

Wine, etc.: A sampler of quality, affordable Cotes du Rhone reds | COMMENTARY

By Tom Marquardt and Patrick Darr
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We know how much our readers love values — wines that surpass their price in quality — so, this week we focus on the red wines of the Cotes du Rhone. It is a region that produces easy-to-find wine ranging from \$15 to a still moderate \$40.

One of the oldest wine regions in the world, the vast Cotes du Rhone Appellation d'Origine Controlee straddles the Rhone River. Here winemakers can choose from 21 different grape varieties to make red, white and rosé. Syrah, grenache and mourvedre dominate the red wines. Farther to the north, the region relies more on syrah to make much more concentrated and complex wine.

The simple Cotes du Rhones are fruity, accessible and versatile food matches that are priced under \$20. Next up the ladder in quality are the Cotes du Rhone Villages that represent 95 communes. Grenache must be at least 50% of the blend. This AOC is surpassed by a Cotes du Rhone Villages named after a village — Rasteau being our favorite. Finally, the best is reserved for the crus classification. Seventeen crus are able to add their village to the label — but not necessarily “Cotes du Rhone.” Good examples of these wines are Cornas, Chateauneuf-du-Pape, Cote Rotie, Crozes-Hermitage, Gigondas, Saint-Joseph and Vacqueyras. These wines can range from \$30 to \$300.

We often point new wine enthusiasts to this region because the wines are so great for the money. You can sip them, serve them with pizza and burgers, bring them to a party and even age them for a few years, although most of them are best drunk young.

Here are several we recently enjoyed:

E. Guigal Cotes du Rhone 2017 (\$18). We've followed this wine for decades. Always a great buy, it bursts with fresh black fruit on the nose and adds spice notes to the flavors. Elegant, yet complex enough to pit against pasta, pizza, burgers and similar food. Syrah dominates the blend.

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