

Poised for success

Montpellier's Vinisud show in March was the first opportunity to taste a wide selection of 2006 Rhône Valley reds. The vintage had the potential disadvantage of coming immediately after the much vaunted 2005, which produced seriously concentrated, chunky reds, many for long-term keeping.

The benchmark in the north is always Cave de Tain l'Hermitage, which has produced a range of ripe, plump-fruited wines. In its vintage report the company said: "The reds display a particularly strong colour, primary red and black fruit aromas ... imbued with a balanced roundness and finely crafted tannic structure."

Summing up the Berry Bros &

Rudd en primeur offer, chairman Simon Berry agreed: "These wines have been a joy to taste, being softer and more attractive than the 2005s but with the depth of flavour and length to ensure ageing potential."

The good 2006 vintage conditions were replicated in the south too. According to Anthony Taylor, export manager at Gabriel Meffre in Gigondas, it was very sunny, but cool evenings kept the acidity high and tannins gentle. He said: "Not quite as big as 2005, but better acid/tannin balance, which will help to keep the colour. The wines are excellent for restaurants – mid-term wines. Balance is the key."

David Longfield

Vineyards in Cornas



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Wine highlights

Cave de Tain

☆☆☆☆ Cornas 2006 Arènes Sauvages

Very fragrant nose. Spiced plum, garrigue herbs, baked gammon and fresh leather and spearmint. Elegantly powerful with gentle, ripe tannin through to a lengthy finish.

☆☆☆☆ Crozes-Hermitage 2006 Les Hauts de Fiefs

Invitingly scented nose with fragrant baked plums. Big and bold. Plenty of black fruit, juicy balancing acid and a layer of ripe tannin. Liquorice and clove on a creamy finish. A cracker, tasting well above its appellation.

☆☆☆☆ Hermitage 2006

Headly, spicy aromas. Fresh crushed berries with lavender, rosemary, oregano and woodsmoke. Densely packed, full of creamy, spice-laden blackcurrant, plum, damson and tobacco leaf. Needs a few years to settle fully.

Delas Frères

☆☆☆☆ St-Joseph 2006 Les Challoys

A big hit of black cherry, plum and blackcurrant on the nose with tomato and herbs. Robust and generous, bags of ripe black fruit with keen acidity. Very moreish.

Alain Graillot

☆☆☆☆ Crozes-Hermitage 2006

Perfumed lavender, rosemary aromas. Big and weighty, spice-packed with plum and fig. Beefy tannins too – lots of potential for five to eight years.

Domaine Durand

☆☆☆☆ St-Joseph 2006 Lautaret

Intensely herbal aromas with sweet plum and blackcurrant compote. Full-on, a mouthful of black fruit, tightly packed but juicy with an insistent finish. Great stuff.

☆☆☆☆ Cornas 2006 Empreintes

Deep, dark and smoky on the nose. Full, rich black cherry/ blackcurrant to taste with smoky wood; dark fruit and spice on an impressive finish that doesn't overwhelm.

Yves Cuilleron

☆☆☆☆ Côte-Rôtie 2006 Bassenon

Very fragrant nose, inviting plum, fig, saffron and cinnamon spice. Gorgeously rich, creamy texture with bags of spicy, pure plum fruit. Subtle, balanced and complex with perfectly weighted tannic support. Superb.

☆☆☆☆ Côte-Rôtie 2006 Madinière

Very creamy, berry-rich aromas with soft herbal hints. Full, with heftier tannin than the Bassenon. Pure plum and blackberry fruit with gentle acidity leading to a fruit-focused finish. Very stylish.

☆☆☆☆ Cornas 2006 Les Vires

Really earthy aromas. Deep, baked black fruits and plum. Dense and minerally on the palate with plentiful but rounded and balanced tannin. Keep for at least five years before drinking.

Domaine Christophe Pichon

☆☆☆☆ Côte-Rôtie 2006 La Comtesse en Côte

(Cask sample) Simply delicious, creamy, spice-laden complexity of garrigue herbs and lavender, plum, fig and black cherry.

Ferraton Père & Fils

☆☆☆☆ St-Joseph 2006 La Source

(Pre-bottling sample) Concentrated black berry fruits on the nose. Deep, rich blackberry, blackcurrant flavours. Full and fruit-focused.

☆☆☆☆ Ermitage 2006 Les Dionnières

(Barrel sample) Voluptuous, creamy/herbal plum and blackberry nose. Plenty going on, with black fruits, plum liquorice, mixed herbs. Complex, with very fresh acidity and great length.

Alain Vogé

☆☆☆☆ Cornas 2006 Vieilles Vignes

(Barrel sample) Creamy, pure blackberry fruit; lightly herbal. Dense and voluptuous palate with plum and blackcurrant, spices and black pepper all wrapped in crunchy tannin, and cut by juicy acidity. Very appealing

Xavier Vins

☆☆☆☆ Gigondas 2006 Xavier Vins

Deep in colour. Rich cassis nose with capsicum and clove. Dense cassis fruit with plummy spice mid-palate. Evenly weighted with a plump, fruity finish. Needs time

Ratings ☆☆☆ good ☆☆☆☆ very good ☆☆☆☆☆ excellent ☆☆☆☆☆☆ exceptional