



Henri Bonneau

Chateauneuf-du-Pape (Rhône)

Henri Bonneau's wines are among the most famous and the most expensive in the world though even if you are ready to spend the money they are not easy to get hold of. In a world now seeking for wines of authenticity these are quite simply some of the last great traditionally styled wines made in the world, produced in the same artisanal though uncompromising way his father and grandfather made these wines.

Henri Bonneau (born 1938) is 12th generation of a family of wine growers. He made his first vintage in 1956. His domaine covers only 6.5 ha., mainly planted with Grenache that counts for about 90% of the blend added with small amounts of Mourvedre, Counoise and Vaccarèse. He feels Syrah is not suited to Chateauneuf-du-Pape and he also distrusts new clones and does not like vines that are over 50 years old finding 30 to 50 years to be ideal.



Up to 5 different red wines are produced here depending on the vintage and the evolution of the wines. His decision about cuvées is taken several years after the harvest - just before bottling. The blend of the four Chateauneuf cuvées and the treatment in the cellars are similar. With 13 different plots the largest is situated in La Crau with another situated in Grand Pierre beside Rayas and it's probably from these vineyards the best cuvées are selected. Bonneau also has 3.5 ha of vines in the Gard which goes to make his similarly styled vin de France "Les Rouliers" which is usually a blend of 2 vintages and which can also contain some de-classified Chateauneuf-du-Pape.

The vinification and ageing of the wines is in fact very simple. When the fermentation in cement tanks is finished the wine goes into a mixture of foudres, demi-muids and small old barrels from Burgundy. Here it stays until Bonneau finds it ready to be bottled - maybe after 4, 6, 8 or 10 years. The grapes are rarely de-stemmed and the wines are fined with egg whites before bottling. Henri Bonneau's ageing cellars are from the 17th century and are legendary. You can't find a barrel there less than 10 years old and most of them are very ancient. When you walk around his tiny cellar it is not hard to imagine that nothing much has changed there for hundreds of years.

What is the secret? "There are no secrets" says Bonneau, but yields are very low, about 10-12 hl./ha. Harvesting is typically very late. The maceration is not exaggerated and there is no artifice in the winemaking, simply long slow ageing to allow the wines to show their best before releasing them when they are ready to be enjoyed. Maybe the explanation is that simple? When asked if there were any secrets or manipulations in the cellar he simply shrugged and replied "No - besides I need time to go fishing".

"Les Rouliers" Vin de France *Made from a vineyard worked by his son Marcel in the Gard (west of Chateauneuf on the western side of the Rhône River) and sometimes contains declassified Châteauneuf from his own vineyards. Has all the hallmarks of great Châteauneuf with astonishing freshness, depth and complexity with a floral spice lift that belies its age. This is a wine that most Chateauneuf producers would be happy to call their "regular" Chateauneuf, however this is anything but "regular".*

Chateauneuf Du Pape Marie Beurrier *"Monsieur Bonneau's Cuvée Marie Beurrier bottling is a decidedly deeper and more powerful wine than his regular Châteauneuf du Pape, and plays the role of La Tâche in the Bonneau cellars to his Réserve des Célestins' Romanée-Conti (of course within the strapping and powerful idiom of Châteauneuf). To my palate this is the most classic expression of Châteauneuf du Pape magic in the Bonneau cellars."* John Gilman – View from the cellar

Chateauneuf Du Pape Reserve Des Celestins *"Henri Bonneau's Réserve des Célestins is his greatest wine, and unequivocally the single greatest wine made in Châteauneuf du Pape today. In the old days it had its rivals, when Jacques Reynaud still was alive and making his magical elixirs at Château Rayas, or when Château de Beaucastel, Vieux Telegraphe, Château Fortia or Château la Nerthe were experiencing their salad days of greatest achievement. But today the Bonneau Réserve des Célestins sits alone at the summit, a lonely beacon of brilliant terroir and impeccable winemaking."* John Gilman – View from the cellar

"His top cuvee, the reserve des Celestins is majestic. His other cuvee, Marie Beurrier, is nearly as good but significantly less expensive." Parkers Wine Buyers Guide No 7

