

50 top Rhône reds £8-£18

Our expert panel has tasted through 120 reds from the northern and southern Rhône to bring you 50 of the best bargains available in the UK today – at prices that won't break the bank. Judge Matt Walls analyses the results

THE RHÔNE MIGHT be one of the classic wine regions of France, but it remains just as fruitful for the bargain hunter as for the serious collector. Rhône reds in particular have long had a reputation for delivering good value and this recent tasting of inexpensive reds largely confirmed it.

At this price level, the named village wines performed strongly and 'generally showed their individuality and quality', according to panel judge Joanna Simon. Cairanne performed particularly well – justifying its recent elevation from Côtes du Rhône-Villages to AC status – with Plan de Dieu and Massif d'Uchaux not far behind.

There were plenty of solid wines from southern Rhône crus like Vinsobres and Lirac. Though better known, Vacqueyras and Rasteau and were less reliable. Good-quality Châteauneuf-du-Pape has long sat outside this price bracket, and it seems that Gigondas, once seen as 'the poor man's Châteauneuf', is heading the same way.

One surprise was the quality of some of

the straight AC Côtes du Rhône. As you might expect at this most basic level, quality oscillated wildly; but there are some delicious wines if you know what to buy.

Little from the northern Rhône fell into our price bracket but the cheapest Crozes-Hermitage. Most that we tasted were from the tricky 2013 and 2014 vintages; quality was inconsistent, but a handful delivered.

The 2013s at this level in both northern and southern Rhône are drinking well, and in general are more successful than the '14s. The more robust 2012s were still going strong, but the '11s were past their best.

That we weren't tasting richer vintages may have been a blessing; we found few examples of jammy fruit or unbalanced alcohol. 'I was very impressed with the wines' freshness,' said *Decanter's* Christelle Guibert. 'Overall I felt the oak was very well managed, with only a few exceptions.'

Simon summed up our impressions well: 'Overall, it was a solid performance, especially in the price range.'

The tasters



Christelle Guibert
is *Decanter's* tastings director, having worked in wine for more than 20 years



Joanna Simon
is a judge at the Decanter World Wine Awards, and a wine and food writer who publishes the www.joannasimon.com website



Matt Walls
is a freelance wine writer and author with a special interest in the Rhône. He also blogs on www.mattwalls.co.uk

DECANTER BEST-VALUE RHÔNE

30 **Château Beaubois, Cuvée Expression,**

Costières de Nîmes 2013 88

£9.95 **The Flying Corkscrew**

Strawberry aromas dance over appealing savoury hints of smoke and pepper. Youthful, medium-bodied, harmonious palate offering a pure fruit expression with further delightful peppery notes. Impressive style and finesse.

Drink 2016-2018 **Alc** 13.5%

31 **Château Beaubois, Elegance, Costières de**

Nîmes 2013 88

£12.50 **The Flying Corkscrew**

Intriguing nose of spicy blackberries with gamey undertones and a touch of sweet red fruit which opens out to a full, ripe, rich, rounded palate packed with liquorice-spiced fruit and mouthcoating tannins. Decidedly southern Rhône Syrah with a nice rustic vibe. **Drink** 2016-2017 **Alc** 13.5%

