

### New-Look Delas' Wines to Watch

With an impressive new winery up and running, Delas' Hermitage and Côte-Rôtie Syrahs continue to improve



Delas' Syrah vineyards on the hill of Hermitage (Courtesy of Delas)

By James Molesworth



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*Senior editor James Molesworth, Wine Spectator's lead taster for the wines of France's Rhône Valley, is back in the Northern Rhône for a preview of recent vintages of the region's top Syrahs and more.*

Over my many years covering France's Rhône Valley, I've regularly checked in with Jacques Grange at [Delas](#). It's been fun to chart their growth and improvement. When he was joined in the winemaking by Claire Darnaud-McKerrow, they began a subtle but steady shift in the wines, reducing new oak and extraction and aiming for a fresher style in both the whites and the reds. And now they have a new winery facility at their disposal, a level of investment commensurate with their dedication.

The new digs, designed by architect Carl Fredrik Svenstedt (he also designed Provence's [Domaines Ott](#)), sit in the middle of Tain l'Ermitage. The exterior walls are made of large limestone blocks arranged in a wave-like pattern that gives the winery a sense of calm motion. Inside, it's gleaming new conical stainless steel vats, a cool room for chilling down the fruit as it arrives, and a [gravity-flow friendly](#) layout.

The top half of the production, including most of the estate wines, is now being vinified here, starting with the 2019 vintage, with the old facility in St.-Jean-de-Muzols still being used for the rest of the production. There's room to grow even after they eventually bring in all the Crozes production and perhaps bring some new St.-Joseph plantings online.

Before tasting a lineup of the young 2017s and 2018s, we talked vintages. The 2017 harvest started Aug. 28, similar to '18 according to Darnaud-McKerrow, following a warm and dry year, though not as warm and dry as '18.

"'17 has more freshness than '18, which is more like '09. The tannins in '17 are quite ripe, and the nights were not particularly cool, so the acidity is not as fresh as '19, for example," she says. "We did have some maturity blockage along the way, with younger vines shutting down. '16 had so much purity and freshness and '18 has so much concentration and power, that '17 you could blink and miss it. It's a more discrete vintage, and it's only starting to open up now that [the wines] are in bottle."



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*Jacques Grange and Claire Darnaud-McKerrow (Courtesy of Delas)*

"2018 was perfect. We started early with the Crozes to keep it fresh and then not have to run behind on St.-Joseph, Hermitage and Côte-Rôtie," says Grange. "Because of the heat, things shut down a bit, and ripening was behind. Then we got a light rain first week of September and that seemed to be what was just missing, because all of a sudden the vines changed dramatically in a few days, the color turned dark in the grapes and everything came in just right. It's structured, concentrated, generous. The only slight issue being it was a bit too hot at points. It has the same generosity and density as '19, but '19 has the fresher acidity, because the nights were cooler."

The **2017 Delas Crozes-Hermitage Domaine des Grands Chemins** is juicy and nicely compact, with a core of red and black currant fruit woven with alder, incense and bay accents. Very vibrant acidity lets the finish ripple on. The **2017 Crozes-Hermitage Le Clos** is richly layered, with cassis and raspberry fruit infused with anise and black tea. The pure fruit lingers through the finish with a twinge of iron at the end to keep it grounded.

The **2017 St.-Joseph Francois de Tournon** has settled in, with a core of lightly steeped black currant and black cherry fruit now showing a full range of alder, tea and tobacco accents from start to finish, ending with an elegant mineral streak through the finish. The **2017 St.-Joseph Ste.-Epine** is very refined, high-pitched and fresh, with red currant and damson fruit streaking alongside a vibrant mineral note, ending with a floral flurry. Long, almost piercing in feel, this is always among the purest expressions of Northern Rhône Syrah.



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The **2017 Cornas Chante-Perdrix** is a fresh, lively styled Cornas that relies more on red fruit, savory and floral notes, ending with a kick of olive at the very end.

The **2017 Côte-Rôtie Seigneur de Maugiron** is still closed, but the pieces are there, with a core of gently steeped red cherry and blackberry fruit, an iron spine and notes of singed juniper, tobacco, bay and incense weaving in and around it all. The iron note takes a strident encore on the finish for added effect. The **2017 Côte-Rôtie La Landonne** is very reserved today, a well-structured and amply fruited version, with simmering red currant and blackberry preserve flavors infused with black tea, singed iron and tobacco accents. There's a flash of bay in the background, too, before the iron edge really asserts itself on the finish. Despite the nearly austere minerality, there's both finesse and drive here and ample pure fruit to meld with via cellaring.

The **2017 Hermitage Domaine des Tourettes** is tight as well, but with a bit more obvious velvety textured cassis and blackberry fruit infused with subtle anise, sweet tobacco and loam notes adding depth through the finish. This moves slowly but confidently. The **2017 Hermitage Les Bessards** is tighter than the La Landonne, with its large-scaled core of red and black currant preserve flavors held in check for now by a wall of loam and cast iron notes, giving it an austere edge at first glance. But the fruit is copious and built with an inner freshness, even though it is dark in profile, so the minerality will meld into the fruit in time. The finish is seriously long, echoing with sage, charcoal, juniper and tar.

The 2018s are not bottled yet. The **2018 Crozes-Hermitage Les Launes** is very exuberant and primal with a blast of bright plum and cherry fruit, backed by singed alder and tobacco accents that emerge slowly on the finish. It's very youthful and just settling into itself. The **2018 Crozes-Hermitage Domaine des Grands Chemins** has dense blackberry and black currant fruit with lots of tar, but it's well-integrated. Muscular, yet driven, it's a very solid wine in the making. The **2018 St.-Joseph Les Challeys** is also very primal, with sappy cherry paste and warm plum preserve aromas and flavors dominating now, with hints of violet, singed wood, sweet earth and tobacco just starting to show. The **2018 Crozes-Hermitage Le Clos** is really packed with ripe plum and blackberry purée flavors carried by a graphite edge. This is muscular in feel, yet fresh as it ripples with fine acidity throughout—a great combination of concentration and drive.



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The **2018 St.-Joseph Francois de Tournon** is dense and driven, with a lovely beam of cassis and plum. Lots of alder and incense notes too. The **2018 St.-Joseph Ste.-Epine** is packed for Ste.-Epine, with a darker-than-usual profile, more oomph and a gorgeous set of plum and cassis flavors lined with violet and anise.

The **2018 Côte-Rôtie La Landonne** is a large wine in the making, with a torrent of cassis, açai and blackberry paste flavors built on girders of graphite and iron. Both rich and austere at the same time, this will need to time come into itself. The **2018 Hermitage Les Bessards** is lush and warm in feel, with waves of cassis, plum sauce and blackberry reduction laid over loam and warm tar. Fleshy, yet defined and driven, relying on both power and guile, it has a seriously long finish.

We finished with three vintages of a new wine in the making, a *lieu-dit* selection of Hermitage from Les Grandes Vignes, the highest part of the hill, situated on pure granite.

The **2017 Hermitage Les Grandes Vignes** is a very intense, racy, compact (youthfully) wine built on red currant and cherry fruit lined with a piercing minerality and gilded with rose petal and iron notes. Very pure, very long, very refined. The **2016 Hermitage Les Grandes Vignes** has a slightly fuller feel as the extra year's time has allowed it to fill out. It's in line with the vintage though, being softer and more charming in profile, with suave plum and cherry preserve flavors gliding atop more gentle structure, though no less short or layered. The finish has its piercing minerality in reserve and lilting perfume all around it. The debut (and still not yet released) **2015 Hermitage Les Grandes Vignes** is finally starting to take shape, with the minerality embedding deeply in the fruit, giving it an equal balance between damson, red currant notes and sleek iron notes while more floral and savory aspects emerge from the background. It's very elegant in feel, which means it's easy to overlook the length. But stay focused and you'll be more than impressed at how long this is.

In fact, stay focused on the efforts at Delas. With a new winery now befitting the ultimate potential for these wines, you'll likely be more than impressed with what's to come.



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