

Wine Spectator Insider

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A Members-Only, Weekly Publication

THE *Wine Spectator Insider* kicks off 2008 by going weekly—you can anticipate reading the newest reviews of the latest exciting wines from *Wine Spectator's* editors every Wednesday going forward. Today's issue features more reds from the Rhône Valley's extraordinary 2005 vintage, but this time James Molesworth focuses on the Syrahs of Cornas, where exciting things are happening as new vigneron fine-tune their winemaking styles and proven domaines such as Paul Jaboulet Aîné, A. Clape, Jean-Luc Colombo and Tardieu-Laurent continue to excel. Also in this issue you'll find more than a dozen outstanding reds from Italy's Veneto reviewed by Jo Cooke. They range from big, burly Amarones to refined Merlots. And as always, for the rarest and highest scoring of this issue's selections, including a classic-rated Northern Rhône Syrah, check out the Hot Wines, on page 4.

France Rhône

Cornas isn't the first appellation to leap to mind when wine lovers think of Northern Rhône Syrah. But there's a quiet revolution going on in this tiny appellation which, like the rest of the valley, performed well in 2005.

While modernists such as Tardieu-Laurent and Jean-Luc Colombo turn out their new-oak-driven cuvées, new vigneron are joining the ranks and combining those modern touches with the more traditional approach of other Cornas vigneron such as Pierre-Marie Clape and Thierry Allemand. The wines of Matthieu Barret at Domaine du Coulet, two of which are featured here, are particularly noteworthy.

—James Molesworth

JEAN-LUC COLOMBO

Cornas Force One 2005

93 points | \$130 | 70 cases made | Red

Bright and racy, with a fresh raspberry core that drives the mineral, violet, lavender, iron and fresh thyme notes through the grip-filled finish. Still a touch taut and sinewy now, but has the depth for cellaring. The debut for this wine, sourced from 60-year-old vines in a parcel that used to go into the Terres Brûlées bottling. Best from 2008 through 2018.—*J.M.*

JEAN-LUC COLOMBO

Cornas Les Ruchets 2005

93 points | \$88 | 900 cases made | Red

Ripe, with a touch of flashy toast helping to frame the black currant, boysenberry and fig fruit, which is in turn pushed by cassis bush and olive notes. Really stretches out on the finish. From a single parcel of 90-year-old vines with southeastern exposure. Drink now through 2018.—*J.M.*

DOMAINE DU COULET

Cornas Billes Noires 2005

93 points | \$116 | 200 cases imported | Red

Gorgeous and inviting, with kirsch and freshly crushed plum backed by tangy iron and *garrigue* notes. This is fresh and up front, but also has deceptive grip for cellaring. From parcels at the top of the hill, including some 80-year-old vines. Drink now through 2017.—*J.M.*

ERIC & JOËL DURAND

Cornas Confidence 2005

93 points | \$70 | 50 cases imported | Red

Lovely wild herb and flower aromas give way to a dark, rich palate of briar patch, molten chocolate, aged tobacco and sweet tapenade. The long, grippy finish has lots of graphite and iron notes. This has serious depth. A blend of parcels, including some La Geynale, aged in 30 percent new oak. Best from 2008 through 2018.—*J.M.*

TARDIEU-LAURENT

Cornas Coteaux 2005

92 points | \$49 | 33 cases imported | Red

Ripe and powerfully built, but with a great juicy core that makes it accessible, allowing raspberry, blackberry, fig, olive and sweet tobacco notes to pump through the bright, well-structured finish. From 50-year-old Saveaux and Chaillots vines. Best from 2009 through 2015.—*J.M.*

A. CLAPE

Cornas Renaissance 2005

91 points | \$60 | 540 cases made | Red

A dark, chewy style, with a nice beefy edge to the black currant, sage, roasted chestnut and iron notes. The long finish is framed by a nice bittersweet cocoa note. Rock solid. This is the young vine bottling. Best from 2009 through 2015.—*J.M.*

JEAN-LUC COLOMBO

Cornas Terres Brûlées 2005

91 points | \$78 | 1,350 cases made | Red

Pure and driven, with a sleek profile of blackberry, currant and aged tobacco, followed by a lingering hint of grilled sage on the finish. Has nice flesh and length. Made from a blend of parcels and purchased fruit. Drink now through 2015.—*J.M.*

DOMAINE DU COULET

Cornas Brise Cailloux 2005

91 points | \$63 | 400 cases imported | Red

Very briary in texture, with lots of tobacco, olive and grilled herb notes, followed by a solid core of dark fig and black cherry fruit. There's a nice lingering cassis note on the finish. Partially de-stemmed fruit, aged for just 12 months in oak (none new). Drink now through 2015.—*J.M.*

ERIC & JOËL DURAND

Cornas Empreintes 2005

91 points | \$60 | 200 cases imported | Red

There's solid grip, but this manages to stay elegant, with a range of dark currant, tobacco, olive and sage notes followed by a meaty edge on the finish. The latent richness begs for a cassoulet. A blend of parcels, made with 20 percent new oak. Best from 2009 through 2015.—*J.M.*

PAUL JABOULET AÎNÉ

Cornas Domaine de St.-Pierre 2005

90 points | \$110 | 75 cases imported | Red

Racy, fresh and forward, with a bright minerality that leads the way for cassis bush, violet and red cherry notes, followed by a nice tangy finish. Sourced from a single parcel of 45- to 60-year-old vines. Drink now through 2013.—*J.M.*

PAUL JABOULET AÎNÉ

Cornas Les Grandes Terrasses 2005

89 points | \$55 | 75 cases imported | Red

Polished for a Cornas, with dark fig, cocoa, roasted vanilla and coffee notes that glide along well-rounded tannins. Has a fleshy, smoky finish. Made from a blend of two parcels. Drink now through 2015.—*J.M.*

Italy Veneto

MICHELE CASTELLANI

Amarone della Valpolicella Cinque Stelle 2004

92 points | \$85 | 500 cases imported | Red

Clean dried fruit and raisin notes rise from the glass and mingle with mineral, light spices and a hint of red licorice on the palate. Full-bodied, with a silky smooth texture, very fine tannins and a long finish. Nice to drink already. Best after 2008.—*J.C.*

ROMANO DAL FORNO

Amarone della Valpolicella 2002

92 points | \$585 | 115 cases imported | Red

Shows aromas of leather, smoked ham, prune, tarry mineral and dried flowers. An amazing panoply for a 2002, which was a weak vintage. Full-bodied, with velvety tannins and a long, intense, peppery finish. Given the difficulties of the vintage, this is a fine effort by Dal Forno. Drink now through 2016.—*J.C.*

INAMA

Veneto Oracolo 2003

92 points | \$65 | 350 cases imported | Red

This pure Cabernet is bursting with spicy licorice and thick berry character, with game and floral notes. Full and rich, offering big, velvety, fruit-coated tannins that push through the firm, long finish, with lots of lingering fruit and oak. There's a good balance of ripe fruit and acidity, but this is too firm to enjoy to the full just now. Made from fresh, non-dried Cabernet grapes in the Colli Berici area of Veneto. Best after 2010.—*J.C.*

VIVIANI

Amarone della Valpolicella Classico Tulipano Nero 2000

92 points | \$160 | 40 cases imported | Red

A full-blown Amarone, showing loads of spicy raisin and mineral character, with fresh black truffle. Full-bodied, with spice-coated tannins and a long, clean cinnamon finish. Leave this a while for the full effect. Will improve with age for a long time. Best after 2009.—*J.C.*

STEFANO ACCORDINI

Amarone della Valpolicella

Classico Vigneto Il Fornetto 2001

91 points | \$120 | 85 cases imported | Red

Lots of clean black fruit and light iodine character grows in intensity on the full palate, with tight tannins that draw out the finish. Very clean and fruity. Has a racy character. Best after 2008.—*J.C.*

MICHELE CASTELLANI

Amarone della Valpolicella Classico I Castei Campo Casalin 2004

91 points | \$90 | 400 cases imported | Red

Intense dried fig, date and prune aromas follow through to a full-bodied palate, with well-integrated, fruit-coated tannins and loads of fruit on the long finish. Peppery. More subtle than recent vintages, but very well made. Best after 2008.—*J.C.*

MASI

Amarone della Valpolicella Classico Mazzano 2001

91 points | \$149 | 350 cases imported | Red

Needs air to bring out the rich aromas of dried cherry, currant, spicy earth and fresh herbs. Full-bodied and very tight, with firm tannins coated by a solid core of fruit and mineral. The finish is chewy. Needs more time, but worth the wait. A very dry, muscular style. Best after 2009.—*J.C.*

MASI

Amarone della Valpolicella Classico Serègo Alighieri Vaio Armaron 2001

91 points | \$75 | 1,000 cases imported | Red

An elegant Amarone, showing aromas and flavors of black cherry and currant, with a floral vanilla note. Medium- to full-bodied, with a silky mouthfeel and a fresh fruit and vanilla finish. Fine and well-knit. Best after 2008.—*J.C.*

NICOLIS

Amarone della Valpolicella Classico Ambrosan 2001

91 points | \$65 | 800 cases imported | Red

Has an intriguing nose, offering concentrated currant and raisin, with hints of tar and freshly ground black pepper. Full-bodied, with fine, fruit- and mineral-coated tannins that provide a long, clean-cut finish. Drink now.—*J.C.*

LA SANSONINA

Veneto 2004

91 points | \$80 | 1,500 cases made | Red

The black fruit, lamb roast, fresh herb and olive paste aromas come out with air. Full- to medium-bodied, this is refined, with well-poised, mineral-coated tannins and a long, focused finish. Pure Merlot. Best after 2009.—*J.C.*

TEDESCHI

Amarone della Valpolicella Capitel Monte Olmi 2003

91 points | \$90 | 130 cases imported | Red

Bursts with black cherry and damson fruit—almost sweet like a Recioto. Very decadent as it opens. Full-bodied, with robust tannins that provide a good grip and prolong the finish. This is long, but needs time to develop a more even length. Wait for this one. Best after 2009.—*J.C.*

VENTURINI MASSIMINO

Amarone della Valpolicella Classico Campo Masua 2001

91 points | \$60 | 100 cases imported | Red

There's a nice balance of currant, raisin, dried cherry and mineral on the nose, which follows through to a silky, full-bodied palate, with a good vein of dried fruit that takes on a lightly bitter, pruny note on the finish. Best after 2008.—*J.C.*

ZENATO

Amarone della Valpolicella Classico Sergio Zenato Riserva 2003

91 points | \$88 | 300 cases imported | Red

Very nutty and floral on the nose, with crushed black fruit and notes of violet and fresh herbs. Full-bodied and fresh, with lots of dried fruit and floral character, fine, firm tannins and a long, mineral finish. Tightly packed and refined. Needs some time in bottle. Best after 2009.—*J.C.*

HOT WINES

These are the most exciting discoveries from our editors' most recent tastings, published exclusively in *Wine Spectator Insider*. They are high-scoring, low-production wines from around the world that may be difficult to find, but are worth seeking out.

TARDIEU-LAURENT

Cornas Vieilles Vignes 2005

95 points | \$75 | 35 cases imported | Red

Polished and lush, this is frankly modern, with alluring mocha, fig cake, linzer torte and loganberry notes, but it's also firmly grounded in its *terroir*, with a racy iron- and chalk-edged finish that delivers grip and definition. Sourced from 50- to 80-year-old vines in the Geynale and Eygas parcels. Best from 2008 through 2020. *From France.*—J.M.

JEAN-LUC COLOMBO

Cornas La Louvée 2005

94 points | \$88 | 350 cases made | Red

This is packed, with dark fig and raspberry ganache notes all richly layered with bittersweet cocoa, aged tobacco, loam and iron. The long, muscular finish will need time to stretch out. A single parcel of 75-year-old vines with full southern exposure. Best from 2008 through 2017. *From France.*—J.M.

ROMANO DAL FORNO

Valpolicella Superiore 2003

93 points | \$229 | 330 cases imported | Red

A big, burly red, with lots of charred oak and smoky bacon character coloring the rich, ripe crushed berry fruit. Hints of flowers and black cardamom add to the complexity. Full-bodied, with well-poised, velvety tannins that capture the flavors and drive them through the long finish. Needs cellaring, but this fabulous now too. Best after 2010. *From Italy.*—J.C.

MACULAN

Merlot Breganze Crosara 2004

93 points | \$90 | 30 cases imported | Red

Dark in color, offering ripe black cherry and a mélange of fresh herbs and flowers, with black olive and a hint of black licorice. Full-bodied and rich, with a concentrated core of fruit and chocolate and coffee notes. The big, round, fruit-coated tannins firm up slightly on the long, fruity finish. A well-constructed Merlot. Very tempting now. Best after 2009. *From Italy.*—J.C.

WINE SPECTATOR'S TASTINGS

Wine Spectator reviews more than 15,000 wines each year; our senior editors comprise the most experienced staff of professional wine tasters of any publication in the world. Each editor specializes in the wines of specific regions; their initials identify the taster of each wine reviewed.

We always taste wines blind, in our offices in San Francisco, Napa, New York and Tuscany, and in the vineyard regions of Europe. This is your guarantee that a wine's reputation or price does not influence its score. We score wines using our 100-point scale, explained below.

James Laube Senior editor, Napa
Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1983. Tasting beat: California

Kim Marcus Managing editor, New York
Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1988. Tasting beat:
Austria, Greece, Portugal, Southern France

Thomas Matthews Executive editor, New York
Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1988. Tasting beat:
New York, Spain

James Molesworth Senior editor, New York
Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1997. Tasting beat: Loire Valley, Rhône Valley, South Africa, South America

Bruce Sanderson Tasting director, New York
Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1993. Tasting beat: Alsace, Burgundy, Champagne, Germany

Harvey Steiman Editor at large, San Francisco
Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1983. Tasting beat:
Australia, New Zealand, Oregon, Washington

James Suckling European bureau chief, Italy
Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1981. Tasting beat: Bordeaux, Italy, Port

Wine Spectator's 100-Point Scale

95-100	Classic
90-94	Outstanding
85-89	Very good
80-84	Good
75-79	Mediocre
50-74	Not recommended

Tasting staff:

Jo Cooke (Veneto),
Tim Fish (California),
Alison Napjus (Alsace),
Daniel Sogg (New Zealand),
MaryAnn Worobiec (California)