

France, Southern Rhône: Châteauneuf du Pape (2020, 2021 & 2022)

By JOE CZERWINSKI Sep 29, 2023

This long-overdue report, to be concluded in two weeks' time, covers **three vintages and includes hundreds of wines and dozens of producer visits**. It includes final, in-the-bottle reviews of the 2020 red wines, a mix of in-the-bottle and pre-bottling reviews of the 2021 reds, and some preliminary looks at the 2022 reds from tank and/or barrel. It also includes reviews of the 2021 and 2022 white wines, mostly from bottle.

Most of the wines reviewed here were tasted under blind conditions at the Fédération des Syndicats de Châteauneuf-du-Pape, while others were tasted during visits to the producers.

Bookkeeping aside, **this is a trio of interesting vintages to consider together, with two quite strong years sandwiched around a more difficult one**. Yet 2021, which engendered many long faces among vignerons during September of that year, has turned out surprisingly well at many estates. And 2022 is not without its bad news.

Going back to **2020**, it was a hot, dry season, marked by ripe fruit and perhaps a bit less concentration than in 2019. Many of the red wines are exceptionally suave and easy to drink, although there may be some that are simply too facile. Most are ready to drink at this point, and they should provide pleasure for at least the next decade (or two, in the case of the longest-lived examples).

The next year, **2021**, was marked by a couple of notable weather events. The first was a hard frost across the region on the night of April 7-8, which damaged many young vine shoots. Some plots were spared, but overall, such as at Clos des Papes, for example, losses were about 40%. The rest of the growing season progressed smoothly, without any great heat waves or storms, until the harvest period, which was punctuated by several episodes of rain. Harvest timing became critical to avoid dilution or crop loss. In general, whites fared better than reds, but there are a number of successes, and it is by no means a complete washout.

Taking a first look at the **2022** wines, it was a return to warm, dry conditions. Berries were small. There were some worries about the vines shutting down due to lack of rainfall, but cool nights seemed to help, and then a strong storm system struck on August 14. For most of the appellation, it provided a welcome respite and provided the vines enough water to carry them through the rest of the ripening period. For vignerons with parcels in la Crau and neighboring lieux-dits, this storm—reported by some sources as a tornado—spelled disaster, hitting the vines with hail of such size and ferocity that vines were seriously damaged and virtually entire crops were lost. Among the hardest hit, Domaine du Vieux Télégraphe did not make its flagship wine, La Crau, in 2022.

