

Rhone Rangers Red Wines



Regular listeners and readers will know that I am a huge fan of Rhone wines – and that definitely includes Rhone-style wines that are grown domestically.

Located in the Southern part of France, the Rhone Valley is technically two distinct viticultural areas; the Northern Rhône Valley and the Southern Rhône Valley, which derive their specific characteristics from the unique soil compositions found throughout the Valley.

Well, the good news is you don't have to go all the way to France to sample the popular varietals from this remarkable region. Thanks to a group of passionate wine producers, the Rhone Rangers are dedicated to bringing Rhone wines a lot closer to home.

The Rhone Rangers is an organization dedicated to promoting American Rhone varietal wines from the same grapes that have flourished for centuries in France's Rhone River Valley. Last week, they saddled up and rode into town to advance "the knowledge and enjoyment of the wide range of Rhone wines produced in America." Considering that there are twenty-two traditional Rhone grape varieties as approved by the French government, there is a lot of educating to be done! Fortunately, I love "homework."

Some of those varietals include red wine grapes, such as granache, mourvèdre, cinsault and carignan, to name a few.

In addition, aromatic white wine varietals, such as viognier, marsanne, roussanne, bourboulenc and grenache white are grown throughout the region.

Over twenty wineries participated in the DC tasting, with most pouring three or four different wines. As you can imagine, that resulted in a lot of tasting (and spitting). Last week, we covered a few of my favorite white wines. This week, we're going to talk about some of the remarkable red Rhone-style wines available in our area.

Of course, no review of Rhône-style wines would be complete without mentioning at least one ersatz from the Châteauneuf du Pape appellation. Eberle means "Small Boar" but there is nothing boaring about the **2010 Eberle Winery Cotes-du-Robles** is a multi-varietal blend of Mourvèdre, Grenache and Syrah. It is supple and rich, with scents of berry fruit and cedar on the nose. Luscious flavors of black cherry, tobacco and Asian spices glide over the tongue on their way to a smooth, smokey finish. **\$22**

Grenache is the unsung hero of Rhone wines, often playing a backup role in blends. But in the hands of Wrath Vineyards, it shines on its own. The **2011 Wrath "Destruction Level" Grenache** shows off wonderful aromas of black cherry and blueberry jam followed up by luscious flavors of kirsch, licorice, and spice on a medium-bodied frame. The fruit-driven finish is round and expansive. **\$35**

One of my favorite grape varietals in Rhone is Syrah. The **2012 Qupe Syrah from the Central Coast of California** combines New World winemaking with Old World style. This lovely wine displays aromas of cherry and strawberry on the bouquet and lush, silky flavors of raspberry, strawberry and jammy red berry that keep building and deepening through the finish. The seductive, intense fruit and fat, round flavors make this wine shine. **\$20**

Another Syrah wine comes from Ridge Vineyards, one of the most prominent producers in the Bay Area of California. Their **2009 Ridge Vineyards Lytton Estate Syrah** is one of the best values in a big Rhône-style red wine. It features a distinctive bouquet of candied cherries and dark plum on the nose, leading to flavors of ripe cherry and blueberry on the tongue. Hints of tobacco and cedar buoy the medium-bodied finish. **\$33**