

Praise for the Chateaufneuf du Papes of Domaine Paul Autard



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Domaine Paul Autard

Despite a lack of formal enological training, Jean-Paul Autard—the fourth-generation head of this family-owned domaine—is quietly fashioning some of the most elegant wines in the appellation. Though only 46, he has been making wine since 1976, as his father had an accident that necessitated Autard taking over the domaine sooner than planned.

With nearly 70 acres of vineyards, the domaine annually produces 3,750 cases of Châteaufneuf-du-Pape and more than 6,500 cases of Côtes du Rhône. Autard ferments the wines in *cuvées* (cement vats), with both pumping-over and pneumatic punch-downs. Some wine is then transferred to *barrisques* (small oak barrels) for 14 to 16 months before the final blend is made.

The use of *barrisques* instead of the larger *foudres* (wooden vats) or *demi-muids* (600-liter barrels) sets Autard apart from most of his peers. He also employs 100 percent new oak for his top *cuvée*, a practice that puts him distinctly in the minority of Châteaufneuf vignerons.

Made from equal parts Grenache and Syrah, the 2003 Châteaufneuf-du-Pape Cuvée La Côte Ronde is a selection from 40- to 50-year-old vines; the wine shows a plush, smoky quality with ripe raspberry and blackberry fruit. I find the new oak gives the Cuvée La Côte Ronde a hard-candy feel when young, but after four or five years, the *terroir* emerges and the wine shows little evidence of its new-oak background.

Autard bottles a more traditional Châteaufneuf as well; it's a blend of 60 percent Grenache and 30 percent Syrah, with some Mourvèdre and Cunoise, and it sees only 5 percent new oak. The 2003 Châteaufneuf-du-Pape shows spice, truffle and pepper notes, with a sweet earthy finish.

