Gigondas 2010 & 2011

**Recommended** 15-16.75pts (83-89pts)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wine</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>GD</th>
<th>CH</th>
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<th>Tasting note</th>
<th>Alc</th>
<th>Drink</th>
<th>Price</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Montirius, Confidential 2010</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>Black fruit and fresh black pepper on the nose. The palate has lots of fruit and spice as well as a glossy middle. Rich and complex with several layers.</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>2014-2023</td>
<td>£34.95-£37.95</td>
<td>Berry Bros &amp; Rudd, OW Loos</td>
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**Fair** 13-14.75pts (76-82pts)

- Montirius, La Terre des Alhés 2010 14.25 (80+)

- Dom. de la Salle, La Tour Saranne 2010 14.25 (83)
- N. Chapelot, Clos des Bons Amis 2010 15.25 (92)
Decanter PANEL TASTING

Gigondas 2010 & 2011

This southern Rhône region is a treat for wine lovers: charming, herb-tinged Grenache for affordable drinking over the next 10 to 30 years. John Livingstone-Learmonth writes

ONE OF THE simple mistakes often made in the appraisal of southern Rhône reds is to compare Gigondas with Châteauneuf-du-Pape. These are two very different areas. Gigondas is home to many west-facing vineyards, with terraces standing at up to 400m and considerable limestone and Alpines influences that lead to late ripening for much of the appellation. By contrast, Châteauneuf-du-Pape is low lying, has more heat in its vineyards, more Mediterranean residues and sand in its soils, and ripens early.

Hence expectation about Gigondas needs to be adapted towards wines that are often backed by welcome freshness and cut, their tannins a little bracing when young, with a true meridional depth on the palate, derived from a large majority of Grenache in the blend.

Growers with scattered vineyards can enjoy all wine styles at Gigondas. On the garrigue plain drifting towards the River Ouvèze the wines have a long fruited, upfront, full-bodied style, whereas the later-ripening, elevated sites take a tootshome quality to pop up the uppie qualities.

Variable vintages and styles

Achieving complete ripeness in Gigondas can be tricky, which is why a vintage such as 2010 is so good at the highest quality levels – the ripeness and freshness danced winningly together. It was a landmark vintage along the lines of 1990 and 1978, one that can run for 30 years.

By contrast 2011 was a vintage of uneven ripening; the fruit weight wasn’t especially deep, and alcohol is on the high side. As a result, it pays to be more choosy in 2011 when buying Gigondas; the best wines are harmonious, pliant and fluid. Their relative lack of real tannic support means most should be drunk in their first 10 years, though the very best can last for 15 or 20 years.

When reviewing the wide horizon of Gigondas reds, more variables enter calculations in terms of style. There are cheap-end Gigondas that are bottled swiftly, within six to nine months; these are at best workmanlike, often showing sweetness and a lack of real fruit pedigree. A very cheap Gigondas must come with a warning.

At the other end of the scale, there is the growing use of oak to big up what are termed ‘Premier’ wines. New oak and Grenache are one of life’s misalliances, and in 2011 the considerable deficit of structure meant that the oak came first, the wine second – the wrong way round. With their high price, they can be often swerved. In 2010, greater density and ripeness allowed the oak to be better subsumed into the mainstream of such Prestige wines, but it is a vintage where the top wines are marvellous, the lesser wines some way behind.

Having tasted Gigondas every year since it received appellation status in 1971, the most encouraging comment I can end with is that these are wines of genuine charm, overestimated on their power angle and underestimated on their finesse. In small vintages and big vintages alike, a mature Gigondas can evoke Pinot Noir associations and present a beautiful glass of wine, its red fruits scented with dashes of Provençal herbs.

Gigondas: know your vintages

2012 Good year. Prominent, clear fruit in the best wines. Some have sharp tannins. Slow resolution vintage.
2011 Good vintage. The best wines are agreeable, pleasantly and aromatic. Some high alcohols.
2009 Very good vintage. Robust, well-controlled power in these long, tenacious wines.
2007 Very good vintage. A big year with wines showing hallmark intensity. Long, formidable wines, some excellent. Need time to settle.
2006 Good year. Delightful wines to drink, some very good. Forward, well-ripened and underestimated.

Gigondas: the facts

Vineyards in production 1,228ha
Grape varieties Grenache (50%-85% allowed); Syrah, Mourvèdre (40%-50% together is allowed). Other white and red grapes also allowed in production of red (99%) and rosé (1%).
Yield 36 hl/ha (38 hl/ha allowed in 2010).
Bottles a year 4-5 million
Domains 80
Sales 60% of wines from domains, 40% from négoceur or merchant trade.
The results

For a taste of southern Rhône without the Châteauneuf-du-Pape pricetag, look to Gigondas – especially the 2010 vintage, which offers great drinking over the next 20 to 30 years. Christelle Guibert reports

Gigondas is an appellation with real opportunity

Gearoid Devaney MS

With more than 62% of the wines recommended by our experts, this was an encouraging tasting for both Gigondas producers and Rhône lovers, especially for the excellent 2010 vintage. "It's a more complete vintage," said Livingstone-Lea's Honorez. "It's darker in colour and has more depth, and the best wines are balanced and fresh."

There was an extra coarseness and clarity in many of the wines, which is very appealing.

The scores

67 wines tasted
2 Outstanding
14 Highly recommended
26 Recommended
25 Fair
0 Poor
0 Faulty

The tasters' verdicts

Gearoid Devaney MS

Devaney works at Fine Wines, a London-based independent merchant. He was the Modus Vivendi of the Year 2000 and now a Master Sommelier. He is Head Sommelier at London's Capital Hotel and has also worked at London's Oranger and the three-Michelin-starred Pierre Gagnaire in Paris. In 2005 he assisted Tom Aikens in opening his signature restaurant and was part of the team instrumental in the restaurant winning a Michelin star.

Devaney's verdict

"Overall this was a good tasting and the wines were showing well. The 2010s were less homogenous than the 2010s but still produced some lovely wines. Wines from elevated sites and those with a history of wine production were generally very good. But as for the vineyards, some of the 2010s are more modern and have the potential to age and improve. The best wines will start to show well from 2015 but could age for 20 years for anyone with the patience to lay them down."

"Grenache does not take very well to any other oak – in fact, quite the opposite. It was a shame to taste some wines that had too much fruit concentration but were completely overworked and heavily oaked."

"Some of the more entry-level wines were quite appealing and offered good value. In fact, Gigondas is a whole offers good value for lovers of the southern Rhône. As the price point of the great wines of Châteauneuf moves out of reach for the everyday drinker, there may be an opportunity for Gigondas to fill its shoes."

Christian Honorez

Honorez is the founder and managing director of A2VIn and has more than 20 years' experience of bringing quality wines to top restaurants and hotels in the UK through his positions with Genesis Wines, H&H Bancroft and H&H Fine Wines. A2VIn is a wine importer that sources wines from predominantly small producers.

Honorez's verdict

"As expected, this was a very successful (tasting). Unsurprisingly the 2010s were generally superior but many 2011s were also showing well, particularly the one over 2012 vintage. In general, the 2011 vintage is for earlier drinking, somewhere between a two- to eight-year window from now, while the best 2010s will still be enjoyed during the next decade."

"One of the drawbacks of some of the 2010s was the high level of alcohol, which was more evident when the wines didn't have the structure and depth to cope. Also at fault was the occasional absence of new oak, Southern Rhône wines don't need much (if any) new oak, especially the Grenache-based cuvées which make up the bulk of Gigondas wines."

"2010 was again showing why it's such a sought-after vintage. Most of the wines needed a bit more time before they should be broached – probably one or two years minimum – but they were more complete with great structure, balance and freshness."

"Gigondas is well suited to today's wine lover, with strong identity and offering great value. Often a little more rustic than its big neighbour Châteauneuf-du-Pape, the wines are generally fresher and easier to drink, despite an almost similar alcohol level."
The panel agreed that the 2011s would need to be consumed relatively young and should definitely be drunk before the 2010s. Livingston-Learmonth estimated that some 2011s might keep until 2025, but most should be enjoyed by 2020, while many of the 2010s would last until 2030 or longer with no problem.

The panel was pleasantly surprised by the moderate alcohol and the consistency in quality of the wines, making them eminently drinkable. “Even when the alcohol was higher, it was mostly in sync with the concentration of the fruit,” said Devaney. But he criticised the heavy-handed use of oak still prevalent in many wines. “In some it was so dominant that you couldn’t taste any fruit behind it. How can you appreciate a wine when it’s covered in oak?”

Livingston-Learmonth commented that ‘oak with Grenache is always a disaster and I found, for both vintages, that the sweetening effect of the oak made the wines much less pleasant.’ Honour also agreed and wished more producers would understand that consumers’ tastes had changed: “There are producers who think they are still in the 1990s, and have to use 100% new oak. Back then, using all-new barrels was exciting and different. People liked it and all the producers wanted to try it. But when the wine is Grenache-based, new oak – especially in smaller barrels – is not the way forward.”

John Livingston-Learmonth

Since first visiting the Rhône in 1973, Livingston-Learmonth has dedicated most of his life to writing and talking about the region’s wines. A principal contributor to the book Gigondas, Its Wines, Its Land, Its People, published in English and French, Livingston-Learmonth is also the author of four books on the Rhône and runs the website DrinkRhone.com.

Livingston-Learmonth’s verdict

“The moderate qualities of 2011 came in immediate contrast to the charged features of 2010, so it was a great exercise to taste them side by side. The 2011s have issues of excess warmth – high alcohols relative to their content – and their finishes can drift, lacking depth of fruit. But the best are wholesome, delicate in parts, with a few showing a real sense of place. Many will live for eight to 10 years. 2011 wasn’t a year for plunging the wines into oak.

‘2010 is broad-bodied, deep and long. These wines truly fill the glass and will be impressive if left to settle, properly fuse and then be drunk with a little maturity, from around 2017. Balance is better than 2011, but a few wines were overdone, with sometimes coarse oak bringing an unwanted sweetening that flattened the rich fruit within. ‘Growers have to remain on their toes if the price-quality ratio in Gigondas is to remain appealing. The number of merchant houses dealing in it has grown recently, which may indicate the wine is regarded as easy to sell; all the more reason to maintain the highest of standards from cellar to bottle.’