

2007 Southern Rhône Values

A dozen very good to outstanding Grenache- and Syrah-based reds (and one Viognier-based white) from an excellent vintage, all priced at \$25 or less

James Molesworth Posted: July 17, 2009

It's a perfect storm these days for Rhône lovers: The 2007 vintage has produced flattering, deliciously ripe wines while the economic situation has forced producers, importers and distributors to shave margins and focus on value. The result is a strong flow of outstanding wines in the under-\$25 category heading this way now and into the fall.

2007 is an excellent year, but it wasn't a sit-back-in-your-chair-and-let-nature-do-its-thing vintage. Vignerons that allowed the precocious fruit of the vintage to shine without sacrificing the Rhône's typically racy, graphite underpinning have made some thoroughly delicious wines. The best marry exceptional fruit with solid grip. But not everyone was able to pull that off—many wines simply offer flashy fruit without the requisite grip so, while flattering, they are burning the candle at both ends.

Yields were also higher in 2007 than in the recent string of vintages preceding it. Producers that tightened the screws on their vineyards harnessed racy acidity and well-defined finishes in their wines, while those who took all of nature's bounty produced wines with slightly fluid edges that will mature on a faster track.

Here's a selection of newly released wines from the Southern Rhône's less-heralded appellations (meaning, not Châteauneuf-du-Pape, but for a special report on 2007 Châteauneufs, see the July 15 Insider newsletter, which features more than 40 outstanding and classic wines). Domaine Les Aphillanthes has an outstanding trio of cuvées. Vigneron Daniel Boule formerly sold his family grapes off, but began bottling his own wine in 1999. Quality has steadily been on the rise here, with consulting winemaker Philippe Cambie adding his two cents as well. The 2007s are the domaine's best offerings yet, with the domaine's old-vine bottling leading the way, not a surprise as Mourvèdre is a key grape in 2007, lending backbone to the fleshy opulence of Grenache.

**DOMAINE LES APHILLANTHES Côtes du Rhône-Villages Vieilles Vignes
2007 Score: 92 | \$25**

Bold and very ripe, with delicious, almost gushing layers of blackberry, fig compote and boysenberry, all held together by a strong mineral spine and a long, racy graphite finish. Rock-solid and very impressive for the appellation. Grenache. Drink now through 2011. 30 cases imported. —*J.M.*

**DOMAINE LES APHILLANTHES Côtes du Rhône-Villages Cairanne
L'Ancestrale du Puits 2007 Score: 91 | \$23**

Dense but pure, with alluring black tea and mesquite aromas up front, followed by dark, macerated currant, fig and plum fruit. Hints of ganache and espresso frame the finish, which is supple and lengthy. Grenache and Mourvèdre. Drink now through 2011. 200 cases imported. —*J.M.*

**DOMAINE LES APHILLANTHES Côtes du Rhône-Villages Cuvée des
Galets 2007 Score: 90 | \$21**

Very ripe, with velvety layers of crushed plum, warm fig and boysenberry fruit layered with dark toast and spice cake notes. There's a long, graphite-tinged finish. Very flattering. A steadily rising producer. Grenache, Syrah and Mourvèdre. Drink now through 2010. 700 cases imported. —*J.M.*