

# LET THE SUNSHINE IN WITH FRANCE'S RHONE WINES

One of the most bountiful vineyard areas in France is the historic Rhône River Valley. Tourists acquainted with this sun-drenched region remember the celebrated bridge at Avignon, the monumental Palace of the Popes and innumerable Roman antiquities...the Pont du Gard, Maison Carrée in Nîmes, the amphitheater at Arles, for example. Also as memorable, the marvelous food and wine so characteristic of southern France.

Long before the advent of the Roman legions, the Greeks arrived to settle in this valley about 800 B.C. They found a land blessed with intense sunshine. Among the gifts they brought were the olive tree and the grapevine. Today, thanks to the cultivating talents of these early invaders, the harvest from gardens, orchards and vineyards offers a delicious cornucopia of tomatoes, olives, peppers, eggplants, pears, peaches, apricots, cherries, melons, and grapes.

The Côtes du Rhône vineyards are France's oldest. They stretch north from Avignon for 125 miles, ending just south of the city of Lyon. In the southern area the vines must struggle to survive in chalky, stone-covered soil, while in the northern half they scale steep palisades along the river. But everywhere, under brilliant sunshine, the grapes swell and ripen, and eventually are transformed into aromatic, full-bodied red wines, tingling, fresh rosés and fruity, dry white wines. The variety and quality of Rhône wines have always been greatly admired by connoisseurs. Of late, their availability on this market has been growing at a rapid rate. In 1983, almost 850,000 gallons of wine from Côtes du Rhône shippers arrived in the U.S. to satisfy the demand of the American wine lover.

Châteauneuf-du-Pape is perhaps the region's best-known wine. It takes a combination of 13 grape varieties to make this intense, ruby-colored wine. More and more in demand are the less complex wines called Côtes du Rhône Villages that come from 17 villages scattered throughout the southern vineyard region. From this same area, Gigondas and Lirac (red or rosé) are two more popular choices, as is Tavel rosé, which was a great favorite of Louis XIV.

In the north, where the climate and vegetation are more continental, production is not as abundant as in the south. Yet the sumptuous and elegant red wines from Crozes-Hermitage, Hermitage, Côte Rôtie and Cornas are considered to be among the finest of France.

The diversified style of the Côtes du Rhône means there is a wine to please every palate and every menu. Essential to any menu typical of this region are tomatoes, garlic and olives. Our sunshine menu opens appropriately with Beurre d'Olives, a zesty appetizer, simply made, simply delicious spread on fresh baguette and served with a glass of fruity Lirac rosé.

The main course, Estouffade de Gigot (Lamb Stew) is redolent of vegetables, herbs and wine. A white bean casserole (Flageolets aux Herbes) complements the stew beautifully. Either a Côtes du Rhône Villages or a more full-bodied Gigondas make excellent wine choices for this course, and go as well with the cheeses that follow. Choose a selection of chèvres (goat's milk cheeses) and include a wedge of Roquefort—both choices marry well with the sunny red wines of this region. For dessert, an apricot custard cake—Clafoutis—will finish off this menu with great panache.

This sunshine menu, inspired by fine wines from the Côtes du Rhône, can inspire you the next time you plan to entertain. And, because each dish is so simple to prepare—and so delicious—each is sure to be a welcome addition to your everyday family recipe repertoire.



## BEURRE D'OLIVES

(Olive Butter)  
(Makes about 2 cups)

- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter,  
room temperature
- 2 shallots, minced

- 1 cup chopped, pitted French  
Niçoise olives
- 2 T. dry red wine

Place all ingredients in food processor or small bowl of electric mixer. Process until well blended. Serve on thin slices of French baguette.

## ESTOUFFADE DE GIGOT

(Lamb Stew)  
(Makes 6 servings)

- 1 4- to 5-lb. leg of lamb, boned
- Salt and pepper
- Flour
- 6 slices bacon, diced
- 4 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1/2 cup finely chopped parsley
- 1 t. Herbes de Provence

- 1 cup chopped celery
- 4 tomatoes, peeled, seeded and chopped
- Grated rind of 1 orange
- 1 1/2 cups beef broth
- 1 1/2 cups red Côtes du Rhône wine
- French baguette, optional
- Olive oil, optional

Cut lamb into 1 1/2-inch cubes. Season cubes with salt and pepper. Roll in flour, coating lightly. Fry bacon in Dutch oven until crisp. Remove bacon and brown lamb cubes in drippings. Add garlic and sauté another 5 minutes. Add remaining ingredients, except baguette and oil, and simmer, uncovered, 1 to 1 1/2 hours, or until lamb is tender. Pan juices may be thickened, if desired. Sprinkle crisp bacon over top of each serving. Can be served with thin slices of baguette sautéed in olive oil.

## FLAGEOLETS AUX HERBES

(Herbed White Beans)  
(Makes 6 servings)

- 1 lb. dried white beans
- 1/2 lb. bacon, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
- 2 large onions, chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, chopped
- 3 tomatoes, peeled, seeded and diced

- 2 cups dry white Côtes du Rhône wine
- 2 cups chicken broth
- 2 t. salt
- 2 t. coarsely ground black pepper

Cover beans with water and bring to boil. Remove from heat and let soak at least 2 hours. Add more water and simmer until beans are tender, about 1 to 1 1/2 hours. Drain. Combine bacon, onions and garlic and sauté until bacon is crisp. Add tomatoes, wine, broth, salt and pepper. Simmer 5 minutes. Mix with beans and pour into 2-quart casserole. Bake in preheated 325° F. oven for 2 hours, stirring every 30 minutes, until beans are plump and juices are almost absorbed.

## CLAFOUTIS AUX ABRICOTS

(Apricot Custard-Cake)  
(Makes 6 servings)

- 12 apricots, peeled, halved and pitted
- 3 eggs
- 2 T. butter, melted
- 1/2 cup flour
- 1/2 cup confectioners' sugar

- 2 t. vanilla extract
- 1 t. almond extract
- 1/2 cup dry white Côtes du Rhône wine
- 1 1/2 cups heavy cream

Place apricot halves in greased, shallow 2-quart baking pan. In separate bowl beat eggs. Beat in butter, flour, sugar, extracts, wine and cream. Pour mixture over apricots, filling pan about 3/4 full. Bake in preheated 400° F. oven for 20 to 25 minutes, or until golden brown and puffed. Serve either warm or well chilled.

## A Quick Guide to Côtes du Rhône Wines

Appellation	red	white	rosé	characteristics	suggested cheeses
CÔTE ROTIE	red			lambic when young, mellow and smooth with age; unusual violet bouquet	Epaves, St. Neaire
CONDRIEU	white			dry, floral, fresh, to be drunk young	Coummeries, St. Paulin
ST. JOSEPH	red	white		reds: elegant, delicate with aging; whites: light and fresh	Brillat-Savarin, Explorateur
CROZES-HERMITAGE	red	white		sturdy, full-flavored, lightly perfumed	Epaves, Morbier, Hahachon
HERMITAGE	red			big, lively, vigorous, long-lived	Roculot, Bleu d'Auvergne, Pont l'Évêque, Munster
CORNAS	red			Robust, very deep dark red	Bleu des Causses, Pont l'Évêque
CÔTES DU RHÔNE	red		rosé	light and agreeable, soft, well balanced	Bleu de Bresse, Neuchâtel, Cantal, St. Marcellin
CÔTES DU RHÔNE VILLAGES	red			more substantial than Côtes du Rhône; deeper color, agreeably fruity	St. Marcellin, Neuchâtel, Beaufort, Camembert
COTEAUX DU TRICASTIN	red			light and fresh	St. Paulin, St. Neaire, Tomme de Pyrénées
BASTEAU		white		sweet, grassy, heavy	
GIGONDAS	red			warm, full-bodied, ages long and well	Roquefort, Pont l'Évêque, Munster
CÔTES DE VENTOUX	red	white	rosé	medium-bodied, dry to medium, light in color	Baron, Neuchâtel
BEAUMES DE VENISE		white		sweet, dry, wine, fruit, grassy	
CHATEAUNEUF-DE-PAPE	red			rich, round, rich, intense color; darker to medium than Côtes du Rhône	Roquefort, Munster, Pont l'Évêque
LIAC	red		rosé	rich, full-bodied, slightly spicy	Explorateur, Chausserie
TAVEL			rosé	light, delicate, to be drunk when 3 to 5 years old	Coudé, Vacherin
CÔTES DU LOURON	red	white	rosé	light and light to medium, dry, full	Cantal, St. Neaire, Brie