

## Northern Rhône 2020: full report and top-scoring wines

With drought and heat a main concern throughout the growing period, an early harvest has led to surprisingly fresh, albeit potentially slightly less ageworthy, wines. Look out for both reds and whites from the Northern Rhône in 2020.



The main features of the year were drought, heat and a very early harvest. Thankfully there were heavy rains in October, November and December 2019 which created reserves for the vines to draw on.

There were also welcome rains in May and June that helped sustain the plants. The rest of the year, however, was exceptionally dry. The vineyards roused early thanks to warm weather in March, but mercifully there were no spring frosts here. They held on to this lead throughout the year, resulting in the earliest vintage since 2003.

It was steadily hot throughout the year, but there were no fierce heat spikes like in 2019. This is one reason Bastien Jolivet of Domaine Jolivet thinks the wines are so balanced and harmonious: ‘there were no excesses,’ he says.

Laurent Fayolle believes another factor is occasional rain showers that provided just enough to preserve the vines' foliage. Some growers did report localised water stress, however, leading to blockages in maturity, particularly in Crozes-Hermitage and with younger vines. This might partly explain a lack of depth in some wines.

Aside from these factors, there were no major climatic events or stresses to deal with. 'Everything was done by June,' says Jean-Louis Chave. Grapes had to be gathered promptly due to the ongoing heat, but there was no pressure from rain or rot. Yields were only slightly lower than average and nobody I spoke to reported problems with fermentation.

**The results are 'much better than I thought they were going to be,' says Philippe Guigal, 'we were surprised by the wines, we thought they'd be more flabby, but they have good energy.' They aren't high in acidity, but their light textures give them a sense of freshness and drinkability.**

It's difficult to pick out top performing appellations, as they all performed consistently well. But after a disappointing 2018 and 2019 relative to other Northern Rhône appellations, I found a lot to enjoy in Cornas and Saint-Péray in 2020. Whites are as strong as reds this year.



### E Guigal, Ex-Voto, Hermitage, Rhône, 2020

Fresh and dense, displaying great substance and depth. Robust oak work here and it's very tannic; a powerful, driving wine of great size and grandeur. Long and complete, it will swallow its oak in time I suspect. At the start of its 40 months in new oak barriques. Old vines from Les Bessards, Les Greffieux, L'Ermite and Les Murets.

Drinking Window 2032 - 2046

Points 97