

THE RARE WINE CO.  
21481 EIGHTH STREET EAST  
SONOMA, CA 95476  
e-mail: sales@rarewineco.com



1-800-999-4342  
1-707-996-4484  
Fax: 1-707-996-4491  
1-800-893-1501

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# History's Prize

## *Paul Jaboulet's Legendary Châteauneufs: 1970-90*

*It was not* so long ago that negociants were all-powerful in the Rhône Valley. Few domaines had the capacity to bottle and sell their own wines, and so merchants struck up relationships with growers, many with astonishing vineyard holdings, to create some of the greatest wines of the day.

This system began to unravel in the 1970's and today, negociant labels are increasingly unimportant to wine lovers seeking high quality Rhônes. Now, virtually anyone with a few acres of vines can bottle and sell their own wine, reaching markets halfway around the world.

### **Paul Jaboulet**

Fifty years ago, Paul Jaboulet Aîné was, along with Chapoutier, *the* great negociant of the Rhône Valley. Established in the early 1800's with important properties in Hermitage, the firm had a network of hundreds of Rhône Valley growers from whom they purchased fruit. And until World War II, most of its wine (even Hermitage) was sold in cask, often to other merchants, particularly in Bordeaux and Burgundy.

Over time, Jaboulet came to bottle more and more of their own wines, including not only their famous Hermitage La Chapelle—made from their own vines—but also cuvées from purchased fruit. The most famous of these was their Châteauneuf du Pape labeled "La Grappe des Papes" (though for the U.S. and Britain, the wine was sold as "Les Cèdres").



*Two decades of  
La Grappe des Papes*

From the 1950's to 1980's, La Grappe des Papes was among the greatest of all Châteauneufs. That a negociant could achieve such quality is explained not only by Jaboulet's high winemaking standards, but by the fact that this cuvée was built from the fruit of the region's finest estates, including Ch. de Beaucastel.

A typical Grappe des Papes blend was two-thirds Grenache, with the balance largely Syrah. The winemaking was traditional:

fermentation with stems in concrete tanks; a month-long maceration; and aging in *foudre* for 12-18 months.

### **Extinction**

Sadly, recent releases of Grappe des Papes have been a shadow of the great early vintages. Some might attribute this decline in quality to the untimely death of the revered Gérard Jaboulet in 1997. But the real cause was Châteauneuf du Pape's upsurge in domaine-bottling in the 1990's, which robbed Jaboulet of the fruit sources that once made Grappe des Papes so magical.

This was the culmination of a trend that began a century ago, but took hold only in the past 15 to 20 years. As late as 1978, Vieux Télégraphe still sold half its production to negociants (particularly Jaboulet), while many of today's brightest stars sold virtually everything this way. In fact, it was not until the success of the 1989 and 1990 vintages that many small growers were emboldened to market their own wines. *Continued Next Page*

# SOUTHERN RHONE

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## This Offering

We have very fond memories of old Grappes des Papes. In fact, in the early 1990's, we were still able to offer such famous vintages as 1957 and 1967 in this newsletter. But over the past seven or eight years, they have essentially disappeared from the market.

Last year, we were contacted by the agent of a Michelin-starred restaurant in Paris that had a large

collection of Grappe des Papes, all purchased on release and lovingly cellared. We sampled every vintage (some twice) and were astonished by the wines' condition and quality. Some vintages that seemed unexciting when young have exploded in richness and depth, challenging even the most famous years.

From all the vintages offered, we purchased four that truly excelled. Each is not only a vibrant and superb example of classic Châteauneuf du Pape; it is also an amazing value. These wines are not to be missed.

### 1970 Paul Jaboulet Grappe des Papes \$110.00



Given that 1970 rivalled Châteauneuf's great 1967 vintage, it is no surprise that the '70 Grappe des Papes seems so similar to the legendary '67. It still has great color; the nose is deep and brooding, with dark fruits intermingled with meat fat and licorice; the palate is still firm and concentrated and the finish has plenty of punch. This was the oldest Grappe des Papes in the cellar and testifies to the restaurant's superb cellar conditions. *One bottle limit.*

### 1983 Paul Jaboulet Grappe des Papes \$69.95



The finest Grappe des Papes between 1981 and 1989. This deeply colored, large-scaled wine exudes classic aromas, with an exotic Asian spice nuance; the palate is firm, powerful and concentrated, with excellent structure, and brimming with mature, sweet fruit. It may last another decade, but it can't get any better than it is now.



### 1979 Paul Jaboulet Grappe des Papes \$85.00 bt. \$179.95 mag.

A fine vintage—at the time compared to the famous 1981—that produced an astonishing Grappe des Papes. The first bottle we tasted was so amazing we had to try a second, which was no less impressive. (And we have since had three more: each as fine as the first.) The nose is classic Châteauneuf *garrigue* and black fruits; the palate is gorgeous, long and wonderfully textured, building to a big finish.



### 1990 Paul Jaboulet Grappe des Papes \$89.95 bt. \$185.00 mag.

The 1990 vintage produced many outstanding Châteauneuf du Papes, but this beauty easily holds its own. In fact, in *Rhône Renaissance*, Remington Norman calls the '90 Grappe des Papes "a top example from that fine vintage." We had the chance to compare the 1990 and 1989 from this cellar, and the 1990 won hands down. It boasts fantastic color; a deep truffly nose and, on the palate, sumptuously sweet black cherry liqueur-like texture and flavor. Beautiful, especially in magnum.

## A Legendary Barbera at an Incredibly Low Price



One wine, perhaps more than any other, has come to symbolize Piedmont's Barbera renaissance: Quorum. Since 1997 a group of elite growers have pooled their talents and resources to make this highly limited luxury cuvée. The 1999 Quorum stands as a high-watermark of their effort and has sold between \$95 (the original list price) and \$150 a bottle. At \$60, it is an *amazing* deal. Hurry.

### 1999 Quorum\* ..... 59.95

Parker: "95 rating. A spectacular achievement ... there is no doubting its explosive qualities as well as its extraordinary ripeness and richness ... a sumptuous bouquet of black fruits, coffee, vanillin, chocolate, and licorice. This super-endowed, full-bodied, rich, intensely-concentrated, opulent Barbera is prodigious."

# On the Edge of Wine

## *Schoffit's Monumental "Larme de Lave"*

*Every so often* a wine appears on the scene that tests boundaries, challenges definitions and probes the limits of our comprehension. Bernard Schoffit's 2001 Larme de Lave is one such wine.

Among the richest wines ever made in Alsace, the 450 grams per liter of residual sugar dwarfs the mere 4.2% alcohol that Bernard could coax from the yeast. In fact, we know of only one Alsace wine to match these numbers: Zind-Humbrecht's legendary 1994 Clos Jébsal Tric Speciale.

### Born of Providence

But as great as that wine was, we won't be surprised if one day Larme de Lave surpasses it. The reason is simple: Rangen. While there is no doubting the stature of Clos Jébsal, Rangen is one of France's transcendent vineyards—the only Alsace vineyard based on volcaniclastic rock. And Schoffit has one of the most revered sections, the Clos St. Théobald.

Bernard purchased his vines in St. Théobald more than a decade ago, snapping up parcels of old vines that had been abandoned because they were too steep to work. He lovingly restored these vineyards, relishing not only Rangen's unique soil but the low yields that old vines naturally produce. Year after year, Bernard gets great concentration and richness from his fruit (particularly his Pinot Gris) and as a result no one has made more truly mindboggling *selections des grains nobles (SGN's)* in recent years.

### A Great SGN Year

But in 2001, Bernard had the opportunity to make the wine of a lifetime. This was a great SGN year, with high levels of ripeness and rampant botrytis in the vineyard. In fact, his "regular" Pinot Gris Clos St.



Théobald SGN in 2001 is stunning for its richness and complexity.

But the intense botrytis of 2001 produced extreme shriveling in some sections of the Clos. Consequently, on the first day of harvesting the raisined *grains rôtis*, October 18th, he had his pickers select only the most concentrated, shriveled berries to make a "super SGN."

After a painstaking selection, and a long, slow vinification, Bernard had only to name this freak of nature. For the first couple of years, he referred to it as "ET" because of its other-worldliness. Eventually, however, he settled on *Larme de Lave* ("tears of the lava") for the label.

Needless to say, just a tiny amount of this historic nectar was made. It's virtually impossible to find—though we do recall seeing a half bottle a while back for nearly \$200. Don't regret that you didn't buy it while you had the chance—particularly at our price.

### 2001 Domaine Schoffit Pinot Gris Rangen-Clos St. Théobald "Larme de Lave" SGN *95+ Tanzer* **\$95.00** *half bottle*

Steve Tanzer: "Made from 100% nobly rotten fruit harvested on October 18; this technically barely qualified as wine, with 4.2% alcohol, 450 grams per liter of sugar and 12 grams of acidity) Yellow-gold color. Restrained, brooding aromas of singed peach, marzipan and honey. Viscous, intensely spicy and wonderfully pure for a wine with such tooth-rattling sweetness. Almost miraculously, one can identify the variety here. An exhilarating combination of fresh and dried fruits. Builds and expands remarkably on the endless finish, showing a Tokaji-like note of white raisin and supersweet roasted fruit tones. For a wine that's nearly half sugar, this is shockingly easy to drink. May well outlive us all."

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## BURGUNDY

# A New Plâteau

### *Comtes Lafon's Volnay Santenots-du-Milieu Scales New Heights*

Dominique Lafon is virtually unique among Burgundy producers. He is, as Pierre Rovani has written in *The Wine Advocate*, "one of the rare winemakers in Burgundy, indeed in the world, who is equally talented at producing first rate red and white wines."

Lafon makes many coveted whites, but the red jewel in his crown is his Volnay Santenots-du-Milieu—from a

particularly low-yielding parcel of 40+-year-old vines. Most of the tiny production is pre-committed to top restaurants in France, and what's left over for the rest of the world can't come close to meeting the demand.

In 2002, Lafon made what could be his finest wine yet from this vineyard. Now nearly impossible to find, we are pleased to offer it along with some earlier rarities.

**2002 Comtes Lafon  
Volnay Santenots-du-Milieu\***  
**93-95 Rovani**  
**\$125.00**



Pierre Rovani: "... explodes from the glass with awesome scents of flowers and dark cherries. Superbly balanced, its concentrated, medium to full-bodied core of fruit displays sappy, expansive waves of dense black cherries. Exquisitely ripe, yet fresh, it reveals a prolonged finish studded with additional layers of dark fruits ... Wow!"

**2001 Comtes Lafon Volnay Santenots-du-Milieu ....59.95**

Tanzer: "... aromas of plum, cherry and licorice, with hints of rose petal and leather; pure and nuanced ... Fat, sweet and rich ...." Great price!

**1996 Comtes Lafon Volnay Santenots-du-Milieu ...125.00**

Tanzer: "92 rating ... Expansive but graceful, with lovely chocolatey richness and a fleshy mouth feel. Really quite seamless. Finishes very long and ripe ...." *1-bottle limit*

**1995 Comtes Lafon Volnay Santenots-du-Milieu ....95.00**

Rovani: "92 rating ... Readers who own this wine will be happy to know that it has reached its plâteau of maturity and will drink well for at least another 5-6 years." *Limited*

## *Colin-Deléger's Great 2002 Whites*

A longtime favorite of ours, Michel Colin is famed for making beautifully delineated wines that express their vineyards. His two most coveted wines, of course, are the majestic Chevalier Montrachet and his tiny output from 55-year-old vines in Demoiselles. Elusive though both wines are, we managed to get a small amount from the great 2002 vintage. We also snagged some of the superb Chassagne Vergers. Not to be missed.

**2002 Chassagne Montrachet**  
**"Les Vergers"**  
**93+ Pierre Rovani**  
**\$54.95**

Rovani: "Rich aromas of liquid minerals and spices dominate the nose ... Fleshy, intense, and medium-bodied, this sappy, well-focused wine displays a flavor profile of resin-coated stones and chartreuse. It is powerful, extremely well-balanced, deep, and possesses a long, fruit-filled finish."

**2002 Puligny Montrachet**  
**"Les Demoiselles"**  
**96 Pierre Rovani**  
**\$135.00 very limited**

Rovani: "There are only 3½ barrels (87 cases) ... Its intricate aromatic profile reveals a deep, spicy minerality. This fleshy, expansive, medium-bodied wine broadens on the taster's palate, releasing intense layers of minerals, gravel, and spices. Seamless, harmonious, and exhibiting astounding length, this is one of the great efforts of Michel Colin's 40-year career."

**2002 Chevalier**  
**Montrachet**  
**94+ Tanzer — 96 Spectator**  
**\$199.95 1-bt. limit**

Tanzer: "Cool aromas of crushed stone, mint and menthol. Suave, classy and seamless, with sappy, dusty flavors of pineapple, grapefruit and powdered stone. Wonderfully sweet and smooth grand cru with outstanding subtle persistence ... impressive underlying power and soil character ...."

## PIEDMONT

# 2000 Barbaresco Stars

### *Standouts from a Great Vintage*

If you're in search of seductively textured Nebbiolo, Barbarescos from a very ripe vintage are the place to look. Unlike more structured Barolos, Barbarescos tend towards lushness and are known for achieving spectacular results in such years. Just taste the great Barbarescos made in years like 1990, 1997 and 2000.

The top 1990's and 1997's are long gone from the marketplace, and the best 2000's will soon follow. Recently, however, we picked up three of the vintage's giants—the top Barbarescos of Albino Rocca, Moccagatta and Vietti. We are pleased to offer limited quantities of these three gems at very enticing prices.



**2000 Albino Rocca  
Barbaresco "Brich Ronchi"**  
**95 Wine Spectator**  
**\$49.95**

*Wine Spectator:* "Very attractive aromas of ripe plum, berry and grilled meat. Full-bodied, with lovely fruit and big, silky tannins. The finish is fantastic, with very ripe fruit, yet refined and caressing in texture."



**2000 Moccagatta  
Barbaresco "Basarin"**  
**96 Wine Spectator**  
**\$59.95**

*Wine Spectator:* "Incredibly rich, with masses of ripe fruit on the nose, from plum to blackberry, showing smoky oak undertones. Full-bodied, with layers of silky, ripe tannins and a long, fruity, almost jammy finish. A real triumph. Moccagatta is a leader in Barbaresco right now, and this is one of the greatest wines ever from this producer."



**2000 Vietti  
Barbaresco "Masseria"**  
**95 Wine Spectator**  
**\$54.95**

*Wine Spectator:* "Beautiful aromas of mushroom, berry and dried fruit. Full-bodied, with rich, silky tannins and a finish of amazing fruit and spices that goes on and on. I love this. Hard to hold back, as this is so luscious and exciting to taste now."

## 1996 Ornato

*Pio Cesare's Legendary Barolo at an Amazing Price*

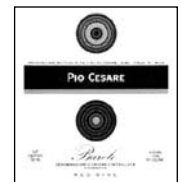
*Pio Cesare* is one of Barolo's oldest and most respected producers, with origins in the late 19th century. Until 1985 the firm hewed to the classic tradition of only making blended Barolos, but in that year they began to make a single-cru Barolo from their best vineyard, Ornato.

The winemaking for Ornato is a mixture of the old and new: fermentation is with a submerged cap (*cap-pello sommerso*) and aging is in a mixture of *barrique* and *botti* for a full 36 months.

Made only in great years, Ornato is one of the elite wines of Piedmont, and it's expensive: the current vin-

tage lists at \$145. We are pleased to offer the now-rare 1996 at a simply stunning price. Extremely limited.

**1996 Pio Cesare  
Barolo Ornato\***  
**96 Wine Spectator**  
**\$89.95 bt. \$179.95 mag.**



*Wine Spectator:* "Generous and meaty. Gloriously rich character, with delightful aromas of plums, fresh flowers and spices. The wine is full-bodied with meaty, earthy, plummy flavors and big, thick, velvety tannins."

# The Quiet Revolution Part 2

## *The Emerging Cult of Austrian Dry Whites*

In our article on Austria last August, we wrote that its dry whites are changing how the world thinks about white wine. Unmarked by new wood, the best Rieslings and Gruner Veltliners have brilliantly defined personalities—their richness and complexity coming almost entirely from the grape and the soil.

Leading this revolution has been a small group of growers, two of the most important of whom are F.X. Pichler and Emmerich Knoll. The top cuvées of both producers are nearly impossible to find; yet we are pleased to offer them at prices that are easily 30% below market.

### *F.X. Pichler*

*“Given Pichler's tiny yields ... and his minimal interventionist wine-making philosophy, it is not surprising that he is considered a genius.” Pierre Rovani*

Perhaps the greatest of the dry white specialists, FX's wines possess massive concentration, on top of all the other usual descriptors. A great FX wine has a magic that cannot be described, only experienced. His annual release in February causes a frenzy, with collectors vying for their meager allocations. In fact, we have never before seen a sizeable parcel of these wines, and could not believe our good fortune when two of his top wines became available.



**2002 F.X. Pichler  
Gruner Veltliner “M”  
\$49.95**



**2002 F.X. Pichler  
Riesling Kellerberg  
\$49.95**



“M” is for monumental, and this is always a selection from one, or several, of his top vineyards. Phillip Blom, author of Faber's great guide to Austrian wine, calls it "staggeringly intense and complex, displaying tropical fruit, honey and mineral aromas, powerful yet elegant—a wine to meditate on." This wine is proof that Gruner Veltliner, on the right soils and at low yields, can produce wines of world class breed and personality.

The Kellerberg shows that Pichler makes Riesling that is every bit as profound as his masterful Gruners. It achieves astonishing levels of richness and finesse, and offers incontrovertible evidence that Kellerberg is a *great* vineyard. The 2002 Kellerberg has all of the opulence of the “M”, but with more steel at the core. Fabulous with an hour or so breathing, it will age for a decade or more with ease.

### *Emmerich Knoll*

*“Stunning Wines.” Pierre Rovani*

Knoll was another of the Wachau's founding fathers and has a following only exceeded by F.X. Pichler's. In fact, for many Austrian connoisseurs, if they could choose one producer's wines to drink, it would be Knoll.

Knoll's wines offer the best of both worlds: they are effusively rich in their youth—with a luscious red fruit quality—and they live forever. Packed and concentrated, with brilliant acidity, with time they reveal the "essence of Wachau" minerality that is so compelling.

**2002 Knoll Riesling  
Smaragd Schutt  
\$39.95**



The Knoll family owns vineyards in some of the most elite cru of the Wachau—including Schutt, Loibenberg and Kellerberg—but for great Riesling, Schutt is the most likely choice. Knoll has just 1.5 hectares here, which produces a wine of marvelous richness but the ability to evolve with grace for a decade or more.

## RHONE VALLEY

# Rostaing's 1995 La Landonne

## *A Mythic Côte Rôtie at a Fantastic Price*

*René Rostaing* is one of the great producers in Côte Rôtie: a master winemaker with vineyard holdings that are the envy of other growers. He started out in 1971 with .25 hectare of La Landonne and .22 hectare of Côte Blonde, adding to his holdings with the retirements of his father-in-law Albert Dervieux in 1990 and his uncle Marius Gentaz in 1993. When the dust settled, he was sitting on, among other prizes, a full hectare of La Landonne, two-thirds of which was older than Guigal's portion.

La Landonne and Côte Blonde are, of course, Rostaing's greatest wines—both marrying richness and elegance, with the soaring perfume that marks the greatest Côte Rôties. In its youth, La Landonne tends to show slightly more wood, but with time this is overwhelmed by aromas of violets, truffles and game.

One of our favorite Rostaing La Landonnes is the

1995, from a vintage increasingly viewed as a great Northern Rhône year. We've tasted it several times since release, and each time it reveals new layers of flavor and aromatics. It will undoubtedly continue to develop for another decade or more.

A few weeks ago we acquired a parcel of this great wine that had been in the cellar of a French collector since release. The price is incredible.

**1995 Rostaing Côte Rôtie**  
**"La Landonne"\***  
**92 Parker**  
**\$89.95**



Parker: "Tannic and rich, with a chocolatey, smoky, black currant/cassis-scented nose, this powerful, impenetrable wine will require cellaring until the turn of the century; drink it over the following 10-12 years."

## *No Bull: Pintia, Vega Sicilia's New Toro*

*Twenty years ago*, the Toro region was essentially unknown outside Spain, but today it is the focus of feverish activity. A slew of eager winemakers and investors have arrived, inspired by the area's warm climate, high altitude, phylloxera-resistant sandy soil and old

Tempranillo vineyards along the banks of the Duero.

A number of promising new Toro projects are in the works, but among the most exciting is Vega Sicilia's Pintia. In its first Toro vintage, 2001, Vega has made a ravishing wine. Produced entirely from the local Tempranillo clone *Tinta de Toro*, it was aged in a mixture of French and American oak. It offers the power you'd expect from Toro's climate allied to the finesse for which Vega Sicilia is famous. Don't miss it.

### *Pesquera's Famous 1994 Janus*

The product of a single day's harvest, October 12, and made in an ancient stone *lagar*, the 1994 Janus has become one of Spain's Holy Grail wines. We have just bought a small amount of this rarity in superb condition. Extremely limited.

**1994 Pesquera Janus\***  
**97 Parker**  
**\$169.95**



Parker: "... may be the greatest Pesquera ever made. This wine is awesome in its richness, intensity and potential complexity."

**2001 Pintia**  
**95 Parker**  
**\$49.95**



Parker: "The spectacular 2001 boasts an inky/purple color in addition to wonderful aromas of creme de cassis, melted licorice, truffles, and smoky, toasty oak. Intensely concentrated but not overdone, this voluptuously thick, rich red possesses fine acidity as well as well-integrated, sweet tannin. It will offer a sumptuous mouthful of wine over the next 7-8 years."

# A Southern King

*La Corte's Old-Vine Gem at a Bargain Price*

*Southern Italy* has countless old vineyards capable of producing great wines. Campania's Aglianico vineyards date back a century or more, and in Puglia, to the east, the Primitivo and Negroamaro vines are nearly as old. Yet, it was not until the past decade that the potential of these vineyards began to be realized.



*A venerable Primitivo vine*

Puglia's La Corte is a case in point. This ancient farm—covered with Primitivo and Negroamaro vines planted in the early 1900's—was rediscovered in the late 1990's by Vahé Keushguerian, an Armenian raised in Lebanon. The property boasted not only great vineyards; its warm, dry summer days and cool desert-like nights allowed for full ripening without depleting the grapes' acidity.

Having previously made wine in Tuscany, Keushguerian instinctively recognized La Corte's potential, and in just his first vintage, 2001, he was proven right. His top wine that year, "Re" (Italian for "King"), is made from 60% old-vine Negroamaro and 40% old-vine Primitivo, and is a stunning achievement, bursting with rich, concentrated fruit.

## A Meeting of Minds

Keushguerian believed that the best way to unlock the potential of La Corte's old vineyards was to involve winemakers representing totally different cultures. And so he brought in one of Australia's hottest young enologists, Chris Ringland, to work with the leg-

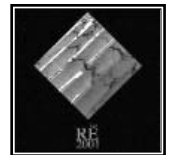
endary Pugliese winemaker, Giuseppe Caragnulo. His reasoning was that Ringland (formerly of Greenock Creek) had the requisite winemaking savvy while Caragnulo knew more than anyone else alive about Puglia's old Primitivo and Negroamaro vines.

The idea of the "Re" cuvée was reportedly Ringland's idea. He selected the best Primitivo—from the estate's Surani, Torre and Monache

vineyards—and combined it with La Corte's finest Negroamaro, from its Lombardi and San Nicola vineyards. Ringland aged the wine 14 months in new and one-year-old French oak before bottling it unfiltered.

It is a beautiful wine and testament to the potential of two ancient indigenous grape varieties, and a benchmark wine for Southern Italy's winemaking revolution. It is also an amazing value.

**2001 La Corte "Re"  
94 Daniel Thomases  
\$29.95**



Daniel Thomases in *The Wine Advocate*: "... a beauty. Almost decadently ripe on the nose, with a full panoply of ripe and resinous fruit, coconut, toasted coffee, and mocha, it combines packed, concentrated, and powerful flavors with the maximum sensuality of texture and a non-stop, palate and throat-coating finish. The best wine I have ever tasted from this part of Puglia?"

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