

## France, Southern Rhône

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As I wrote in the introduction to Part One, the Southern Rhône has been blessed with great wines in several recent vintages. Certainly, 2016 is among the best ever, drawing comparisons to 1990 and 1978, but 2015 and 2017 aren't far behind.

Part Two of this year's Southern Rhône coverage includes a focus on a couple of notable appellations that begin with the letter V: Vacqueyras and Ventoux.

Both are often overshadowed by more illustrious neighbors, but both often provide exceptional QPR (quality-price ratio). Both include red, white and rosé wines, although reds dominate.



The alluvial soils and glacial terraces of Vacqueyras lie at the base of the Dentelles de Montmirail. Without much in the way of altitude differences to moderate the warm climate, these are ripe wines, with much of the power related to the specific soils. Sandier sites yield lighter reds than those with more clay and galets (stones). Those clay-rich sites are also more able to resist hydric stress in hot, dry vintages, like 2017.

The local cave cooperative (Vignerons de Caractère) has combined efforts with that of neighboring Beaumes de Venise to create Rhonéa, but much of what can be found in export markets comes from the region's numerous independent estates or from large négociants. All are capable of making good wines, but probably the most individual and exciting bottlings come from family domaines, like Domaine de Montvac, Domaine la Garrigue and Montririus.



The author, after a full morning of blind-tasting Vacqueyras wines

The appellation of Ventoux (formerly Côtes du Ventoux) is another world. Dotted around the foot of the famous Mont Ventoux, many of the vineyards are widely separated, and many of the estates are diversified, growing tree fruit or crops in addition to vines. Aside from a few showpiece estates that have gained international renown (Chêne Bleu, Domaine de Fondreche, Château Pesquié), prices are very reasonable for the quality. Indeed, even at those three estates, the pricing is much less than it would be if they were located in some of the more fashionable appellations.

Yet Ventoux is up and coming. Attractions here include the potential of altitude to moderate global warming, relatively inexpensive land and varied soils, including mixes of red clays and rolled stones that are similar to those in higher-value regions of the Rhône. For consumers looking for innovative new producers or bargains to serve as their house pours, Ventoux has plenty to offer. With the 383 reviews in this issue, that brings the Southern Rhône (Parts One & Two) total to 1,214. But there's still more to come in Part Three, which will include additional wines from

Cairanne, Lirac, Rasteau, Vinsobres, and more. Stay tuned!



**2017 MONTIRIUS VACQUEYRAS LE CLOS  
92-94**

A 50-50 blend of Grenache and Syrah, the 2017 Vacqueyras le Clos offers up peppery, spicy aromas, plenty of berry fruit and a full-bodied, velvety-textured palate. It looks just about as good as the fabulous 2016.

**2017 MONTIRIUS VACQUEYRAS MINERAL BLANC  
92**

The 2017 Vacqueyras Mineral Blanc is a blend of 50% Bourboulenc, 25% Grenache Blanc and 25% Roussanne. As always at this address, there's no oak used. This wine offers up aromas of struck flint and lime fesh. It's medium to full-bodied, fairly round on the mid-palate, then gains focus on the nish to end on brine and zest notes.

**2017 MONTIRIUS VACQUEYRAS GARRIGUES 2017  
90-92**

The medium to full-bodied 2017 Vacqueyras Garrigues looks a step behind the 2016, being more open-knit in texture, with plenty of berry fruit that finishes crisp, zesty and clean.

**2016 MONTIRIUS VACQUEYRAS LE CLOS  
94**

A 50-50 blend of Grenache and Syrah, the 2016 Vacqueyras le Clos is even better than the excellent Garrigues. Herbal, peppery notes accent mixed berries and black olives in this full-bodied, creamy-textured beauty. Complex and complete, it inishes with supple tannins and tremendous length.

**2016 MONTIRIUS VACQUEYRAS GARRIGUES  
93**

A blend of 70% Grenache and 30% Syrah, the 2016 Vacqueyras Garrigues is a strong effort, boasting hints of garrigue that accent raspberry and chocolate notes. Medium to full-bodied, with rich, velvety tannins, it remains vibrant and fresh through the long, silky finish. It should drink well for a decade.