaune and Paris, possesses the cool continental climate and fossil-strewn limestone soils that imbue Chardonnay with unique traits not found even in other iterations from the vine's Burgundian homeland. Within the Chablis area, authorities have delimited the top sites: generally, these are sunny, south-facing slopes of Kimmeridgian marl, which give the most powerful and complex wines. Sites conducive to lighter, earlier-drinking styles, typically on the younger, harder Portlandian limestone, take the Petit Chablis designation. For the Lavantureux family, the line is not so clear: an imaginary boundary through the vines divides their Chablis from their Petit Chablis, meaning this humble bottling has the character of a more pedigreed appellation. "Petit" or not, this wine provides bracing refreshment while bearing the mark of its terroir: notes of lime, seashells, white flowers, and an energizing acidity for your apéritif or a shellfish feast.



2018 MARSANNAY ROUGE
"CLOS DU ROY"

♦ RÉGIS BOUVIER \$42

THE CLOS DU ROY has enjoyed a kingly reputation ever since the dukes of Burgundy, residing in nearby Dijon, sang, documented, and drank in its virtues. A gentle slope with rich clay and limestone soil and perfect exposition, it is one of Burgundy's better-kept secrets.

Bouvier fashions a red from his parcel here that is at once serious and gay, generous and firm, bold and elegant. This full-bodied wine has the stuffing and structure to stand up to wild game, along with the freshness and vitality to pair it with much lighter fare.

2018 JULIÉNAS ♦ LA SŒUR CADETTE \$34

VÉZELAY, A SMALL CHARDONNAY APPELLATION in northern Burgundy, has a marginal climate that can give growers serious headaches. The 2016 vintage epitomized these challenges, as a devastating frost in late April caused Valentin Montanet of La Sœur Cadette to lose 80% of his crop—truly catastrophic for a small-scale producer. With most of Burgundy ravaged by frost, Valentin looked to the south to purchase grapes in order to supplement what remained of his harvest. This decision also gave him a chance to vinify Beaujolais, an idea he had long entertained, and one that has brought him great joy since he launched the project.

Three vintages into his Beaujolais venture, Valentin has learned a few tricks about working with Gamay, and his latest release makes it hard to tell he hasn't been making Beaujolais his whole life. His 2018 Julié纳斯, sourced from an organically farmed vineyard on granite soil, is textbook *cru* Beaujolais: very aromatic with loads of fresh Gamay fruit, it flows over the palate with a juicy buoyancy that is simply hard to resist.



2019 CONDRIEU ♦ LIONEL FAURY \$64

THE VIOGNIER GRAPE has been cultivated on the granite terraces of Condrieu since at least Roman times, and likely long before, which makes it all the more incredible that it almost disappeared after World War II; production for the entire appellation dropped to as low as 2,500 bottles in the late 1960s, according to John Livingstone-Learmonth in *The Wines of the Northern Rhône*. Its revival has been hard fought, as the steep, terraced slopes here are painstakingly difficult to work, but the payoff for diligent growers is one of the world's most remarkable dry whites. Its ravishing perfume, luxurious body and texture, and unique abilities at table endow Condrieu with a special place in the connoisseur's cellar. The dry style, which preserves perfume and freshness along with an unctuous richness, remains rare, as few producers excel at striking this delicate balance. Lionel Faury has mastered the art, and he is now among the elite producers of this storied French white.



2018 CHÂTEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE “TÉLÉGRAMME”

◆ DOMAINE DU VIEUX TÉLÉGRAPHE \$56

HEAVY RAINS LATE IN THE 2002 GROWING SEASON, rare for the normally dry and hot southern Rhône, left many growers fearing their crop would be diluted by the water. Assessing the quality of the fruit throughout harvest and vinification made it clear to brothers Daniel and Frédéric Brunier of Domaine du Vieux Télégraphe that the vintage would give a much lighter wine, lacking the color, power, and concentration that had come to typify their Châteauneuf-du-Pape. They decided to create a second label, and so Télégramme was born. The wine saw instant success, as consumers relished its soft



tannins and utter drinkability. Télégramme became a staple of the Brunier portfolio, as they continued to produce it from the younger vines—about 80% Grenache—on the stony plateau of La Crau. The 2018 release, from another somewhat rainy year, offers a fresh and floral nose, an elegant, silky palate, and such perfect balance that it doesn't even need a food pairing.

2018 BANDOL ROUGE

◆ DOMAINE DE LA TOUR DU BON \$40

IN THE 1950S, TOUR DU BON was owned by a family originally from Champagne, and they baptized each vine planted on the estate with a splash of bubbly from Bouzy. Agnès Henry and her family arrived in 1968 and continued that kind of attentiveness, becoming pioneers in the region for organics, biodynamics, and natural winemaking. For this cuvée, Agnès takes Mourvèdre, the dominant grape locally—which she compares to a Spanish bull, with heavy feet anchored to the ground—and blends mainly with Grenache, which she sees as an airier counterpoint, to smooth out the bull's raw power. Years of care, trailblazing, and experience clearly show at first sip.





2019 Petit Chablis <i>Roland Lavantureux</i> BURGUNDY	Chardonnay	28-year-old vines Clay, Portlandian limestone	Serve <i>cold</i> 46–50° F Decant optional	Lime, oyster shell, white flowers, flint Lean, briny, crisp, zippy	Drink now
2018 Marsannay Rouge “Clos du Roy” <i>Régis Bouvier</i> BURGUNDY	Pinot Noir	10-year-old vines Limestone, marl, clay	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 56–60° F Decant optional	Cherry, black tea, turned earth Elegant, robust, nuanced	Drink now through 2030
2018 Juliénas <i>La Sœur Cadette</i> BEAUJOLAIS	Gamay	30- to 45-year-old vines Granite	Serve <i>cool</i> 52–56° F Decant optional	Cranberry, peony, lilac, spice Juicy, bright, playful	Drink now through 2025
2019 Condrieu <i>Lionel Faury</i> NORTHERN RHÔNE	Viognier	Vines planted between 1976 and 2007 Granite	Serve <i>cool</i> 50–54° F Decant optional	Jasmine, peach, apricot, quince Unctuous, creamy, voluptuous, silky	Drink now
2018 Châteauneuf-du-Pape “Télégramme” <i>Domaine du Vieux Télégraphe</i> SOUTHERN RHÔNE	80% Grenache, 10% Syrah, 6% Mourvèdre, 4% Cinsault	20- to 60-year-old vines Alluvial deposits, limestone, <i>molasse</i> (red clay) with <i>galets roulés</i>	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant optional	Licorice, thyme, violet, raspberry Velvety, supple, generous	Drink now
2018 Bandol Rouge <i>Domaine de la Tour du Bon</i> PROVENCE	55% Mourvèdre, 25% Grenache, 15% Cinsault, 5% Carignan	38-year-old vines Clay, limestone, silt, sandstone	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant recommended	Blackberry, game, <i>garrigue</i> herbs Structured, tannic, chewy, grippy	Drink now through 2030

cover: © GAIL SKOFF

left gatefold: Vineyards of the Côte d’Or. © GAIL SKOFF

right gatefold: Northern Rhône vineyards. © ANTHONY LYNCH

far left top: David and Arnaud Lavantureux. © DOMAINE LAVANTUREUX

far left bottom: Bouvier’s vineyards. © GAIL SKOFF

middle top: Valentin Montanet and his father, Jean.

© DOMAINE MONTANET-THODEN

middle bottom: Harvesting Condrieu. © DOMAINE FAURY

near left top: The stones of La Crau.

near left bottom: Agnès Henry of La Tour du Bon.



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Paris

A6



• Roland Lavantureux (Chablis)

Auxerre

La Sœur Cadette (Vézelay)

Burgundy

• Dijon

• Régis Bouvier (Marsannay)

• Beaune



FRANCE



• Juliéna

• Mâcon

Beaujolais

• Lyon



Lionel Faury (Condrieu)

Northern Rhône

• Valence

Rhône

Southern Rhône

• Domaine du Vieux Télégraphe
(Châteauneuf-du-Pape)

Avignon



Nice

Provence

Marseille

• Domaine de la Tour du Bon
(Bandol)



Mediterranean Sea

L'Autoroute
du Soleil

AXIS OF
FRENCH
FINE WINE