

The Successful Collector – By Julian Hitner

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~ Syrah-Shiraz – the grape of champions ~

Saturday, October 1st, 2011

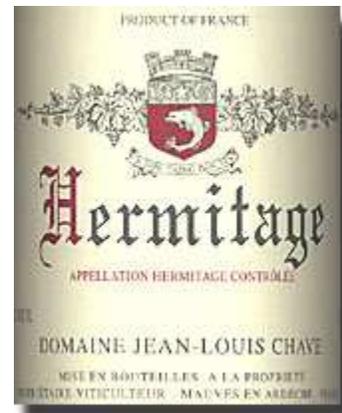
A grape like no other:

“The grape that’s easy to love.” Such, in a nutshell, is what Syrah-Shiraz is all about—that and a few other things. But when push comes to shove, there are few other red grapes worthy of the same adulation as this marvellous multi-named varietal. At home in virtually every warm-climate region in the world, though a few cooler places are also giving it a go, Syrah-Shiraz (the two names are the same) unquestionably ranks as one of the wine world’s greatest treasures.



For the record: Syrah-Shiraz does not originally hail from the (now-) pariah nation of Iran, which just so happens to contain a city named Shiraz. In fact, Syrah-Shiraz originally hails from the northern Rhône, where it is simply called ‘Syrah.’ From more serious oenophiles, its parents are Dureza (red) and Mondeuse Blanche. In this part of France, and this part of the Old World for that matter, there is no question that Syrah reaches its greatest zenith of quality, depth, intensity, and refinement. In the northern Rhône, this vigorous varietal is often best suited to being planted on relatively south-facing, well-drained, rockier soils. Though heat is seldom a problem, Syrah will also react to overly excessive temperatures by ripening too quickly. A few facts well worth remembering.

Top appellations? Think Côte-Rôtie, Hermitage, and Cornas. Throughout the very former, Syrah often takes on more fragrant, slightly smoky (even ‘roasted’) overtones. It is often softened with a small percentage of Viognier, which has the additional effects of adding to the fragrance and colour of the wine. In Hermitage, on the other hand, Syrah becomes much more powerful, concentrated, and extremely ageworthy. Taking very well to new French oak, as it does in Côte-Rôtie, young Hermitage will often display beguiling aromas of



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blackberries and fresh saddle leather, laced with an assortment of black fruits, subtle chocolate, and spice; as it ages, more gamy and cedary overtones tend to take over, yet the best wines will almost never lose their sense of richness, concentration, and raw power. As for Cornas, wines from this sometimes-underrated appellation tend to have more in common with Hermitage than collectors might think. Primary differences are namely greater ruggedness and more of a brooding attitude, and (perhaps) slightly less complexity. Either way, for top examples of Syrah, one need look no further than these three appellations.

In the southern Rhône, Syrah takes on more of a supplementary role than a predominant one. In the top appellations of Châteauneuf-du-Pape and Gigondas, it accompanies Grenache—along with a dollop of Mourvèdre—in the blend. In other parts of southern France, Syrah often plays a similar role, adding structure and perfume to the wine.

Outside of France, there is no shortage of places where this marvellous grape excels; yet few are more famous than the winegrowing regions of Australia. In this part of the world, the grape is almost always called ‘Shiraz,’ and tastes extremely different when compared to its counterparts in the Rhône. For those seeking sheer power, the Barossa Valley is your best bet. Here, centenarian vines provide for the most powerful, most concentrated, most alcoholic, and most flavourful Shiraz anywhere on earth. Oftentimes infused with eucalyptus, common aromas to watch out for, particularly in youthful examples, are rich dark (or milk) chocolate, black fruits, dark cherries, leather, vanilla, and spice. In the past, many Australian winemakers used to age Shiraz in American oak; though many are now switching to French in order to bring out fresher fruit characteristics and greater elegance in their wines.



Outside of Barossa, Shiraz can be found almost everywhere in Australia. In South Australia—where the Barossa Valley is located, by the way—McLaren Vale often yields ever-so-slightly less powerful, oftentimes more velvety examples; while the Clare Valley tends to offer finer fruit clarity and precision, if not wines of similar weight to Barossa. In Coonawarra, more mint- and mineral-

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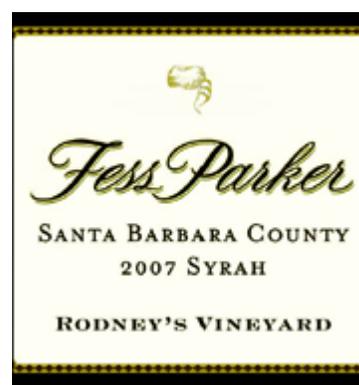
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laden, as well as less alcoholic, wines tend to be found. Switching states, in New South Wales, Hunter Valley Shiraz, while not as widely available as its South Australian colleagues, can be just as rich and extracted, though oftentimes offering just a bit more grace and silkiness. In Western Australia, Margaret River Shiraz is not to be missed: like Coonawarra, this is a much cooler climate, only with much greater clarity and forwardness of fruit, plus less concentration and alcohol—a much more restrained style, if you ask me. As one can see, the choices for Shiraz in Australia are endless; and there are a host of other regions I have not even mentioned!

After Australia, California comes next on the list of great New-World Syrah-Shiraz producers. For the most part, the grape goes by the name of 'Syrah,' with the best examples commonly bringing out the more white peppery, brambleberried, and 'forested' aromas of St-Joseph or Crozes-Hermitage in the northern Rhône, while at the same time tasting much riper, more supple, and assuredly higher in alcohol. And even then, the differences are easy to decipher: richer oak influence, more profound, purer varietal aromatics, and something of the reverse in terms of 'Old World reservedness.' Best regions for Californian Syrah? At present, most point to Paso Robles and Santa Barbara (and all of the sub-regions), yet Syrah can be found in various quantities throughout most winegrowing areas in California.



As for the rest of the world? In Washington State, excellent Syrah can also be had, tasting just as rich as its Californian counterparts, yet at the same time possessing more balanced levels of acidity; not to mention a sort-of 'coolness' that perhaps comes as a result of significant day/night-time conditions. In South America, Chile has also shown enormous potential for crafting some of the best bottlings in the Southern Hemisphere, outside of Australia. Though it hasn't even been twenty years since the first plantings were assembled in the Aconcagua Valley, Syrah has since taken Chile by storm, the finest examples brimming with intense varietal characters, while concurrently often featuring amazing overtones of crème de cassis, ripe flowers, and (or course)

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new oak influences. In Argentina, even more Syrah is grown, though it has been said that excessive yields have only made for a handful of notable examples thus far. In South Africa, where the grape is sometimes labelled 'Shiraz,' promising endeavours have also begun to emerge. And even New Zealand is beginning to get the hang of Syrah, particularly in Hawkes Bay, with the best bottlings, though still rather peppery, managing to impress with their overall fruit clarity, structure, and refinement of texture.

Ending our thoughts on this grape, even other places in Europe outside of France have shown remarkable results with 'Syrah,' as the grape is widely called in most regions. In Italy, premium—as well as some very cheap and downright lousy—examples can be found in most provinces. In Tuscany, up to twenty percent Syrah may be used in the Chianti blend; though Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot are more common international grapes. At the same time, there is nowadays no shortage of Syrah-dominant (or exclusive) wines to be bought, especially throughout Tuscany, many with personalities all of their own. And the rest of Europe? Let's just say there are plenty of other places not listed here. But what with the locales already mentioned, each with their own take on the grape, what does it matter?

[Click here for a few gems from the 1 October 2011 Vintages Release](#)

A few gems for collectors:

White Wines:

Chateau Musar White 1995, Bekaa Valley, Lebanon: Say I tried this at a blind tasting: chances are, I'd probably guess this was an old-style white Rioja, one of the most underrated of its type in the world. But no, this is the white wine of Chateau Musar, unquestionably the greatest winery in the entire Middle East—a little far from Iberia. Starbright, medium golden-orange in colour, the '95 exhibits marvellous, mature scents of (Fino-inspired) dried tangerine peel, baked lemon, sugarcane, nuts, and a beautiful hint of iodine (most attractive) and spice. Very complex and characterful, featuring superb dry fruit, balanced acidity, and a very poignant hint of rancio and nuts on the finish. Exemplary, white Rioja-inspired wine. One of the unique little gems of the winemaking world. Now-2014+. (Julian Hitner, *The Successful Collector*, May 2011)

91++ \$85.00 (#109421) Vintages Online Exclusives

Jean Féry & Fils 2008 Puligny-Montrachet Les Nosroyes AOC, Burgundy, France: Located just south of the Les Perrières Premier Cru vineyard, I have always been impressed with the quality of such single-vineyard (village) wines as Les Nosroyes in Puligny-Montrachet, with the very best of them performing (on the odd occasion) just as

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well as their more exalted counterparts. Starbright, pale greenish-straw in colour, the 2008 Jean Féry is finely toasted, revealing inviting scents of nudded-poached pears, intermixed with fresh lemon, yellow plums, mild orange zest, apricots, and minerals. Complex, with beautiful fruit, balanced acidity, and a decidedly 'rounded,' yet refined hint of nudded pears on the finish. A single-vineyard Puligny of really great personality, elegance, and overall complexity. Now-2016+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, June 2011)

91 \$52.95 (#243568) Vintages 23 July 2011 Release

Le G de Château Guiraud 2009, Bordeaux AOC, Bordeaux, France: Superb dry 'Sauternes,' it is something of a shame that the wine can only be labelled as 'Bordeaux AOC.' Starbright, pale-light straw-lime in colour, the 2009 Le G de Château Guiraud displays enticing, citrus-laced scents of lemon blossom infused with fresh gooseberries (not NZ-style), pears, lavender, minerals, and a lovely hint of almonds and orange zest. Complex, with beautiful, extremely sturdy fruit, crisp acidity, and a splendid, elegant hint of lemon and lavender on the finish. A white wine of great character and charm. The blend is typically 70% Sauvignon Blanc and 30% Sémillon. Now-2016++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, August 2011)

90 \$23.95 (#231878) Vintages 1 October 2011 Release

Schloss Reinhartshausen 2002 Riesling Spätlese, QmP Erbacher Schlossberg, Rheingau, Germany: Performing a good several notches above expectations, the 2002 Erbacher Schlossberg Riesling Spätlese, though already nine years old, behaves as if it was bottled only a few years ago. Starbright, light green in colour, the wine is still excitingly youthful, revealing beautiful, almost enveloping, scents of ripe, slightly kerosene-laden peaches, pears, lemon/lime, wild white flowers, and spice. Complex, offering superb fruit, balanced acidity, and a polished, pure hint of sweet, slightly citric peaches, pears, and mild kerosene on the finish. Truly impressive. Now-2017++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, August 2011)

90 \$19.95 (#129858) Vintages 1 October 2011 Release

Red Wines:

Tenuta dell' Ornellaia 2008 Ornellaia, Bolgheri Superiore DOC, Tuscany, Italy: Like Bordeaux, it seems to me that 2008 has been underrated in Tuscany, what with the outstanding Ornellaia serving as the latest example of how exceptional some of these wines have emerged. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour, the wine is stunningly intense for all to see, delivering marvellous, though somewhat 'compact,' aromas of mocha, toasted currants and plums, switching to coffeecake, kirsch, leather, vanilla wafers, spicebox, and charcoal. Extremely complex, boasting magnificent, powerful yet elegant fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and an incredible, lasting hint of smooth mocha, black plums, and coffeecake on the finish. From strength to strength, this is an unquestionably decadent, well-structured, and delectable wine. 54% Cabernet Sauvignon, 27% Merlot, 16% Cabernet Franc, and 3% Petit Verdot. Now-2025. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, August 2011)

94++ \$184.95 (#722470) Vintages 1 October 2011 Release

Domaine La Millière 2009 Vieilles Vignes, Châteauneuf-du-Pape AOC, Rhône, France: One of many examples of how brilliant the '09 vintage actually is, the Vieilles

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Vignes from Domaine La Millière is a deliciously, superlatively integrated Châteauneuf of which collectors ought to have no reservations purchasing. Brilliant, dark-opaque ruby in colour, the wine, while perhaps showing signs of shutting down for awhile (nothing a good decanting ought to solve), hints at a remarkable plethora of black raspberries and plums, plus leathery Provencal herbs that shortly give way to licorice, pain grille, crushed rocks, and traces of underbrush and spice. Very complex, with powerful, alluring fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a lingering, well-structured hint of 'dusty' black raspberries and plums on the finish. Excellent performance all around; built for a long life. Now-2022++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, August 2011)

93 \$47.95 (#63396) **Vintages 1 October 2011 Release**

Clos de Marquis 2008, St-Julien AOC, Bordeaux, France: Second wine of Léoville-Las Cases, a Second Growth of First Growth quality, the 2008 Clos de Marquis is an exemplary offering that manages to eclipse many a 'Grand Vin' in the 1885 Classification. Brilliant, dark-opaque ruby in colour (plus a touch of purple), the wine offers instinctively elegant aromas of dark, slightly fragrant mocha, Oreo cookies, currants, plums, blueberries, incense, crushed rocks, vanilla, and spice. Very complex, revealing excellent fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a confident, polished hint of blueberried plums (quite enticing) on the finish. A claret of real finesse, silkiness, and focus. 55% Cabernet Sauvignon, 41% Merlot, 3% Cabernet Franc, and 1% Petit Verdot. Now-2019++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, August 2011)

92++ \$64.00 (#137927) **Vintages 1 October 2011 Release**

Frank Family 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley, California: The first wine I have ever tasted from Frank Family, which is based out of southern Calistoga AVA, the 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon represents a superb introduction (for me) to their operation. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour, the wine is really finely toasted, delivering starkly alluring aromas of fresh mocha shavings, currants, blackberries, coffee ice cream, forest floor, and a hint of vanilla and spice. Very complex, with great forward fruit, firm tannins, milder acidity, and a deliciously sturdy yet abundant hint of mocha shavings and 'dusty' currants (laced with a little coffee ice cream) on the finish. Superbly executed, even bordering on elegance. Also contains 9% Merlot and 2% Petit Verdot. Now-2020+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, August 2011)

92+ \$46.95 (#246900) **Vintages 1 October 2011 Release**

Pensées de Lafleur 2006, Pomerol AOC, Bordeaux, France: The 'second wine' of the magnificent Château Lafleur, the '06 Pensées serves as a superlative introduction (or indication) as to what its bigger brother is all about: a wine of pure elegance, style, and ultimate allure. Brilliant, dark-opaque ruby in colour, the second wine offers terrifically elegant aromas of finely toasted oak that shortly gives way to dark strawberried currants, dried blackberries, dark chocolate shavings, kirsch, cherries, pencil lead, and a hint of earth and spice. Seriously complex, with truly beautiful, almost Left Bank-inspired fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and an elegant, poised hint of currants and graphite on the finish. Extraordinary claret of serious class, structure, and style. Almost makes my numerical score look conservative. 59% Merlot and 41% Cabernet Franc. Now-2017++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, April 2011)

92 \$129.00 (#566729) **Vintages Online Exclusives**

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Château Clinet 2006, Pomerol AOC, Bordeaux, France: One of a handful of Pomerol-based estates with the word 'Clinet' in the title, this particular château has always seemed to fall slightly under the radar; which really is surprising when taking into account how much it has improved over the past decade or so. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour, the '06 vintage is beautifully toasted, boasting enticing aromas of currants, blackberries, cherries, plums, charcoal (very subtle), kirsch, pain grille, mocha, and a hint of vanilla and spice. Very complex, offering excellent, smoother-styled fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a seriously satisfying hint of cherried currants on the finish. Superb Pomerol of great structure, style, and focus. 85% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 5% Cabernet Franc. Now-2018++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, April 2011)

91+ \$99.00 (#564575) Vintages Online Exclusives

Sparkling Wine:

Pol Roger Vintage 2000 Extra Cuvée de Réserve Blanc de Blancs Brut, Champagne, France: Fantastic Blanc de Blancs of incredible precision and charm, the 2000 Extra Cuvée de Réserve represents an unmistakable must-have for serious champagne collectors. Starbright, pale-light lime in colour, the wine displays marvellously tempting scents of fresh pears intermixed with brioche, white grapefruit, flowers, lemon, lime, pistachios, cream, and spice. Remarkably complex, basking in exceptional fruit, brilliant acidity, and a crisp, ultra-refined hint of lingering citrus pears and biscuits on the finish. Outstanding sparkling wine from Pol Roger, (likely) forever one of my favourite family-owned houses of the region. Now-2018++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, June 2011)

93+ \$94.95 (#96685) Vintages Online Exclusives

Fortified Wine:

Dow's 1997 Vintage Port, Douro DOC, Portugal: The final exceptional vintage of the twentieth century, Dow's wonderful '97 has patiently developed into a boisterous, abundant port that will leave collectors well satiated after just the first sip. Brilliant, opaque red currant in colour, it does seem to be maturing seamlessly, offering 'blackened' fruitcake, sweet plums, dates, gingerbread, shortbread, toffee, forest floor, and spice. Seriously complex, with excellent fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a crisp, multi-layered hint of raisiny black fruit on the finish. Outstandingly structured, elegant, and as finely tuned as a grand piano. Need I say more? Now-2030++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, August 2011)

94 \$44.95 (#236935) Vintages 1 October 2011 Release

Dessert Wines:

Château Doisy-Védrines 2007, Sauternes AOC, Bordeaux, France: Originally, the three Doisy (Védrines plus Daëne and Dubroca) were originally one estate, split up in the nineteenth century. And while Védrines might not be as famous as Daëne, there is no longer any question that the former nowadays almost equals the latter in quality. Starbright, light golden-yellow in colour, the '07 exhibits marvellously refined scents of nuted honeycomb, apricots, baked lemon, quince, maple bark, marzipan, and just a hint of spice. Very complex, offering extraordinary, vibrant sweet fruit, balanced acidity, and a

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terrific hint of honeycomb and lemon on the finish. Amazingly harmonious, elegant, and serene. Quite possibly the best Doisy-Védrines ever, and insanely great value for collectors. The vineyard is planted to 80% Sémillon, 17% Sauvignon Blanc, and 3% Muscadelle. Now-2030++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, August 2011)

94+ \$29.00 (#98418) Vintages 1 October 2011 Release

Château de Rayne-Vigneau 2007, Sauternes AOC, Bordeaux, France: One of the lesser-known estates of Premier Cru status, the 2007 Château de Rayne-Vigneau represents a truly great offering for Sauternes collectors. Starbright, light-medium golden-straw in colour, the wine presently shows a tempting floral, honeyed element at the outset that shortly gives way to alluring sweet apricots and lemon, nectarines, nuts, and spice. Very complex, with excellent sweet fruit, balanced acidity, and a remarkable hint of delicately natted honeysuckle on the finish. Superlative sticky of pure harmony, balance, and breed; though for slightly earlier drinking when compared to many of its counterparts. The vineyard is planted to 83% Sémillon, 15% Sauvignon Blanc, and 2% Muscadelle. Now-2025. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, August 2011)

92+ \$31.00 (#98236) Vintages 1 October 2011 Release