

We start 2014 geeking out on “green” wine. We’ve resolved to keep finding the most interesting, environmentally friendly wines on the planet, and to challenge you (and ourselves) to further expand your palates. So you may ask, what else is new? But January gives us a chance to reflect, and as the wine club celebrates its fifth anniversary, it’s interesting to see the important changes that have occurred in the wine world since we founded the club. While organic and biodynamic winemakers used to be considered slightly crazed outliers, nowadays they’re downright, dare I say, trendy. So, as our options increase exponentially each year, our job becomes more challenging and more interesting. Simply finding a green winemaker isn’t enough these days. Finding a winemaker whose passion from vine to bottle is truly reflected in a great sip is our task. These people need our support! This means it’s your support that allows us to seek out special wines. See, we know you’re a discriminating crowd, not the type to schlep to the Plaid Pantry for a generic bottle of plonk. Educated and passionate consumers like you are crucial to the long-term health of the wine industry as well as the environment. So stick with us: we’ll continue the hunt, pooh-poo the plonk, follow our passion, and in turn feed yours. Happy new year!

Feeling slightly nostalgic, we go back to one of our favorite regions this month. The Rhone Valley in France holds a special place in our hearts, as we have visited it many times over the years in search of great wines. Here, passion runs in the winemakers’ blood, and organic agriculture is a way of life, not a marketing term. This large region spans two climates and a number of grape varieties. The Northern Rhone is a more continental climate, while the Southern Rhone is influenced by the Mediterranean. This month we picked a red from the north and a white from the south.

Northern Rhone reds make up only 5 percent of the valley’s wine. Here, vineyards reside on steep hillsides of granite, where stones often have to be carted back up the hills after rainfall washes them down. These *galets* are crucial because they help retain heat and ripen vines. The Saint-Joseph appellation was the favorite wine of French kings in the 16th century, and today, wines from this AOC still reign supreme and are touted for their elegance and finesse. As winemaker Fabrice Gripa says, “The challenge is to pass beyond having ‘big’ matter in the wine to having finesse. Concentration doesn’t necessarily make a grand vin.” Fabrice, son of founder, Bernard Gripa, studied in the New World and implements modern technology, yet still retains the handcrafted aspect of the original production. The Syrah grapes here are crushed in the traditional manner—by foot in open wooden vats with no addition of foreign yeast. They are hand-harvested from organic vines with an average age of 40 years.

Our second wine takes us to the Southern Rhone Valley, where the Avril family set down roots (pun intended) in the 17th century. From this well-known and respected family, Paul Avril (1873–1962) began to sell red and white wines for the first time under the Clos des Papes label in 1896. He was also a serious player in the creation of the “appellation d’origine contrôlée Châteauneuf-du-Pape” (the very first appellation in France). Régis Avril (1901–1987) continued the family estate by supplying wines to France’s presidents during the time of de Gaulle and Pompidou. Paul Avril took over the winery in 1963 and his son Paul-Vincent Jr. joined his father in 1987. After attending enology school in Burgundy, where he says he “learned about the finesse and elegance of wine,” Paul-Vincent went back to the domain in 1988 with visions of these fine qualities, which he still considers today to be the most important aspect of a quality wine. Clos des Papes is composed of 24 different parcels spread around the town of Châteauneuf-du-Pape. One parcel, near the pope’s castle and surrounded by walls (clos), is where the name of the Domaine comes from. “Le Petit Vin d’Avril” (blanc) is from “declassified” Châteauneuf-du-Pape grapes and also from five acres near the Rhone River, blended from two vintages. But don’t think for a moment that this wine is anything less in quality. For definition’s sake, appellation contrôlée rules for wine in France maintain that only a certain volume of wine can be produced under each specific appellation label. Any excess production must be sold under a broader appellation or as declassified wine, usually at a lower price. The secret with declassified wine is that often we’re actually enjoying the same wine, made in the same manner and with care and expertise, from the same region as the premier label.

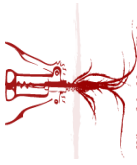
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Purevinewines.com, (877) 404-1121

Until next month,
Joe, Tom, & Andria

(over for recipe of the month)

“fighting for the soul of wine..”



This Month's Biodynamic® / Organic Selections

Domaine Bernard Grippa Saint-Joseph

100% Syrah

**Region: Saint-Joseph,
Northern Rhone**

Vintage: 2008

Elegant and restrained, this medium-bodied red performs well at the dinner table. There's nothing flashy about this wine. It's just pure finesse, with secondary characteristics like tobacco, saddle leather, and a raw earthiness. The aromatics are subtle, with muted cherry and prominent black pepper. This wine is a good representation of the Saint-Joseph appellation, where Old World moderate-climate Syrah performs like a different animal than its New World counterpart. These wines are feminine, with moderate acidity, and can be paired with a wide variety of cuisines.

Hey, why did my wine come in a used box?

In conjunction with Portland Wine Storage and our commitment to the environment we re-use wine shippers as many times as possible making them 100% recycled on our end.

Le petit vin d'Avril Blanc

**98% Marsanne, 2%
Chardonnay**

**Region: Southern
Rhone, France**

This Petit Vin d'Avril is not to be confused with the much more common rouge version you might see in your local wine shop, as the white is rarely exported. This Rhone wine is medium bodied with a glycerin texture that adds some weightiness. There are honey and tropical fruit notes on the nose with a nuance of citrus peel. The integrated acidity allows this wine to stand up to spicy food. We tried it with chili-spiced chicken and it paired perfectly. Since 2011 the vineyards of Clos des Papes have been certified organic.