

Some wines from 2003 and 2004 vintage were bottled in January 2010 - available now - extremely limited



Henri Bonneau

Chateauneuf-du-Pape (Rhône)

Henri Bonneau's wines are among the most famous and the most expensive in the world and even if you are ready to spend the money they are not easy to get hold of. You might think that he must be a wealthy man. If he is you can't see it from his appearance or from his home or cellars. He seems to be a very modest and simple living man.

Henri Bonneau (born 1938) is 12th generation of a family of wine growers. He made his first vintage in 1956. His domaine covers only 6.5 ha., mainly planted with Grenache that counts for about 90% of the blend added with small amounts of Mourvedre, Counoise and Vaccarèse. He feels Syrah is not suited to Chateauneuf-du-Pape and he also distrusts new clones and does not like vines that are over 50 years old finding 30 to 50 years to be ideal.



Henri Bonneau decides for each vintage which cuvées he will make. Sometimes one or maybe up to four. His decision about cuvées is taken several years after the harvest - just before bottling. The blend of the four cuvées and the treatment in the cellars are not differing. With 13 different plots the largest is situated in La Crau with another situated in Grand Pierre beside Rayas and it's probably from these vineyards the best cuvées are selected. Bonneau also has 3.5 ha of vines in the Gard which goes to make his similarly styled vin de table "Les Rouliers" which is usually a blend of 2 vintages and which can also contain some de-classified Chateauneuf-du-Pape.

The vinification and ageing of the wines is in fact very simple. When the fermentation in cement tanks is finished the wine goes into a mixture of foudres, demi-muids and small old barrels from Burgundy. Here it stays until Bonneau finds it ready to be bottled - maybe after 6, 8 or 10 years. The grapes are rarely de-stemmed and the wines are fined with egg whites before bottling. Henri Bonneau's ageing cellars are from the 17th century and are legendary. You can't find a barrel there less than 10 years old and most of them are very ancient. When you walk around these tiny cellars you feel you are visiting a museum. This is classic, old-style Chateauneuf-du-Pape made as it was several hundred years ago.

What is the secret? "There are no secrets" says Bonneau, but yields are very low, about 10-12 hl./ha. Harvesting is typically very late. The maceration is not exaggerated. Maybe the explanation is that simple? When asked if there were any secrets or manipulations in the cellar he simply shrugged and replied "No - besides I need time to go fishing".

2003 Chateauneuf Du Pape Marie Beurrier *"Pungent red berry and cherry aromas perked up by a whiff of dried lavender. Lush, creamy, deeply concentrated raspberry and kirsch flavors are enlivened by juicy acidity and complicated by notes of floral pastilles and licorice. Showing a lot of exotic character now: Bonneau hinted that this may be bottled soon."* 93-94 **Steve Tanzer**

2004 Chateauneuf Du Pape Reserve Des Celestins *"Sexy, high-pitched aromas of black raspberry, cherry, sandalwood and dried flowers. Deeper cassis and tobacco qualities appear on the palate, adding power to the livelier red fruit flavors. Rich but fresh, finishing with excellent clarity and lingering minerality and florality. The barrels of 2004 Marie Beurrier that I tasted were in a cranky and reductive state and were impossible to assess with confidence."* 93-95 **Steve Tanzer**

"His top cuvee, the reserve des Celestins is majestic. His other cuvee, Marie Beurrier, is nearly as good but significantly less expensive." Parkers Wine Buyers Guide No 7

