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The 'Cornas' license plate in Domaine Clape's cave. See page 3.

THE RARE WINE CO.

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Miracle on the Rhône

The Great 2009s and 2010s Showcase Cornas' Renaissance

For a millennium, Cornas was one of France's viticultural jewels, its wines expressing themselves powerfully, yet achieving a remarkable silkiness with age.

But in the twentieth century, Cornas nearly vanished, its young men preferring industrial jobs to working its rocky slopes by hand. By the 1950s, just 120 souls remained in the town, with mostly old men, who knew no other life, left to work the vineyards.

Yet, none of these *vignerons* had the chance to bottle and sell their own wine. Instead, each autumn, growers as great as Auguste Clape, Noël Verset, Marcel Juge and René Balthazar watched as the trucks of Jaboulet, Chapoutier and countless other *negociants* took away their juice to make anonymous village blends.

Salvation

But inspired by Clape and Verset—who cautiously began bottling in the 1950s—the next generation of Cornas has achieved nearly universal domaine-bottling and a reputation for their wines rivaling that of Côte Rôtie and Hermitage. And they did it with unusual loyalty to tradition, rejecting many of the changes that have diluted other important wine cultures.

As a consequence, we can still find purely traditional Cornas of the highest level—a marriage of *terroirs*, vinified with whole clusters and raised in old barrels. But even the more modern examples—of individual sites, some new wood, but little or no destemming—are among the most authentic surviving expressions of northern Rhône Syrah *terroir* and history.

Small is Beautiful

The greatness of Cornas begins, of course, with the place itself. As with other great Syrah sites, the underlying soil is granite. But what sets Cornas apart is its sheltered location, within a steeply rising, terraced amphitheater behind the town.

This protects Cornas' vines from the fierce, cooling winds that flow down the Rhône corridor,



This passing of the torch from father to son is not only a key to keeping Cornas' traditions alive, but according to Rhône authority John Livingstone-Learmonth, “is evident in the wine community in a way that exists nowhere else in the northern Rhône.”

allowing full, even ripening and developing the wine's powerful character and velvety texture.

The planted area is tiny; at 104 hectares, it is about the size of Bordeaux's Château Lafite. The land is also too rocky to use machines; so the vines must be worked by hand. Both factors contribute to the rugged individualism of the growers, the tiny number of domaines and the overall miniscule production.

From Father to Son

Cornas' renaissance is finally coming to the world's attention, thanks to the huge press for the brilliant 2009s and 2010s. But it started in the 1980s, when the success of a handful of

older growers—including Clape, Verset, Michel and Juge—gave confidence to the town's sons, allowing them to return home from well-paying jobs elsewhere.

First among these was Pierre-Marie Clape, the son of the iconic Auguste. Pierre-Marie left his job teaching mechanical engineering in 1989 to begin his two-decade “apprenticeship” with Auguste—reminiscent of Maria-Teresa Mascarello's years of learning from Bartolo. Today, Clape's Cornas is greater than ever, while sacrificing none of its quintessentially traditional character.

Franck Balthazar, too, returned from a non-wine career abroad to take up the classic methods of his father René in 2002. Today, his wines—including Chaillot from century-old vines acquired from Noël Verset—are among Cornas' best and most traditional.

Alain Verset—the son of Noël's brother Louis—took charge of his father's tiny domaine in 1994, and maintains his elder's rigorously classic approach while keeping his full-time day job, as the estate is too small to support his family.

This passing of the torch from father to son is not only a key to keeping Cornas' traditions alive, but according to Rhône authority John Livingstone-Learmonth, “is evident in the wine community in a way that exists nowhere else in the northern Rhône.” ▶

Cornas

The Renaissance of a Viticultural Treasure

► New Talent, Old Ideas

Newcomers have also learned the classic methods from the old-school growers. But while they may augment tradition with their own ideas, the best of these seek as pure an expression of Cornas as possible.

First among these is **Thierry Allemand** who, having worked with both Noël Verset and Joseph Michel beginning in 1981, is idolized for the otherworldly complexity and purity of his Cornas.

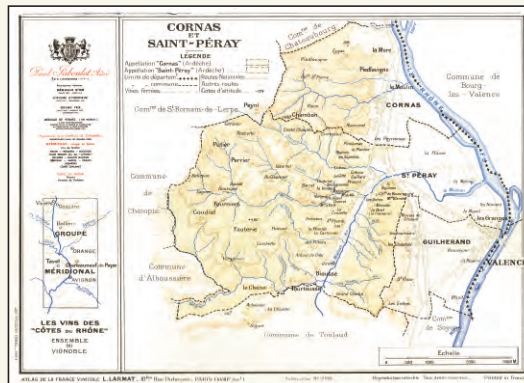
Another in this camp is **Dumien-Serette's Gilbert Serrette**, a proud practitioner of the traditional methods learned from his father-in-law Henri Dumien.

After Serrette, today's best Cornas growers include the traditional **Domaine Lionnet** and **Guillaume Gilles**; **Vincent Paris** (Robert Michel's nephew, who marries classic and modern ideas); and **Courbis** and **Voge**, whose methods lean more towards modern.


Clape and Verset

The importance of Auguste Clape's and Noël Verset's presence in Cornas as champions of the old school cannot be overstated. Like Giacomo Conterno and Mauro Mascarello in Barolo, both Clape and Verset have inspired younger men to believe in traditional winemaking.

To understand how profound their influence has been, one has only to look at Côte Rôtie and Hermitage, where Guigal's and Chapoutier's success has shifted the local ethos much farther towards non-indigenous winemaking.



Larmat's map of Cornas in the 1940s.

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Hallowed Sites

Apart from the human factor, the key to Cornas' magical blend of power and elegance is its granite subsoil—Syrah's ideal partner—and its sheltered location. Within the Cornas amphitheater the vineyards can be divided into three sections, largely by soil.

The **northern sector's** granite contains a rare limestone seam that gives the wines freshness and a firm tannic structure. The top *climat* here is **Chaillot**, from which Allemand and Balthazar make superb examples.

The **central sector** is the core granite area with some clay, enjoying prime southfacing exposures. Here are some of Cornas' most famous sites yielding its fullest, richest wines: **Reynards** (Allemand), **Sabarotte** (Courbis, now working Verset's vines) and **Geynale** (formerly Robert Michel, now Paris and Gilles).

The **southern sector** is where the granite is most decomposed and rich, resulting in perfumed wines with supple tannins; the best *cru* here is **Patou** (Dumien-Serette).

The Bottom Line

All three sectors are capable of producing great Cornas, particularly when artisanally made from the fruit of the ancient *La Petite Syrah* clone of Syrah that dominates in the best sites.

In the past, most winemakers chose to blend various *climats* (and even sectors), believing that the whole was greater than the sum of the parts. Today, of course, site-specific bottlings have become far more prevalent. Yet, these wines too can express the beauty and soul of Cornas with profound clarity. ■

Auguste & Pierre-Marie Clape

The Quintessence of Traditional Cornas



Pierre-Marie Clape

With the Greatest Generation of traditional European winemakers now almost all gone, we are thankful for the emergence of young winemakers determined to uphold the traditions of their appellation.

Even better are those rare cases where a great domaine smoothly segues from one generation to the next. Of the latter there is no better example today than Cornas' great Auguste Clape. Here, the 86-year-old *vigneron* now has his son Pierre-Marie and grandson Olivier seamlessly taking over from him.

From Strength to Strength

Clape wines have never been better than they are today—and it's not just because of the arrival of a new generation. The vineyards are older and they've benefitted from the addition of century-old Petite Syrah vines purchased from Noël Verset. Today, no one in France has a more impressive palette of *crus* with which to work than does Clape.

And finally, there has been the creation of lesser *cuvées*—Cornas Renaissance, Côtes du Rhône and Vin des Amis—that allow Clape's flagship Cornas to have even greater depth, complexity and *typicité* than in the past.



Clape Cornas is for anyone who prizes red wine of transcendent nuance and texture, as well as an immutable sense of place.

The winemaking today is of course largely unchanged. The family harvests only when the fruit is fully ripe, and the old-vine fruit is not destemmed. The primary, whole-cluster fermentation takes place in concrete tanks for six to seven days, followed by three to seven days of maceration to extract fine tannins.

After malolactic, aging is in old *demi-muid* and *pièces*; there is no new oak. As Auguste Clape told author John Livingstone-Learmonth, "as for aging casks, here you need neutral wood with no tannin in it. The Syrah must breathe."

Clape's classic Cornas is today the quintessential example of this ancient wine. Precisely blended from five to six *cuvées* of the oldest vines in the best sites, the backbone is very old vines of Petite Syrah—the old clone considered by many to be the "true" Syrah. Located in Reynards, La Côte and Sabarotte, they create a stunningly deep and complex wine that will develop for decades.

Since 1998, a second Cornas has also been bottled: Renaissance. It is made from 20- to 25-year-old vines on the domaine's best slopes as well as older vines from the lower slopes. An earlier-maturing wine than the classique, it can develop for two decades.

Clape Cornas is for anyone who prizes red wine of transcendent nuance and texture, as well as an immutable sense of place.

2010 Clape Cornas*\$189.95 bottle

Parker: "100 rating ... abundant notes of charcoal, licorice, blackberries and blueberries intermixed with a hint of scorched earth ... a tour de force in what Syrah can achieve in this hallowed appellation."

Livingstone-Learmonth: "★★★★★ has the balance of 1990, but is a bit richer"

2009 Clape Cornas\$149.95 bottle \$395 magnum

Parker: "99 rating ... As close to perfect as a Cornas can be ... blueberry liqueur, blackberries, charcoal, incense ... seamless, full-bodied, exquisitely pure ... the most remarkable Cornas I have ever tasted."

Livingstone-Learmonth: "★★★★★ a tempting richness; it has the sun of the south"

2007 Cornas	89.95	2004 Cornas	95.00	1994 Cornas	145.00
2006 Cornas	99.95	1999 Cornas	225.00	1991 Cornas	475.00
2005 Cornas	139.95	1998 Cornas	195.00	1989 Cornas	435.00

Franck Balthazar

Blazing a Traditionalist Trail for Cornas' Future Generations

A key to Cornas' renaissance has been the return of several young men who've had successful careers elsewhere, yet have answered the siren song of the steep granite slopes to carry on their parent's work.

One of the top growers in this movement is Franck Balthazar, who left his engineering career in 2002 to take up the classic farming and winemaking methods of his father René. Ten years later, Balthazar is making some of the most expressive, and rigorously traditional, wines in Cornas.

A key to the superb quality and character of Balthazar's Cornas are the domaine's great holdings, including a 1914 planting of the ancient Petite Syrah clone, acquired from Noël Verset in Chaillot, and half-century old vines in Mazards.

Balthazar also has created terraces and planted vines on previously overgrown land on the steep Légre slope above Sabarotte—demonstrating the *Cornasien* willingness to develop a backbreaking site for the reward of the aromas and flavors that only Syrah grown here can express.

This is in keeping with Franck's humility. While visiting his tiny *cave* last fall we were struck by his contentment with a life working on Cornas' steep slopes, while making wine as it had been made in the past. Fame and fortune is of little interest. As he told us, "The greatest potential compensation for me is that people may appreciate my wines."

Everything Balthazar does with the glorious Chaillot fruit is old-school: whole-cluster fermentation in concrete with indigenous yeasts, manual cap punching, aging in neutral *demi-muid* and no filtration.

For his other Cornas, **Cuvée Casimir Balthazar**, composed of the fruit from the new plantings and some 50-year-old Mazards, Balthazar partially destems to make a cuvée with a silkier texture than in the more structured Chaillot.

Both wines have classic Cornas character in spades, winning praise from Josh Raynolds and John Livingstone-Learmonth for the pure expression of their *terroirs*. And now with a decade's experience under his belt, Balthazar's 2009s and 2010s are arguably his finest wines to date.

2009 Balthazar Cornas Chaillot\$47.95 bottle

Josh Raynolds: "94 rating. A powerfully scented bouquet ... Clings impressively on the finish, which is lively, focused and very long. This complex wine shows the richness of the vintage but there's nothing heavy or oversized about it."

2010 Balthazar Cornas Chaillot\$47.95 bottle

Livingstone-Learmonth: "★★★★ Saturated bouquet that has a 1990 richness ... a very complex nose, with violet and polished leather ... its deep-seated matter leading into a glowing end, which shows the strength of the vintage."

2010 Balthazar Cornas

"Cuvée Casimir Balthazar"\$32.95 bottle

Livingstone-Learmonth: "★★★(★) Quite generous."

Josh Raynolds: "Intensely perfumed ... with excellent clarity ... Fine-grained tannins make a late appearance and add grip to the long, sweet finish."

Sign of the Times

In the three decades we've been visiting Cornas, we've happened to photograph the sign coming into town twice: in 1985 and 2012. The new sign suggests that things must be going well.



Dumien-Serrette

“The epitome of Cornas.” *John Livingstone-Learmonth*

Most connoisseurs of Cornas are familiar with the great *cru* of the northern and central sectors: Chaillot, Reynards, Sabarotte and Geynale. They also know the producers who’ve crafted brilliant wines from them: Allemand, Balthazar, Courbis, Paris and Michel.

Far less known are the sites of the southern sector, where the rich topsoil of decomposed granite produces perfumed Cornas with more supple tannins than those from the other sectors.

Yet the finest site in this area—the nearly vertical Patou—and its best producer, Dumien-Serrette, are both deserving of far greater recognition for their strikingly pure and unique expression of Cornas.

Winemaker Gilbert Serrette is originally from the Jura, but became a winemaker upon marrying into the Dumien family in 1967, learning the traditions of making Cornas from his father-in-law Henri.

Until 2006, Gilbert’s vinification of the fruit from his ancient *La Petite Syrah* vines on Patou was completely traditional: whole-cluster fermentation, crushing by foot, three weeks of skin contact, wooden basket pressing, neutral barrel aging and no filtration.

Today, Gilbert partially destems, which makes his '05 Cornas Patou his last traditionally vinified wine.

This is a quintessential expression of Patou, from nearly century-old vines. Rich, yet perfumed and elegant, it is deep and age-worthy. Promising a long life ahead, it’s a brilliant example of a little-seen Cornas *cru*.

2005 Dumien-Serrette Cornas Patou 49.95

John Livingstone-Learmonth: “... plenty of wine here ... the nose is ample ... sits comfortably with promise for the future. The palate fruit is thorough, and the wine has bags of wholesome appeal, and continues well to a long finish. Has the usual domaine roundness of shape ... classic Cornas, traditional fruit late in the day, The last vintage with whole bunch fermentation.”

Marcel Juge

Forgotten Hero of Cornas Traditionalism

In the 1970s and 1980s, Marcel Juge was an icon to those who found magic in traditionally made Cornas. Today he is largely forgotten, though a small amount of wine was made in the 2000s under his and his daughter Olga’s names.

Marcel’s early Cornas were the real deal. We’d never hesitate to put one on the same table with a Cornas from Clape or Verset—or even alongside a noble Gentaz Côte-Rôtie (as we did with remarkable results last year).

Marcel was known for his strong opinions. He bemoaned the decline of the French nation, and he was no more kind to American wine lovers: “the Americans don’t understand my wines.” A contemporary of Clape, Verset, Robert Michel and René Balthazar, he continued into old age to make a trickle of wine for his family from his old *La Petite Syrah* vines in Champelrose and Cayret.



Juge detested the taste of oak and sought fully ripe fruit and velvety texture in his wines. “You should be able to smell richness in a wine—it’s not a sugar or a sweetness, it’s a proper ripeness” is how he explained this to Livingstone-Learmonth.

Marcel was always firmly in the traditional camp. He avoided destemming, and he crushed by foot. “Mechanical *pigeage* destroys the crop,” as he told Remington Norman. “With your feet you feel the cuve—its temperature and the cap, it’s much more gentle.”

He used wild yeasts only: “I don’t muck around with bought yeasts—you just end up with Bordeaux.” And he aged his wine in half-century-old casks.

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But while a staunch traditionalist, Juge went his own way in one respect. Rather than making a single Cornas blend like his contemporaries—or making separate *climat* bottlings like the next generation—he produced *two* wines that were a blend of *lieux dits*.

His famed Cuvée C (for “Côteaux”) was blended from vines on multiple slopes. But he also made a small amount of Cuvée SC—standing for “Super-Cuvée”—late-harvested wine from his oldest vines in the best vintages. ■

Lessons of a Tasting

A Look Back at a Golden Age, 1988-1991

On December 10th, 2012, at Bar Boulud in New York, RWC paid homage to four legends of classic winemaking in the Northern Rhône. The following is excerpted from Mannie Berk's blog post on that unforgettable evening.



Noël Verset, Auguste Clape, Joseph Jamet and Marius Gentaz were of a generation that came of age in the 1940s and began to fade away in the 1990s. During their careers, they produced some of history's greatest Syrahs. Yet, for most of this time, they lived in the shadow of the negociants who for many years bought, blended and bottled their wines.

Even today, Cornas and Côte Rôtie (except for Guigal's "La-La's") seem to lack the name recognition

that you'd expect for two appellations that, for the better part of a millennium, were considered among the greatest wine areas of France.

But from the time of Phylloxera in the 1880s until the 1960s, the vineyards of both became largely abandoned, as vineyard workers were lured away by industrial jobs in the cities. By the mid-1950s, the town of Cornas had only 120 inhabitants, compared to 2000 today. The vineyards of Côte Rôtie fell to a little over 100 acres in the '50s, compared to more than 500 today.

The Negoces Ruled

In both Cornas and Côte Rôtie, few growers had the means (or the market) to bottle and sell their own wines. Instead they supplied negociants for their branded blends. It kept the growers unknown, but it allowed a community of negociants to thrive.

This included famous names like Paul Jaboulet Aine, Chapoutier and Vidal-Fleury, the latter conveniently located in Côte Rôtie's hometown of Ampuis. But it also encompassed countless small bottlers, including Verilhac in the town of Cornas, which bought much of Clape's production until the 1960s.

I was introduced to the wines of Gentaz, Jamet, Clape and Verset in the mid-1980s,

when all four men were in their fourth or fifth decade as a grower. Though the term wasn't yet applied so liberally, each was a cult producer, with a small, but devoted American following. Whatever modest celebrity they enjoyed here was thanks largely to Kermit Lynch, who represented three of the growers, and Robert Kacher who imported the fourth, Jamet.

When I first started buying their wines, the "great years" were 1978, 1983 and 1985. That didn't mean that other vintages weren't worth buying; part of the genius of these men was their ability to make superb wines virtually every year. But the lesser vintages didn't have quite the same magic, and in those days there were far more modest years than great ones.

A Unique Quartet

But that was soon to change, at least for a time. In 1988, the Northern Rhône entered a period of glorious weather that would last for four years. Each vintage between '88 and '91 was climatically different and produced its own style of wine. But each was great in its own way:

1988: An abnormally hot summer whose wines had profound potential but were so backward that some doubted they would ever round out.

1989 and 1990: Again warm, but not to the same extreme, producing lush, evenly ripe, beautifully balanced wines.

1991: A classic year, not always understood or widely appreciated, that yielded wines of great elegance, refinement and structure for aging.

For Côte Rôtie and Cornas to experience four great vintages in a row was extraordinary. Today, with Europe's hot summers, we take consistently high-quality harvests for granted. But in 1988, Europe was coming out of three decades of cool weather. It was rare to see four great vintages in a decade, let alone in a row.

The timing could not have been better for Gentaz, Jamet, Clape and Verset. It was a once-in-a-career opportunity as well as the Last Hurrah for Jamet and Gentaz. During this time, Joseph Jamet handed the reins over to his two sons, Jean-Paul and Jean-Luc, after 40 years at the head of his domaine. And in 1993, Gentaz, having no son ►

Lessons of a Tasting

(Continued from the previous page)

► to take over, sold his vineyards to his nephew René Rostaing.

Verset and Clape soldiered on. Verset also had no sons, but he somehow managed to produce wine until 2006. Clape also kept going, joined by his son Pierre-Marie in 1989. But did either ever again experience a quartet of vintages quite like these?

End of the Line

In Côte Rôtie, '88-'91 marks the end of an epoch for the style of winemaking practiced by Marius Gentaz and Joseph Jamet. Each had his own approach—including different barrel sizes—but they were both committed to whole-cluster vinification, aging in old wood and the production of a single Côte Rôtie, assembled from all the domaine's *lieux dits*.

Blending—as opposed to site-specific bottlings—is often overlooked as a defining characteristic of these growers, but it's important to understanding their philosophy.

The spirit of Gentaz and Jamet has lived on, but in somewhat updated form. Joseph Jamet's sons, Jean-Paul and Jean-Luc, would be called by some, Côte Rôtie's most traditional growers, as they,

uniquely among the top domaines, blend more than 15 *lieux-dits* into a single Côte Rôtie. But other things have changed *chez Jamet*, such as the use of about 20-25% new barrels for aging. The sons also do some destemming, which their father was known never to do.

René Rostaing, meanwhile, has continued the work not only of Marius Gentaz but also his father-in-law Albert Dervieux, another traditional giant. Like the Jamets, he remains largely traditional. He only uses about 17% new barrels, and when the vintage justifies it, will use up to 100% whole clusters.

But he long ago adopted site-specific Côte Rôties, having made his great Côte Blonde and La Landonne for more than 30 years. Still, he's far closer to a traditionalist than he is a modernist, and his wines show it.

In Côte Rôtie, there are only a few other growers who come quite so close to the ideals of Marius Gentaz and Joseph Jamet. But Cornas still has Pierre-Marie Clape and Franck Balthazar. And the brilliant Thierry Allemand isn't far removed, having created his own marriage of past and present. ■

Alain Verset

The Verset Name Lives on in a Proudly Traditional Cornas



No one is more revered in Cornas than Noël Verset. But it is not widely known that Noël had a brother, Louis, who also made fine traditional Cornas from the family's ancient Petite Syrah vines.

Louis was never well-known here in the U.S.; his output was even smaller than Noël's and his wines were never imported. And, while Noël finally retired in 2007 after 63 vintages, Louis stopped making wine in 1994. Today his wines are impossible to find.



Yet, Louis had a son, Alain, who took over the domaine upon his father's retirement, and changed nothing. He continues to make fine old-school Cornas, still bearing the mythic Verset name.

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Alain inherited his vines from both father and uncle. Louis' vines are in the great Reynards, Mazards and Les Côtes *crus*, but amount to only about a hectare. Noël's vines are in Champelrose.

Alain only makes about 500 cases, which is unfortunate as his wine is a classic example of Cornas *terroir* and winemaking. He continues his family's practice of whole-cluster fermentation with indigenous yeasts, aging for 1½ to 2 years in neutral casks and no fining or filtration.

And like Louis and Noël, he makes no single-vineyard Cornas, preferring to make a single blend in which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

The Verset approach, steeped in history, tradition and *terroir* is on full display in Alain's beautiful 2005 Cornas. Don't miss this rarity.

2005 Alain Verset Cornas49.95

Noël Verset

The Embodiment of Cornas' Past



If Cornas has held on to more of its winemaking traditions than any other place in the Rhône Valley, we can thank two men—Auguste Clape and Noël Verset—each now nearing their centenaries.

Clape, of course, is not only still actively making Cornas, he has passed on his vast knowledge to his son and grandson, who are ensuring his legacy.

But Verset, who finally retired in 2006, had no successors interested in continuing his work. And so, as his long career came to a close, he sold his prized vineyards to other growers, and hung up his pruning shears. All that is left to those of us who revere Verset are his rapidly disappearing wines.

Native Son


Noël Verset was born in 1919 and, having finished school in 1931, worked his first vintage at age 12. He regards those days fondly: “In those days the vineyard owners lived in the village and employed workers who came down from the Ardèche hills. Nowadays what has been lost is the sense of community as well as a sense of fun in the winemaking.”

Verset continued to work the vines for an incredible 75 years, of which 65 years were on his own. Even in a village with a tradition of *les anciens* working into old age, the length of Verset’s career is remarkable. Verset took it all in stride: “My father lived to be 100, and we say in the family that wine replaces penicillin.”

Verset was clearly held in high esteem by the other veterans of the village. With a tip of his hat, the 68-year-old grower Louis Sozet told Livingstone-Learmonth, “Noël Verset still goes up the hill to work his vineyard, and he’s 84!”

The Definition of Cornas

Noël Verset’s Cornas is prized for how clearly it expresses the soul of its region, village and vineyard—powerful yet elegant, velvet-textured and with aromatics that could come from

 Noël Verset’s Cornas is prized for how clearly it expresses the soul of its region, village and vineyard—powerful yet elegant, velvet-textured and with aromatics that could come from nowhere else on the planet. For anyone with a perceptive palate, tasting a Verset Cornas is instant proof of Cornas’ greatness.

nowhere else on the planet. For anyone with a perceptive palate, tasting a Verset Cornas is instant proof of Cornas’ greatness.

His Cornas was traditionally made in every way: crushed by foot, with no destemming. And while other growers drifted towards single-vineyard bottlings, Verset—like Bartolo Mascarello in Barolo—made only one cuvée, believing the whole to be greater than the sum of its parts.

Verset adhered to tradition right down to the roots: his epic *crus* of Reynard, Chaillot, Sabarotte and Champelrose were all plantings of the ancient local clone, *La Petite Syrah*. And most of the vines dated back to the early part of the 20th century.

This clone’s small, olive-shaped berries produce a wine of

greater aromatic complexity than modern clones.

Many think Verset’s wines are to Cornas what the wines of Gentaz are to Côte Rôtie. And Verset continued to make great Cornas right up to the end. As John Gilman has written: “At the tail end of his long career, Noël Verset made the very finest examples of Cornas.”

A Vanishing Legacy

While Verset’s wines have always been hard to find, the situation today is depressing. The last time we offered his wines was in 2010, and it had taken us four years to acquire the wines. On release, we bought what we could of his last three vintages—2004, 2005 and 2006—augmenting them with pristine older vintages when we could find them.

While we continue to scour the market for well-cellared bottles, the opportunities are few and far between. The sad realization is that there is almost no Noël Verset Cornas available anymore, making the wines below precious beyond any previously offered. Needless to say, these are extremely limited—with a strict one-bottle limit while they last.

2005 Noël Verset Cornas	225.00
2002 Noël Verset Cornas	165.00
1998 Noël Verset Cornas	245.00
1990 Noël Verset Cornas	450.00

Thierry Allemand

This Generation's Icon & His Quest for Expression



Thierry Allemand

For lovers of classic Cornas, Clape and Verset are the giants. But if any man towers above all others for his quest for absolute purity of expression, it is Thierry Allemand.

As he enters his fourth decade of winemaking, Allemand has emerged as a hero for sommeliers and winemakers throughout the world for the amazing expressiveness and

finesse of his Cornas.

Yet, ironically, he did not come from a winemaking family. In 1982, while still a teenager, he approached Robert Michel's father Joseph—one of the great old-school Cornas *vignerons*—who gave him “not only a job but the passion for wine. I joined him in May 1981, and he died in 1985, but he set me on my way.”

While new to the village, Allemand came equipped with intensity of will and rugged individualism—two qualities necessary to succeed in Cornas' challenging environment. At nineteen he set about creating his domaine from scratch, a task that required the clearing of not only brush, but also large trees.

Meanwhile, he continued to work with Robert Michel and Noël Verset, leaving only the weekends for his own wine. So fine was his Cornas that Noël and Louis Verset deemed him worthy of their ancient vines in Reynards when they decided to sell in the 1980s.

Today, Allemand leaves no detail unexamined in his quest for purity. “I seek fruit above all, plus the respect for old methods.” To this end he uses whole-cluster fermentation and neutral oak for aging.

His hunt for transparency has also led him to extremely low use of sulfur for purity of fruit and finesse, and extended aging on the lees without racking.

The results are Cornas that combine classic aromas and flavors with unheard-of definition and elegance. Allemand divides his production between two legendary cuvées—the structured, mineral Reynards and the classic, gutsy, slow-to-mature Chaillot.

Allemand captured the essence of each *terroir* and vintage in 2009 and 2010. These are must purchases for anyone who revels in wines that truly express their season and place.

2010 Cornas Reynard*\$115.00 bt. \$675.00 6-pack

Josh Reynolds: “94-97 rating ... outstanding back-end thrust and lingering mineral and anise qualities ... sexy violet and rose nuances and a hint of spicecake ... rich but lithe ... with strong finishing grip.”

Livingstone-Learmonth: “★★★★★ a floating elegance, with profound cassis airs...”

2009 Cornas Reynard\$99.95 bt. \$595 6-pack

Josh Reynolds: “94-95 rating. A heady, seductively perfumed bouquet ... Broad, palate-staining ... outstanding concentration and intense minerality. Clings impressively on the endless finish.”

Livingstone-Learmonth: “★★★★★ A mighty Cornas.”

2010 Cornas Chaillot*\$89.95 bt. \$525 6-pack

Josh Reynolds: “93-96 rating ... exotic floral and spice notes ... along with candied licorice and smoky minerality. Very sweet, with serious finishing power and cling. This refuses to let go of the palate.”

Livingstone-Learmonth: “★★★★★ Like fine china ... Intricate poise, long wine, and the subtlety of which Northern Rhône is well capable.”

2009 Cornas Chaillot\$79.95 limited

Josh Reynolds: “93-94 rating. Fresh, vibrant and pure ... flavors that stain the palate. At once rich and energetic, finishing with outstanding clarity and sappiness.”

Livingstone-Learmonth: “★★★★(★)”

2008 Cornas Reynard	110.00
2005 Cornas Reynard	179.95
2006 Cornas Chaillot	89.95
1999 Cornas Reynard	245.00

Vincent Paris

A New Star, Marrying Modern & Traditional Ideas



Two generations ago, Cornas seemed doomed to extinction, and as recently as the 1980s, the area was struggling to find a future. But an influx of young *vignerons* has given Cornas new hope.

Among these young growers, one of the fastest rising stars is Vincent Paris. Paris only began making Cornas in 1997, but his pedigree is impeccable: he's the grandson of the legendary Joseph Michel, and he learned winemaking from his uncle, Joseph's son Robert.

He inherited ancient vines from the Michels, including 1910 plantings in the top Mazards and Geynale *crus*. Paris inherited the latter after Robert Michel's last vintage in 2006.

2009 Cornas La Geynale

\$59.95 *limited*

Parker: "95 rating ... incredibly well-balanced wine with impressive purity ... Aromas of crushed rocks, black fruits, camphor and spring flowers soar from the glass of this massive 2009. Offering more crème de cassis and blackberry fruit flavors in the mouth than its siblings, this full-bodied, deep, unctuously textured effort also needs 5-6 years of cellaring. It, too, should drink well for 20-25 years."

2009 Cornas Granit 30

\$37.50 *limited*

Josh Reynolds: "91 rating. Spicy cherry and blackberry aromas, with an energetic floral note adding complexity and tangy mineral providing lift. Silky and sweet, with sappy berry liqueur and candied violet ... The seductive, persistent finish shows smoky spiciness and lingering florality."



But rather than modeling his work on the very traditional Michels, Paris has created his own philosophy, more modern in outlook, and built on cool fermentations and minimal sulfur.

Paris tailors his winemaking to the individual *cuvée*, increasing the amount of whole clusters as the age, and quality, of the vines increases.

The wine from his younger vines—**Granite 30**—is completely destemmed. The **Granite 60**—made from older vines—sees some whole clusters. But his elite **La Geynale**—made from old *La Petite Syrah* vines in that noble *cru*—is fermented primarily in whole clusters. This is Paris' best wine, just as it was Michel's.

In the 2009 and 2010 vintages, Vincent Paris' work reached a new level. But, as is so often the case in Cornas, production of each wine is painfully small.

2010 Cornas La Geynale

\$59.95 *bottle* **\$350** *six pack*

Parker: "95+ rating ... a beautiful perfume of bouquet garni, smoked meats, blackberries and crème de cassis liqueur ... There is plenty of tannin (as one would expect in a 2010) ..."

John Livingstone-Learmonth: "★★★★★ a reserved depth in its black fruit, some thyme ... gives the image of small, concentrated berries ..."

2009 Cornas Granit 60

\$47.50 *limited*

Parker: "93 rating. The dense purple-colored 2009 Cornas Granite 60 Vieilles Vignes exhibits aromas of black raspberries, blackberries, licorice, camphor, subtle barbecue smoke and meat juices. This full-bodied, massive 2009 needs at least 5-6 years of bottle age. It should keep for 20-25 years."

2010 Cornas Granit 60 V.V.

\$54.95 *limited*

Parker: "96+ rating ... may be the greatest Cornas I have tasted from Vincent Paris ... possesses gorgeous floral notes intermixed with notions of powdered rock, blue and black fruits, and acacia flowers. Dense, full-bodied, multilayered and multidimensional ... staggeringly great ..."

Courbis

A Thirty-Year Triumph for a Cornas “Latecomer”



Cornas has Auguste Clape and Noël Verset, and their profound traditionalism, to thank for whatever prestige it enjoyed in the 20th century. But today, we are seeing the emergence of a new generation of *vignerons*, a number of whom have more modern leanings. One of the most successful of these is Domaine Courbis.

The Courbis family has deep roots in the neighboring commune of St. Joseph, having made wine there for four centuries. They didn't buy vineyards in Cornas until 1982.

The Great Sabarotte

But, for latecomers, they've done very well, acquiring two-thirds of a hectare, planted in 1947, in the famed **Sabarotte** climat. And then sixteen years later, they added to their bounty with another .58 hectare in Sabarotte, this one purchased from Noël Verset and planted nearly a century ago.

It's no wonder the brothers Laurent and Dominique Courbis—who now run the domaine—are today better known for Cornas than they

ever were for St. Joseph. Not only are their Sabarotte holdings enviable, they own more than a hectare in **Eygats**, a fabulous site that was abandoned in the dark days of the 1940s because of the difficulty in working it. It was replanted in 1991 and today is producing Cornas of amazing quality.

The family owns about the same amount of **Champelrose**, most of which was planted in 1919. These expertly farmed holdings produce extremely low yields, resulting in fruit of great concentration, aromatic complexity and intensity.

The Courbis Technique

Like others of their generation, Laurent and Dominique vinify, age and bottle each *climat* separately. But there are no dramatic variations in the winemaking for each *cru*.

The fruit is all destemmed and then undergoes a three-week fermentation in stainless steel, followed by aging in a mix of new and one- to three-year-old barriques.

Courbis' recent vintages are among the finest expressions of the modern wing of Cornas winemaking, and as such they are hard to come by.

2010 Cornas Champelrose*\$39.95

Parker: “94+ rating ... exhibits a black/purple color along with a floral note, and a terrific, full-bodied texture with gorgeous ripeness, purity and expansiveness. This savory, full-throttle, compelling Cornas will benefit from 2-3 years of cellaring and drink well for two decades or more.”

2010 Cornas Eygats*\$159.95 *very limited*

Parker: “99 rating. Flirting with perfection, the 2010 Cornas Les Eygats boasts a fabulous bouquet of incense, subtle smoke, black truffles, pen ink, blackberries and cassis. Massive with sweet tannin as well as an unreal skyscraper-like texture across the mid-palate, this broad, savory, classic Cornas should drink well for 25+ years.”

2010 Cornas Sabarotte*\$69.95

Parker: “95 rating ... exhibits gorgeous aromas of pen ink, spring flowers, smoked meats, graphite and massive quantities of blackberry and cassis fruit. This terrific Cornas will age gracefully for 20-25 years.”



Vines in Sabarotte.

Alain Voge

New Look from a Traditionalist-Turned-Modernist



While great wines of both the traditional and modern schools are being made today in Cornas, the truth is that very few producers occupy the extremes of the spectrum. Instead there is a wide range of styles, with each producer taking a highly personalized approach.

A case in point is the once-traditional Domaine Alain Voge, which—with the arrival of the enologist

Albéric Mazoyer from Chapoutier in 2004—brought along the modern ideas of his former employer. He created a new style for Voge, emphasizing the power and richness of its coveted old-vine holdings, including 1925 plantings in the Les Côtes, La Fontaine and Combes.

Under Mazoyer, the fruit is now mostly destemmed. But Mazoyer tries not to overwhelm the wines with too much new wood, preferring to age in barrels ranging from new to four years old. The goal is to retain Voge's richness and structure but with more primary fruit and finer tannins.

Voge's top wines are the **Cuvée Vieilles Vignes** based on 90-year-old vines in Les Côtes, and the **Vieilles Fontaines**, a selection of the richest, most powerful lots, primarily from Les Côtes and Chaillot.

The stratospheric scores that Robert Parker gave Voge's 2009s and 2010s have made them among the most highly sought-after Cornas ever.

2009 Cornas Vieilles Vignes

\$69.95 *bt.* **\$149.95** *mag.*

Parker: "94+ rating. Notes of spring flowers, pen ink, graphite, blackberries and cassis soar from the glass of the inky black-hued 2009 Cornas Vieilles Vignes. This magnificent wine offers thrilling levels of concentration, massive extract and an off-the-charts finish. A killer Cornas"

2009 Cornas Vieilles Fontaines

\$129.95 *bt.* **\$265.00** *mag.*

Parker: "97 rating ... One of the most monumental Cornas wines I have ever tasted, it boasts a blacker color as well as sumptuous notes of melted asphalt, black truffles, smoked game, huge quantities of blackberry and cassis liqueur, and hints of creosote and incense ... a modern day legend from Cornas."

2010 Cornas Vieilles Vignes*

\$129.95 *bottle*

Parker: "99 rating ... off-the-charts richness as well as an extraordinarily precise nose of blackberry and blueberry jam intermixed with cassis, charcoal, lead pencil shavings, pen ink and acacia flowers. A wine of exceptional intensity ... this quintessential Cornas should drink well for 20-30 years."

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