

the south, makes the bite of winter wind or the whip of sleet in your face vanish instantly. They're the wine equivalents of sitting in a cozy room by a roaring fire while it's snowing outside.

Covering the entirety of the Rhône would take a book-or two-so instead, I've concentrated on a handful of appellations: in the north, the land of Syrah, Crozes-Hermitage and Saint-Joseph; in the south, where Grenache is the dominant variety, Gigondas and Châteauneuf-du-Pape. Maybe there are murmurs of discontent-No Hermitage? What about Cornas? Nitwit, you left out Saint-Péray! All true. But file those under "more to explore." And of course I did include Côtes du Rhône, the second-largest appellation in France and home to some of the world's greatest wine values. So, bar the doors against the cold, roast the lamb and sear the steak, and start opening bottles.

tively expensive for most wine buvers. But stellar bottles can be had from Saint-Joseph at fair prices. In all cases, the red grape is Syrah: powerful, dark, spicy, and intense.

2022 MAISON LES **ALEXANDRINS CROZES-**HERMITAGE (\$29)

This partnership among three Rhône winegrowers, Nicolas Jaboulet, Guillaume Sorrel, and Alexandre Caso, has seen its reputation quickly rise since it was founded in 2015. This powerful red, full of lasting black currant-blackberry flavors and soft, mouth-coating tannins, makes it clear why.

2020 E. GUIGAL **CROZES-HERMITAGE** (\$36)

For Philippe Guigal, thirdgeneration winemaker of Rhône powerhouse E. Guigal, this wine "highlights the freshness of northern Rhône Syrah." It's a polished, crisp red, lightly spicy and finely balanced, its blackberry flavors highlighted by hints of white pepper.

2021 ALAIN GRAILLOT CROZES-HERMITAGE

Alain Graillot played a vital role in restoring the fame of Crozes-Hermitage in the 1980s. Now his sons, Antoine and Maxime, con tinue his legacy. Expressive and savory in a way suggesting green peppercorns and dried herbs this is a truly impressive Rhône Syrah.

2020 DELAS DOMAINE **DES GRANDS CHEMINS** CROZES-HERMITAGE

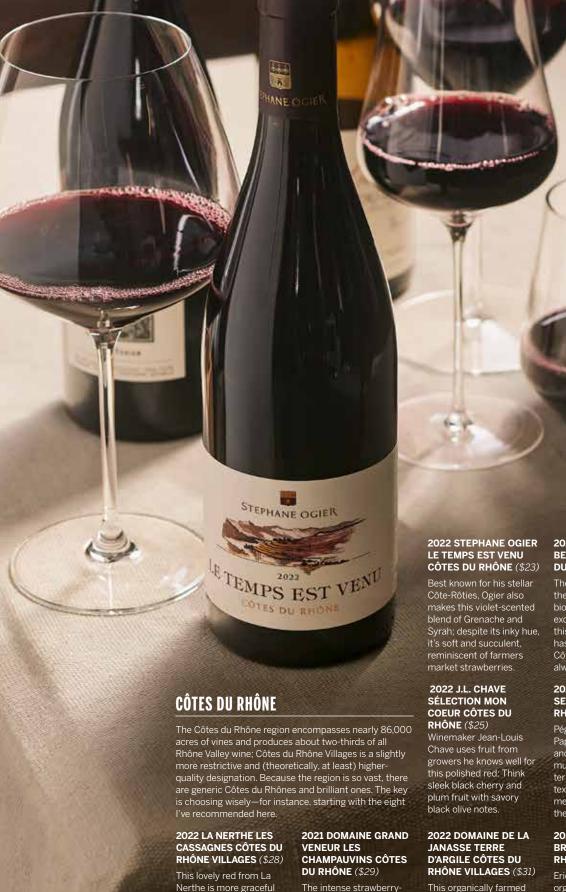
Often, Crozes-Hermitage only passingly echoes the grandeur of Hermitage itself. But this cuvée, with its polished power; deep, dark fruit character; and savory layers of leather, wet ink, and wild herb notes, effortlessly justifies the comparison.

2021 PAUL JABOULET AÎNÉ DOMAINE DE **THALABERT CROZES-**HERMITAGE (\$50)

Domaine de Thalabert, the oldest vineyard in the Crozes-Hermitage appellation has been the property of Jaboulet since 1834. This red, from 50- to 90-year-old vines, is fullbodied and structured, its blackberry fruit accented by hints of licorice, earth, and lavender.

2021 DOMAINE **COURSODON L'OLIVAIE** SAINT-JOSEPH (\$60)

Beautifully fragrant, with aromas suggesting blackberry liqueur, mint and violets, this Syrah from a fourth-generation Saint-Joseph producer is plush up front, then ends more austere and mineraldriven. You could age it. But why? It's just too good to resist right now.



and medium-bodied than

many Côtes du Rhônes,

its strawberry-raspberry

Grenache flavors ending

on a savory herbal edge

and subtle tannins.

raspberry aroma here

notes and modest

out being heavy.

based red with sweet fruit

tannins; it's luscious with-

This organically farmed estate makes some of Châteauneuf-du-Pape's finest wines, as well as this generous red. It's plush with ripe raspberry fruit and baking-spice notes.

2023 DOMAINE DE BEAURENARD CÔTES **DU RHÔNE** (\$25)

The Coulon family farms their estate vineyards biodynamically; their this floral, fragrant red. It has a gracefulness that Côtes du Rhône doesn't always achieve

2022 CHÂTEAU PÉGAU SETIÉR CÔTES DU **RHÔNE VILLAGES** (\$28)

Pégau's Châteauneuf-du-Papes are among the best and this robust red offers ter of black fruit, a supple texture, hints of cured meat and pepper—without the same price tag.

2022 ERIC TEXIER BRÉZÈME CÔTES DU **RHÔNE** (\$40)

Eric Texier farms organically and hews to a minimalist winemaking is an unadulterated, spicy, almost feral Syrah charac ter, all dark berry fruit and notes of black pepper.

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