



2009 Clos Saint-Jean Chateauneuf du Pape la Combe des Fous

A Proprietary Blend Dry Red Table wine from Chateauneuf du Pape, Southern Rhone, Rhone, France

Review by Robert Parker
Wine Advocate # 197 (Oct 2011)
Rating: 96
Drink 2011 - 2031
Cost: \$100-\$187

More restrained as well as less intense and powerful, the dense purple-hued 2009 Chateauneuf du Pape La Combe des Fous offers elegant kirsch notes. While it is not quite up to the level of the 2005, 2007 or 2010, it is a rich, well proportioned effort offering notes of pen ink, raspberries, blueberries, sweet cherries and spring flowers. Full-bodied as well as polished and focused (especially for a 2009), it should drink nicely for 15-20 years. If a prize were given to the Rhone Valley estate that had improved the most in the shortest period of time, it would undoubtedly go to that of Pascal and Vincent Maurel, who took over Clos Saint-Jean after their father passed away in 2002. Since then, they have made a succession of world-class wines that are out of this world. One of the largest estates in Chateauneuf du Pape, Clos Saint-Jean has an amazing number of old vine parcels in its 112+ acres (significant holdings in La Crau, in the eastern part of the appellation). No doubt the hiring of renowned oenologist Philippe Cambie has also increased the quality of these offerings. The 2010 Clos Saint-Jean Chateauneuf du Papes are phenomenal wines. The Maurel brothers believe they are as profound as the 2007s, and it is hard to disagree. Production is down considerably because of the loss of 25-30% of the Grenache crop due to poor flowering, but the levels of concentration, freshness and focus of these wines are remarkable. Moreover, the 2009s from bottle performed at the upper end of the ranges I had given them last year – always a sign of a terrific winery dedicated to high quality. Importers: Eric Solomon, European Cellars, Charlotte, NC; tel. (704) 358-1565 and Paul M. Young, Los Angeles, CA; tel. (323) 222-2003

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The 2009 Chateauneuf du Pape La Combe des Fous (which essentially translates into the “swale of

fools”) is produced from 13 hectares of vines situated primarily in La Crau. It is an interesting blend of 60% Grenache, as much as 15-20% Vaccarese, lots of Cinsault and some Syrah. Tasting the 2009 made me think it is more in the style of the virtually perfect 2005 than the other perfect cuvee, the 2007, which is a bolder, more flamboyant, fleshier, exuberant style of wine. The inky/purple-colored 2009 reveals glorious aromas of spring flowers, raspberries, blackberries, white chocolate, truffles and garrigue. The extraordinary perfume is followed by a sensationally concentrated, full-bodied wine with magnificent texture, structure, purity and equilibrium. It is another brilliant wine that should drink well for 20+ years. (Not yet released) Pascal and Vincent Maurel appear to have achieved great success in both 2008 and 2009 (and don't forget they produced three perfect wines in 2007). To say they are on a qualitative hot streak is the understatement of the wine world. This is a large estate of over 100 acres with extensive holdings in some of the finest sectors of Chateauneuf du Pape, especially in La Crau and high on the plateau north of the village. The Maurels had the foresight to bring in the gifted consultant, Philippe Cambie, when they took over in 2002 after their father's passing. 2002 was the worst year in Chateauneuf du Pape since 1932 because of the historic flooding that region experienced. Clos Saint-Jean's first successes were from 2003 when they produced some of the best wines of the vintage. They have followed those successes with wines that are in the top 10-12 Chateauneufs of the vintage every year – no easy task given the young generation that is pushing the qualitative envelope further and further with each new vintage. Everything is made with extraordinary attention to detail and a new winery has been built on the lower slopes of the village, behind Clos du Mont Olivet and Vieux Donjon. They now have the capacity to control temperature and have more space than they did in their old facility at the entrance to the village. A caveat about my comments on the 2009s. These wines had still not completely finished fermentation at the time of my visit. They were under 3 grams per liter of residual sugar, so in that sense they were essentially dry, but they possessed some CO2. That being said, there is no doubt that Clos Saint-Jean has probably produced the wines of the vintage across the board in 2009. Yields were preposterously low with many of the parcels coming in at 15 hectoliters per hectare or less, which works out to about one ton of fruit per acre – financial suicide! This estate can produce as many as five cuvees of Chateauneuf du Pape in great vintages. Kudos to Pascal and Vincent Maurel as well as their brilliant consultant, Philippe Cambie. Importers: Eric Solomon, European Cellars, Charlotte, NC; tel. (704) 358-1565 and Paul M. Young, Los Angeles, CA; tel. (323) 222-2003
