

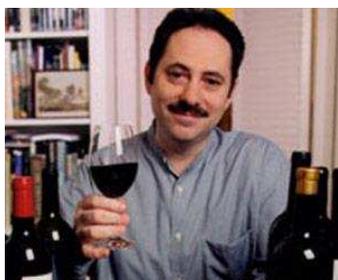


DELAS

Grands Vins de la Vallée du Rhône

By Josh Reynolds

Claire Darnaud, who grew up just outside Tournon and Saint-Jean-de-Muzols and has been working alongside winemaker Jacques Grange since 2009, walked me through this year's set of wines as well as some examples from the outstanding 2010 vintage. "Two thousand twelve made wines that are expressive young," she told me, adding that one aspect she likes of this vintage is that "the sites are expressive of themselves without a lot of tannin to work through, like 2010 and 2005, or strong ripeness that can obscure the fruit, as with 2009 and 2003." Unfortunately production was down, yet again, which has put pressure on Delas' traditional markets, even as Asia, for one example, continues to increase its demand for northern Rhone wines. The good news about 2011 is the wines' vivacity, Darnaud told me, attributing that trait to the cool summer that helped the fruit maintain acid levels and slowed down the buildup of sugar. That said, Darnaud believes that with rare exception the wines are meant to be drunk sooner rather than later, "for their fresh fruit. They mostly don't have the concentration to age for a really long time."



Stephen D. Tanzer is editor and publisher of the critically acclaimed bimonthly *International Wine Cellar*, an independent journal read by wine professionals and other wine lovers in all 50 states and 34 countries, and the first American wine periodical to be translated into French and Japanese.

2012 Delas Freres Crozes-Hermitage Blanc Les Launes – 90pts

(\$20) (roughly 85% marsanne and 15% roussanne): Light gold. Highly aromatic scents of orange, melon and musky pear skin. Sappy and energetic in the mouth, offering lively citrus and exotic fruit flavors and a zesty underpinning of chalky minerals. Round and seamless on the clinging finish, which leaves behind refreshingly bitter citrus zest notes.

2012 Delas Freres Hermitage Blanc Domaine des Tourettes – 92pts

Green-tinged yellow. Fresh pear and orange on the intensely perfumed nose, with ginger, honeysuckle and smoky mineral notes adding lift. Spicy, penetrating and pure, offering vibrant orchard and citrus fruit flavors and suggestions of fresh fig and bitter quinine. Shows impressive vivacity on the finish, with the orange and smoke notes repeating.

2012 Delas Freres Crozes-Hermitage Les Launes – 89-91pts

(\$20) Bright purple. Smoky cherry and dark berry aromas are brightened by fresh flowers and minerals. Cassis and blueberry flavors coat the palate, with a peppery nuance adding lift and bite. The mineral quality comes back on the finish, adding an incisive edge and extending the dark berry fruit.

2012 Delas Freres Crozes-Hermitage Domaine des Grands Chemins – 90-92pts

(\$30) Bright purple. Complex, highly aromatic scents of red berries, smoky minerals, fresh flowers and Asian spices. Perfumed and alluringly sweet in the mouth, with a velvety texture and sweet raspberry and floral pastille flavors that become spicier with air. There's something pinot-like here that's very appealing. Juicy acidity gives energy and bite to the tangy, gently tannic, focused finish. The excellent 2010 bottling of this wine is evolving at a snail's pace, by the way.

2012 Delas Freres Crozes-Hermitage Le Clos – 91-93pts

(\$55) Inky ruby. Pungent aromas of dried cherry, blackberry and fresh herbs, with a suave floral nuance building in the glass. Juicy, concentrated and expansive, offering smoky, mineral-laced cherry-cola and licorice flavors and a hint of rose pastille. Silky tannins give shape to the clinging, spicy finish, which shows excellent clarity and thrust. Quite suave for a Crozes.

2012 Delas Freres Saint-Joseph Les Challeys – 90-92pts

Bright purple. Raspberry, cherry-cola and Asian spice aromas show very good clarity and a lively touch of candied violet. Bright and incisive on the palate, offering energetic red and dark berry liqueur flavors and a sneaky hint of smoky bacon. Finishes very long and sweet, with impressive floral character, noteworthy energy and smooth, slow-building tannins.

2012 Delas Freres Saint-Joseph Francois de Tournon – 91-93pts

(\$38) Inky ruby. Explosive aromas of dark berry preserves, cherry-cola, vanilla and fresh flowers, with intense smoke and mineral accents. Very complex on the palate, with penetrating black raspberry and bitter cherry flavors becoming sweeter with air. Finishes zesty and very long, with youthfully firm tannins contributing shape and grip. The fruit for this wine is sourced from granite-rich vineyards in Tournon, Saint-Jean-de-Muzols, Mauves and Vion, which are all prime sites in the appellation.

2012 Delas Freres Saint-Joseph Sainte-Epine – 91-93pts

(\$76) Inky purple. The nose displays intense, smoke-laced cherry and cassis scents, along with suggestions of olive, black pepper and Indian spices. Silky and sweet on entry, then firmer in the mid-palate, offering chewy dark fruit flavors lifted by juicy acidity. Closes extremely long and spicy, with mounting tannins and a touch of bitter chocolate. "This wine is always strong in tannins and will age almost as slowly as an Hermitage," according to co-winemaker Claire Darnaud.

2012 Delas Freres Cornas Chante Perdrix – 90-92pts

(\$50) Bright purple. Intensely perfumed aromas of cassis, black raspberry, violet and smoky minerals, with a sexy floral topnote. Spicy dark berry and floral pastille flavors pick up smokiness with air and show impressive clarity and depth. The floral finish features building sweetness, soft tannins and a persistent smoky nuance. A lot of this fruit came from the Reynard vineyard, one of the best in Cornas. Incidentally, the 2010 version of this wine is surprisingly open and seamless right now, showing supple tannins and broad, deeply pitched dark fruit and floral character. It has the stuffing to age gracefully but is surprisingly approachable right now.

2012 Delas Freres Cote-Rotie Seigneur de Maugiron – 91-93pts

(\$67) Bright purple. Smoky, perfumed scents of fresh blackberry, cassis and violet pastille, with a zesty mineral overtone. Juicy dark berry flavors are appealingly sweet and open-knit, with notes of licorice and star anise emerging with aeration. Pliant, sappy and focused on the gently tannic, persistent finish, with the mineral note strongly repeating.

2012 Delas Freres Cote-Rotie La Landonne – 92-94pts

(\$280) Vivid purple. A hugely perfumed bouquet evokes smoky blackberry, blueberry, potpourri and cola. Seamless and sweet, offering energetic dark berry and licorice flavors and an exotic floral pastille quality. Gains richness with air and finishes very long, with lingering sweetness, floral character and smooth tannins. Powerful but balanced and lively, even elegant.

2012 Delas Freres Hermitage Marquise de la Tourette – 92-94pts

Dark purple. Dark berry preserves, cherry pit, licorice and peppery spices on the mineral-laced nose. Densely packed and lively, offering pliant blackcurrant and bitter cherry flavors that are sweetened by notes of mocha and vanilla. Chewy tannins contribute grip to the finish, which clings with impressive tenacity and clarity.

2012 Delas Freres Hermitage Les Bessards - 93-95pts

(\$236) Bright purple. Highly expressive aromas and flavors of cherry compote, blackberry, smoky minerals and licorice, along with a sexy floral topnote. Displays impressive intensity to its black and blue fruit and violet pastille flavors, with juicy acidity providing lift. Finishes firmly tannic and strikingly long, with an emphatic jolt of minerality and excellent clarity.

2011 Delas Freres Saint-Joseph Francois de Tournon -90pts

(\$35) Brilliant ruby. Deeply pitched dark berry and violet pastille aromas are brightened by Asian spices and mineral qualities that gain strength with air. At once ripe and lively on the palate, offering juicy black raspberry and bitter cherry flavors and a touch of cola. Shows very good clarity and appealing sweetness on the finish, which is framed by silky tannins. This wine is delicious right now.

2011 Delas Freres Saint-Joseph Sainte-Epine – 91pts

(\$75) Opaque ruby. Dark berry preserves, violet and exotic spices on the highly aromatic nose. Lush and expansive in the mouth, offering energetic black and blue fruit flavors and a touch of bitter chocolate. The spicy note comes back strong on the finish, where velvety tannins fold smoothly into the wine's fruit.

2011 Delas Freres Cote-Rotie Seigneur de Maugiron – 91pts

(\$75) Inky ruby. A wild, intensely perfumed bouquet evokes candied red fruits, potpourri and peppery spices. Juicy, penetrating, subtly sweet raspberry and cherry-cola flavors show impressive vivacity and pick up a smoky nuance with air. Silky tannins give shape to the finish, with the spice and raspberry notes echoing. (I was also able to retaste the 2010 version of this bottling, which is really showing its structure right now. There's no way I'd broach a bottle anytime soon as there's simply not a lot going on today except deep, brooding, primary dark fruit.)

2011 Delas Freres Hermitage Domaine des Tourettes – 91pts

(\$100) Inky ruby. Intense black and blue fruit aromas are complemented by notes of cola, roasted coffee and violet. Stains the palate with intense blueberry, floral pastille and anise flavors sweetened by a touch of mocha. Supple tannins build on the finish, which lingers with impressive tenacity and appealing floral character. Pretty elegant for an Hermitage, and approachable now.

2011 Delas Freres Hermitage Les Bessards – 92pts

(\$230) Opaque ruby. Potent blackberry, cherry-cola, licorice and mineral scents pick up a peppery quality with aeration, as well as notes of dark chocolate and pungent herbs. Shows excellent depth and energy in the mouth, offering sweet dark fruit and mocha flavors that are underscored and lifted by tangy acidity. The floral and mineral notes energize the incisive finish, which features supple tannins and a touch of fruitcake. (The 2010 Bessards is, unsurprisingly, still a baby, but it's showing a suave, seamless texture and deep, sweet dark fruit character that is surprisingly user-friendly for such a young Hermitage. Don't be deceived, though, as this wine deserves many more years of patience.)