

Les Wineries du Rhône



2018 Edition
Photographs © Anne Loubet

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**Étienne Maffre,
UMVR President
and Managing Director of
Maison Gabriel Meffre**

INTRODUCTION —

AWARENESS AND INVOLVEMENT

“When I accepted the presidency of the UMVR (Union des Maisons de Vins du Rhône) in November 2014, my aims were twofold. First of all, I wanted to raise awareness of what it means to be a Rhône Valley négociant; then I hoped to increase our family’s involvement in the management of the local wine industry. It was a very fine line between self-centredness and altruism!

I feel there’s a lot more we could do to explain to the public exactly who we are. Until now, our voice has only been heard through our Maisons de Négoces and via our various brands.

It’s time to stand together

We held a number of brainstorming sessions with various négociants who were happy to discuss their work, including the things that really drive them. Quite a few specific themes came to light; we have put these together to create a collective identity, which we are proud to introduce to you today.

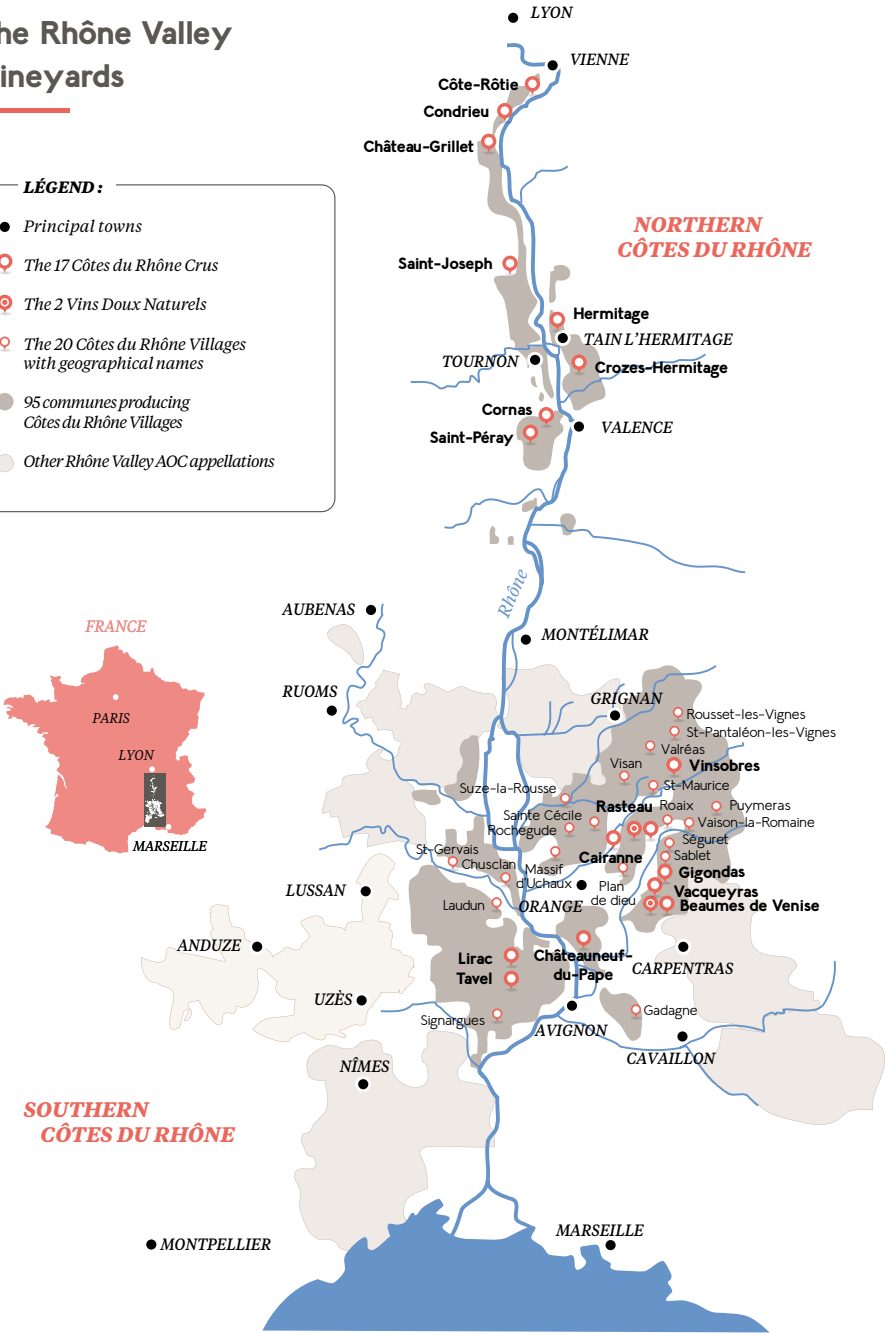
We’d like to invite you to join us on a journey through the *Rhône Wineries*, to learn about their values and meet the men who champion them. I say men advisedly, as we don’t have any women – yet. But then, nobody’s perfect...”

Étienne Maffre

The Rhône Valley Vineyards

LÉGENDE :

- Principal towns
- The 17 Côtes du Rhône Crus
- The 2 Vins Doux Naturels
- The 20 Côtes du Rhône Villages with geographical names
- 95 communes producing Côtes du Rhône Villages
- Other Rhône Valley AOC appellations



PART 1 —

THE RHÔNE WINERIES AND THEIR UNIQUE IDENTITY

Sometimes it can be difficult to describe oneself.

When *négoce* – or merchant – doesn't quite go far enough, and 'Maison de Vins' is too ambiguous, there's only one solution: find a unique new name to express this unique concept.

Welcome to the Rhône Wineries!

A *Rhône Winery* is a bridge, with **one end in the vineyards and the other in the marketplace. This is where collective value is created**; it's the link between an outstanding terroir and the consumer, between the upstream and the downstream. This is where we make our wine – and know how to sell it.

The *Rhône Wineries* embody

- Love for the terroir,
- Passion for the product,
- A deep understanding of the consumer,
- A desire to guide and share.

It's quite a commitment. But in the Rhône Valley, it's a commitment we promise to keep.

One title covering a multitude of jobs

The 'négociant vinificateur' - the merchant/winemaker – buys grapes from the growers, and uses them to make wine which he subsequently sells. He may also make wine on behalf of a producer.

The 'négociant vracqueur' - the bulk merchant – buys, stocks, blends and markets bulk wines. He has a very close working relationship with the cooperative wineries, from which he can ship his chosen wines directly to his distribution clients.

The 'négociant éleveur et embouteilleur' matures and bottles wines, and is in direct contact with parties both up and down the chain. He carefully selects wines from producers or other négociants, matures them in his own cellars, bottles or otherwise packages them and sells them on.

The 'négociant producteur' is a bit of everything. He produces the wines, ferments, matures and bottles them. Almost all Rhône Valley négociants fall into this category, producing a greater or lesser proportion of their own supplies.

Maison Brotte Family Wisdom

First it was Charles, then Jean-Pierre; now Laurent holds the reins at Maison Brotte in Châteauneuf, but he will be passing them to Thibault and Benoit in the future. That makes 4 generations of the same family running the same business. Charles Brotte, grandfather and founder of the Winery, was also one of the founding fathers of the Union des Maisons de Vins du Rhône – or at least of one of its predecessors.

Now, nearly 80 years later, grandson Laurent Brotte owns the Winery and has managed it since 1998. He continues to branch out, finding new markets, growing the range, acquiring new vineyards and increasing capacity. Being the head of a family-run Winery comes with a host of responsibilities!

Every *Rhône Winery* has its own unique spirit. **The Rhône Valley is France's 2nd largest AOP area; the vineyards are up to 2,000 years old, yet still as vibrant as a youngster whose star is on the rise.** Wines are rounded and supple, fruity and appealing, and reliably easy-going. The Crus are always a sound choice, while the regional appellations come close behind, champing at the bit.

We're serious – but we don't take ourselves too seriously.

From haute cuisine to the humble bistro (and vice versa!) there's something here for everyone. For us, nobody is too small to matter. Our wines are varied and accessible.

Rhône working practices are based on simplicity and proximity. And the values underlying those practices remain largely unchanged. We work hard and we play hard.

We realise that the quality of a product is just as much the result of team performance as of the outstanding terroir - a terroir that will still be here long after we are gone. So we should do as much as possible with what we've been given – for ourselves, for others and for the future. These are the principles on which three generations of the Guigal family - Etienne, Marcel and now Philippe - built up one of the most famous Wine Houses in France, known as much for the quality of its wines as for its firm foundations in the Rhône Valley.

Being a *Rhône Winery* means getting to know a little more about your product each day. And according to Jacques Desvernois, Technical Director of Maison Paul Jaboulet Aîné, it also means 'meticulous, precise vinification.' Jacques Grange of Maison Delas Frères, explains that 'we should aim for good balance, year after year. Nothing excessive, just character and integrity. Our top priority is to cultivate sincerity in our wines.'

And if your vineyard knowledge isn't quite up to par, you need to build it up. When he arrived to head up Marrenon, Jean-Louis Piton insisted on getting to know the 4,500 hectares of vineyard as if they were a plot of no more than 10, and on assessing the potential of every plot. **The observation, tastings and experimentation required produce a gargantuan amount of data to store and analyse.** Isn't that a bit disheartening? Far from it!

**Samuel
Montgermont,
Managing Director
of Maison
Les Grandes Serres
and Vice President
of UMVR**



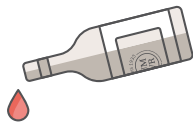
58 businesses
1,770 JOBS



€1 billion in turnover
31% EXPORT



90% SMEs
60% CERTIFIED ORGANIC



**27 million bottles
of Rhône Valley AOP/IGP wines
are sold by the UMVR**



47%
of total
AOP sales

34%
directly
by producers

19% by négociants
outside the Rhône region
or outside France

‘When we talk about wine, we talk about more than vinification techniques,’ says Nicolas Jaboulet, Manager of Maison et Domaines les Alexandrins and General Secretary of the UMVR. We mean terroir, including soils (geology, pedology and hydrology), climate (macroclimate as well as microclimate and year), and the human factor – tradition and skill. And the Rhône Valley terroir is a very special one indeed.

Jacques Grange, Technical Director of Maison Delas is delighted to explain that the ‘Rhône

climate is eminently suited to viticulture – responsible, sustainable viticulture.’

And with the Rhône Valley’s 24 centuries of wine-growing heritage – combined, of course, with a touch of modernity – we can well believe it. Following the trail blazed by the Rhône’s iconic appellations - Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Tavel, Gigondas, Vacqueyras, Hermitage, Condrieu and, Saint-Joseph – there are villages such as Rasteau, Cairanne, Vinsobres and Beaumes de Venise, to name but a few, which are beginning to make a name for themselves.

‘We talk about wine when actually, we want to sit round the table with our friends. When we’re wondering what to drink with soupe au pistou or fish soup, grilled sea-bream or rack of lamb, we don’t mean should we have beer or pastis, no matter how excellent they are; we just know we’re talking about a glass of wine. But which wine should we choose? Wine is like art – it’s so complex that it could easily become an obsession.’



Jean-Luc Colombo,
Managing Director
Vins Jean-Luc Colombo

The abundance and diversity of wines in this region means we can build up a structured range to cater to all tastes and pair with all types of cuisine, and we can be proud to promote their quality of flavour.

The men and women working in the Rhône Wineries have an almost physical relationship with their terroirs.

Just listening to them talk about it is quite an experience. 'I've known the hill at L'Hermitage since I was a little boy,'

says Nicolas Jaboulet. 'I could never imagine NOT making wine here. The vins de garde are nothing short of magnificent.' His enthusiasm is clearly not a put-up job – and neither is his energy in letting us know!

Knowledge gives a greater capacity to introduce change. 'Innovation is part of our tradition,' says Guy Sarton du Jonchay, Managing Director of Maison Vidal Fleury and Vice President of UMVR. The Rhône's prestigious AOPs provide a very strong support base – but relying on that support just isn't enough. **The Wineries reveal their own terroirs – then bring them to life.** Once the push has been made, the Rhône Valley brands extend, enhance and enrich the consumer experience.

No-one rests on their laurels here. They don't have the time – but more importantly, they simply don't want to.

The **entrepreneurial spirit** is clear to see, along with the ability to seek out innovation. We witness it every day. So whether it's a question of becoming Technical Director at the Rhône Valley's historic Paul Jaboulet Ainé Winery before the age of 40 (Jacques Devernois), continuing a family adventure started in 1929 (Pierre Amadieu), or starting completely from scratch (Nicolas Jaboulet, Maison et Domaines les Alexandrins), **the Rhône Wineries seamlessly combine tradition with modernity.**

In short, this is the best of both worlds.

PART 2 —

CREATING VALUE

A Winery is a place for dialogue and for sharing ideas; but most importantly, it's a place to drive growth, for everyone's benefit. Because unlike wineries in the English-speaking world, the *Rhône Wineries consider themselves to be 'as close to the terroir as possible' – as underlined by UMVR Vice-President Samuel Montgermont*, whose Maison Grandes Serres stands right at the heart of the vineyards it serves – Cairanne, Gigondas and Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

Linking the production process to consumer expectation.

'Our role,' says Christophe Chagnot, Manager of Castel Rhône in Saint-Priest, 'the very core of our work, is to be the link between consumer expectation and actual production. It's very much a joint effort, and involves every stage of the production process – soils, pruning, replanting, yield control, blending ... and every stage brings its own challenges, requiring careful handling, attentive listening and effective coordination. If that all-important bond is made, it creates value, and that benefits us all.'

The best ambassadors for the *Rhône Wineries* are the brands and signature wines. They are created, then carefully

Grand Marrenon, showcasing the potential of Luberon

The Marrenon vineyards grow entirely within the bounds of the Luberon Regional Nature Park; Grand Marrenon is one of a unique range of single vineyard wines, ambassadors for the very best terroirs.

With its stony, limestone-rich soils, old Syrah vines – slow to ripen but perfect when they do – and altitudes of 300m or more, Marrenon have created a diverse range of wines with one important common feature: an elegant style with restrained power and fresh flavours.

The Grand Marrenon Luberon AOC brand has a turnover of €1.5 million, and annual growth of 11%. Its 2015 was recently voted top French wine in Germany by German magazine *Weinwirtschaft*, and second most popular wine across all countries. Distribution is through the traditional French networks. Grand Marrenon is exported to around 30 countries.

custom-shaped and honed, building up long-lasting, sustainable relationships with the consumer; because before we can put a name to what we're tasting – we have to recognise what it is.

'Try tasting ten Xavier wines, one after the other. What you have is a perfect crescendo of appellations – in my opinion, the true expression of terroir. They all have that special touch; a similar style comes through in all the wines. That's what the consumer likes to see,' **says Quentin Heller, Sales Director at Xavier Wines.** **'Brand consistency is what we're looking for, a consistently high quality model, over and over again.'**

Brands – both a promise and a commitment.

'I'm often asked whether our wines are vins de négoce, created by a négociant, or whether they're made by the producer,' says Michel Chapoutier, Chief Executive of Maison Chapoutier and President of UMVIN. 'I always say they're Chapoutier wines. It wouldn't occur to me to ask Louis Vuitton whether my bag was made by an employee or a subcontractor; from the moment that signature goes on the bottle, we are putting our names to a product to which we've been committed from the start.'

And whatever our winegrowers bring to our Winery brands, they get back many times over. **Individual brands drive the growth of the collective brands, i.e. the AOPs.**

Héritages: where work becomes a pleasure

Héritages is a range of premium wines from Ogier, selected from terroirs in both the northern and southern Rhône Valley. The range includes 14 appellations.

Partners in the Héritages programme are chosen for the location of their vineyards and their wine-growing skills. Each has to comply with a strict set of specifications, and all are monitored throughout the year. 'Our aim,' explains Managing Director François Miquel, 'is to be as consistent as possible, which we achieve by returning to the same producers year after year.'

The results of this collaborative project are clear to see. Maison Ogier's flagship Côtes du Rhône Héritages makes 50% of its sales on the export market, to over 50 countries, including Sweden, Canada and Japan.

PORTRAIT GALLERY

See pp 26-27 for key



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Samuel Montgermont is involved in promoting awareness of Cairanne, a relatively recent Cru (2016). Further south, it's the same story for Ogier and François Miquel, who declares that 'Lirac is a true gem.' And that's how relationships are made here in the Rhône Valley. Reciprocity and collective engagement are everything. No man is an island; anyone in it just for themselves, or for personal glory, is soon left behind.

François Miquel should know. His role of building a 70-partnership network taking in every one of the Rhône terroirs, and securing multiyear contracts ranging from 3 years for Châteauneuf-du-Pape to 10 years for Côtes du Rhône is no easy task. But he does it for all our benefits.

The *Rhône Wineries* create, maintain and revive jobs, both directly and indirectly, ensuring the sustainability of the Rhône Valley's own unique skills set.



'We're looking for good texture, to make a true table wine – in the noblest sense of the word'.



Jacques Desvernois,
Technical Director
Maison
Paul Jaboulet Aîné

Parallèle 45, an iconic brand

Parallèle 45 is one of the stars of the Côtes du Rhône, named for the 45th parallel north which runs just 2 km south of the Maison Paul Jaboulet Aîné cellars. The line is marked by a roadside monument in the village of Pont de l'Isère, proclaiming, 'Ici commence le midi' – the south starts here.

The wine has been sold under the same name since the early 1950s. Grapes are meticulously chosen from wine-growing partners; the blend comprises 60% Grenache and 40 % Syrah, and is partly matured in truncated cone-shaped oak vats.

Parallèle 45 clearly shows the precision and rigour Jaboulet bring to their Côtes du Rhône - a typical northern Rhône style, intensely coloured with good acidity and powerful, well-structured tannins; available in brasseries, restaurants and specialist wine retailers across France and in 88 countries worldwide.



Thomas Giubbi (right), Managing Director, Maison Vignobles & Compagnie and UMVR treasurer; Nicolas Rager, Agricultural Engineer and Oenologist.

Vignobles & Compagnie, a sense of commitment

In 2017, Vignobles & Compagnie adopted a new visual style to give a clearer sense of the spirit behind the winery, which has been committed to protecting and promoting the Rhône Valley terroirs for over fifty years.

Part of the basis for their new positioning is the Winery's commitment to its wine-growers. When you work closely with 20 domaines, some for over 25 years, you can't help but build up a relationship...

According to Thomas Giubbi, Managing Director since the end of 2011, one of the major challenges is to ensure sustainability for individual businesses. Four of the Winery's partner domaines have been taken over by the owners' children – possible only because they have been able to form a clear picture going forward; they know they can make a living from what the vines produce, with enough left over to invest in new plant material and winemaking equipment.

PART 3 —

LIVING (AND WORKING) TOGETHER

The relationship between a winery and its partners is very close, built on daily communication. Guy Sarton du Jonchay of Maison Vidal Fleury is a keen amateur sociologist and has a particular interest in how wine influences communities. In Côte-Rôtie, for example, growers often help each other out by tending one another's plots, ensuring no-one has to fight their way up the steep slopes overlooking the Rhône more often than necessary. This gives a particular kind of social structure, built up as a result of winegrowing.

The Rhône Winery – a resource for producers.

Knowledge and skills can be shared. Expert agricultural engineers and oenologists monitor processes and advise producers; the challenge, says Thomas Giubbi, is to 'respond to market expectations while still deferring to terroir.'

And little by little, we get bigger. Relationships become closer. 'We like our winegrowers to feel comfortable with us - as if they were at home. They can call us for advice at any time; it becomes a genuine two-way process.'

Gabriel Meffre, a 'green' winery

In 2015, the Winery was audited as part of AFAQ 26000, to address Corporate Social Responsibility. It scored 3 out of 4 - 'exemplary'.

'1995-2005 brought structure to the wine companies,' explains Etienne Maffre, Managing Director and UMVR President. Official standards were put in place to ensure everyone did as they said and said as they did. But nowadays we have to look at each business from an overall perspective. It's no longer just about production; in fact it's no longer just about us!

The challenge now is to develop an ethical approach towards all our environments, be they economic, geographical, social or natural: this means responsible, sustainable, Terra Vitis-accredited agriculture and good water management, but also parity for our workforce, continuing professional development and even eco-design.

Frédéric Lavau knows what he means. Every year he provides a harvest meal for 357 wine-growers, sometimes several hundred kilometres apart. A meeting of minds!

The Rhône wineries have a close bond with their environment. Their function – and their impact – goes way beyond their professional interests and partners. They take on a much wider role, which comes



with understanding the bigger picture; they are conscious of their responsibility to protect the outstanding natural surroundings – which is, after all, what makes the whole business possible.

Even here, they have an advantage: the Mistral wind which regularly blows through the region reduces the need for agricultural inputs. In fact this is what led Maison Chapoutier to create

the region's oldest biodynamic domaine here, the largest such domaine in France.

So the Rhône Wineries work as a team. Ok, but why?

Working for others – that's a given. But working together? Now that's a totally different kind of challenge. **'Stronger together'** is Frédéric Lavau's family motto,



Pierre Amadiou (left), President and Managing Director of Maison Amadiou, with his uncle Claude (behind) and cousins Henri-Claude (right) and Jean-Marie.

'The wine market is undergoing a global restructuring. The UMVR helps us to understand consumer needs, and we regulate production together. It's important that we put our collective experiences of the market to good use, in the interests of the whole industry.'

and he stands firmly behind it, pooling resources to prepare for problems before they arise, and identifying growth drivers before they fade into oblivion. There's no secret formula: just work hand in hand, with complete transparency. To be honest, it can be more difficult than it looks; but to win together, we have to strive together. Anyone who doesn't pull their weight doesn't last very long. Because here, people talk.



Marcel (right) and Philippe Guigal, President and Managing Director of Maison E. Guigal

PART 4 —

GROWING AND SUPPORTING GROWTH

In a *Rhône Winery*, the consumer experience goes beyond just a mouthful of wine. Wineries aim to give customers an all-round experience, to help them 'live the land'.

Wine tourism – not just hot air.

Nicolas Nicolas Jaboulet is very enthusiastic. 'The people who come here are hooked for life. They hire electric bikes; we take them up to l'Hermitage, and then down again on the Crozes side. A two hour

Guigal, opening up to the world

The Guigal family are passionate about the northern Rhône. After all, they helped to put it on the map, highlighting Côte-Rôtie as part of its prestigious past. By acquiring Domaine de Nalys in Châteauneuf-du-Pape, the family has also gained a foothold in the southern Rhône - along with a host of new challenges.

Already on the cards: a new wine tourism facility in Ampuis, including a wine-tasting centre to complement the family's 3 ha of subterranean cellars. A second project brings together the family's two great passions – wine and history. Having recently acquired Maison de la Gabelle in Condrieu, a 16th century gem built in the Renaissance style and listed as a historical monument, they now plan to turn it into a top-of-the-range boutique hotel dedicated to hospitality and the art of good living.

bike ride, a bottle in each pannier – it's an experience they'll never forget'.

In France, wine is seen as an experience good: in a 2016 study by Ifop/Vin & Société, 7 out of 10 French respondents aged 18 to 30 considered wine to be part of their lifestyle, although fewer than 3 out of 10 felt confident talking about it. Should we be despondent? No, we should see this as our inspiration!

**Xavier Vignon (à d.)
et Quentin Heller,
Président
et Directeur
Commercial
de la Maison
Xavier Vins**



Towards a better understanding of the wines.

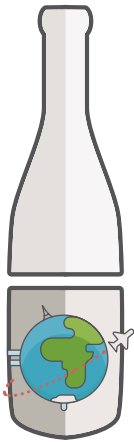
The next challenge for the *Rhône Wineries* is to bridge the gap between the region's most dynamic crus (Côte-Rôtie, Hermitage, Condrieu and Châteauneuf) and the younger, less experienced consumer.

Contrary to what one may think, young wine-drinkers are twice as likely to turn to their family and friends for wine advice as they are to look on social media. There's a very real need for good entry-level ranges. The whole topic of wine is perceived to be rather complex, so **education has an important part to play - and we need clarity from the Rhône Winery brands. It's up to us to show the way!**

Xavier Vins, an ambassador for the southern Rhône

How does one go about starting a *Rhône Winery* from scratch? When in the early days you have to balance your laptop on your lap due to lack of space? 'You have to do an awful lot with very little,' smiles Quentin Heller, Sales Director of Xavier Vins.

The style of the wines – highly structured, rich and dry, with no residual sugar – was brought to the pinnacle of perfection in Xavier Vignon's garage. Xavier is an oenologist with roots in the southern Rhône; he also worked for a time in Champagne. By 2016, the initial 600 – 1,000 bottles of garage-produced wine a year had grown to almost a million bottles, distributed to 200 clients in 25 countries.



The Rhône Wineries export 1/3 of total production



**For 40%, the figures are reversed:
In 23 Wineries, export sales make up 2/3 of turnover**

**Christophe Chagnot,
Managing Director
of Castel Rhône at
Saint-Priest**



Castel - personalising production

Christophe Chagnot manages the Castel Group's wine production centre at Saint-Priest. The facility illustrates just how interested France's leading négociant business is in the Rhône Valley, and the export potential of its wines. 30% of sales are currently made to destinations outside France, and Christophe aims to raise this figure to 50%. Castel are active in 148 countries, with China topping the list. Ahead of neighbouring markets such as Scandinavia and Benelux, Christophe has his sights set on Brazil, Vietnam and Russia.

So what is the strategy? Castel aim to develop brands according to market, by tweaking flavours (within the bounds of oenological possibility) and learning more about local regulations. 37 staff work in marketing at a national level.

Good reputation and positive responses worldwide.

On average, 31% of winery production is exported; however, only **around 20 wineries account for 50% of export turnover.**

Maison Brotte, Gabriel Meffre, Grandes Serres and Les Vins Colombo are all famous names outside France, known for their prestigious brands as well as easy-drinking wines to fit with the current zeitgeist, both made with a skilful touch.

This is the core of the *Rhône Wineries*' mission: connecting with customers worldwide and identifying their tastes; then taking Rhône wines out of their home region and distributing them to as wide an audience as possible.

Brexit (what's left of it), coupled with the rise of Italian, Australian and other New World wines, has created an unstable, competitive environment resulting in a drop in market share for France. The fall in the value of sterling has driven up the price of French wines, which have been replaced at market-entry level notably by their Chilean counterparts. **'This is why', explains Christophe Chagnot of the Castel Group, 'even though we shouldn't back out of traditional markets, we need to diversify, and look to emerging markets as we prepare for the future.'**

There is no shortage of customers waiting in the wings. In countries where markets are still considered to be immature, the middle classes have grown enormously. Re-structuring the

ranges – as we talked about on a national level – is just as important here, helping to boost recognition of Rhône wines abroad.

There are plenty of positive indicators. Production has been rationalised for the better; one or two new crus appear every 4 or 5 years; real gems are being developed as we speak, and a significant amount of investment has already been approved. So we can all look to the future with courage and optimism.

CONCLUSION —

COLLECTIVE VALUE(S)

The *Rhône Wineries* bring together jobs and people, men and women, missions and objectives, around their outstanding terroirs. The brands demonstrate their commitment and determination **to create value – for themselves, their land, and those who live there.**

Empty words? No, that's not the Rhône way. Because by placing the lowest common denominator – in this case man – at the centre of all they do, they have already succeeded. They have **linked the pleasure we get from a very special product – wine – to the success of an entire industry.**

THE RHÔNE WINERIES

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