

'Few knew how to pronounce it; that was nothing compared to the difficulty making it'

vinifies a third of all Condrieu fruit, so it selects the best, most structured wines for Doriane, which absorbs new oak with surprising ease. Doriane also ages well, which is atypical of Condrieu. Most growers maintain the wine is at its best at up to four years old. Julien Barge of Gilles Barge thinks it can age up to 10 years, and the 2001 I tried was still very fresh. Vernay also finds her top single-vineyard Coteau de Vernon (see box, left) keeps surprisingly well, developing honey and gingerbread flavours as it ages. But these ageworthy Condrieus are the exception, usually coming from the best sites planted with the oldest vines.

Condrieu growers, who take immense pride in their vineyards, are not resting on their laurels, but continuing to replant the historic sites. Vernay is doing so, and Guigal, when showing me the four sites from which Doriane is composed, took me to a vineyard beneath the Château de Volan within St-Joseph. 'In the 19th century,' says Guigal, 'this was the most famous vineyard in Condrieu, but like so many others it was abandoned after phylloxera. Alain Paret and I are working together to replant and re-terrace the site.'

No producer makes just Condrieu. Even Vernay does a Côte-Rôtie and St Joseph. Most Côte-Rôtie growers make a little Condrieu, while other producers are dotted across the St-Joseph appellation. This is true of three of the best, Yves Cuilleron, François Villard and André Perret. Even though holdings are small – from 1ha to 4ha at most – such producers often make as many as three cuvées, depending on vine age, the exposition of the vineyards, and the ageing methods. Thus Cuilleron's La Petite Côte is intended to be drunk young; his more expensive Vertige is capable of ageing and developing for a decade or so. The major négociant houses also produce Condrieu. Guigal's wines are of the highest quality, but Jaboulet, Vidal-Fleury, Chapoutier and Delas are also excellent sources.

## The homesick grape

Since Viognier is so fickle in its French homeland, you can imagine how ill at ease it becomes in such remote areas as



Above: Christine Vernay, who took over the family domaine from father Georges

Stellenbosch, Eden Valley or Casablanca. Winemakers the world over were seduced by its exoticism – in such stark contrast to the easygoing adaptability of Chardonnay or stridency of Sauvignon Blanc. Few knew how to pronounce Viognier (*Wine Spectator* provided a pronunciation guide each time the grape was mentioned), but that was nothing compared to the difficulty of making it. Even in Condrieu it lurches, depending on the grower, vineyard and vintage, from the sublime to the pedestrian. In Napa or Mendoza, nobody had a clue. Ten years ago I tasted Viogniers from Mendocino. The producer was renowned, the winemaker highly competent, and the wine was a disaster: well over 16% alcohol even after the oenological liposuction.

There were, and are, good Viogniers being made all over the world, but most miss the mark. They can either lack varietal character or have too much of it. They can be frumpish at one extreme or pinched at the other. If many US wine lovers have turned their backs on Viognier, I can understand why.

And yet when it's good, Viognier is irresistible. Having tasted versions from all over the world, I find it impossible to say which are the best regions to grow it. There are too many variables. It's a triumph of terroir and of the Darwinian varietal natural selection that gallops alongside the concept, that Viognier performs best in Condrieu on granitic soils. Those conditions are impossible to replicate elsewhere, so growers must plant on instinct, avoiding evidently unsuitable conditions, and hope for the best. **D**

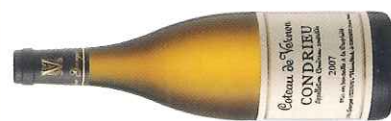
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## STEPHEN BROOK'S TOP

### Condrieu

#### Perret, Coteau de Chery 2008

★★★★★ (18.5pts/20)  
Perfumed and flowery nose. Fine attack boasting concentrated grapefruit and apricot. Quite dense and almost muscular, with intensity and extract. Long. **£32.60; Tan**



#### Vernay, Coteau du Vernon 2007

★★★★★ (18.5)  
Superb honeyed nose and very ripe stone and tropical fruits. Rich, firm and textured, this is voluptuous but also has grip and power. **£59; Yap**

#### Villard, Deponcins 2008

★★★★★ (18.5)  
Honeysuckle nose. Full-bodied, creamy and suave. Luxurious but also has spice and minerality. Long. **£37.82; L&W**

#### Clusel-Roch 2008

★★★★★ (17.5)  
Sweet, charming, honeysuckle nose. Fresh, bright, quite concentrated and tight. Has extract and length. **£36.50; L&S**

#### Domaine de Bonserine 2008

★★★★★ (17.5)  
Vivid floral and white peach nose, pure and lively. Creamy, finely balanced and stylish, with a long, tangy finish. **N/A UK; www.domainedebonserine.com**

#### Guigal, Doriane 2008

★★★★★ (17.5)  
Rich, floral nose with well-integrated oak. Broad, fleshy and concentrated, piquant but also a touch dry from the oak. **£71.55; BBR**



#### Jaboulet, Grands Amandiers 2009

★★★★★ (17.5)  
Discreet floral nose, delicate and charming. Lean, precise and elegant, with a fine texture and admirable length. **N/A UK; www.jaboulet.com**

#### Vernay, Terrasses de l'Empire 2008

★★★★★ (17.5)  
Opulent nose, lush stone fruits. Rich, suave and concentrated, but not

## CONDRIEUS AND VIOGNIERS FROM THE REST OF THE WORLD



heavy. Has spice, vigour and good length. **£35; Yap**

#### Cuilleron, Chaillets 2008

★★★★★ (17)  
Delicate, floral nose. Supple attack, quite concentrated, silky, very pretty and well balanced. **£38–£40.85; BBR, Swg**

#### Gangloff 2008

★★★★★ (17)  
Discreet apricot nose, some tropical fruit. Sleek, fresh and elegant, with charm, poise and fine acidity. Very good. **N/A UK; +33 (0)4 74 59 57 04**

#### Philippe Faury, La Berne 2007

★★★★★ (17)  
Heady peach, mango and honeysuckle nose. Creamy and full-bodied, but has some mineral bite. Weighty but not too heavy. Long. **£33; ThH**

#### Pierre Gaillard 2008

★★★★★ (17)  
Passion fruit and peach nose, with a touch of pineapple. Lush but not heavy, spicy and mineral, balanced and long. **£28–£33.70; BBR, Swg**

#### Vins de Vienne 2008

★★★★★ (17)  
Perfumed nose, very floral. Suave and concentrated, with fine texture and sufficient acidity to keep it fresh and lively. **£31.95; BBR**



#### Chapoutier, Invitare 2008

★★★★★ (16.5)  
Spicy; floral nose; subtle and precise. Suave, concentrated and spicy, with a grainy texture but attractive acidity and length. **£38; Fou, FWC, Maj, Smp**

#### Christophe Pichon 2008

★★★★★ (16.5)  
Delicate, perfumed nose of citrus and almonds. Silky and juicy, concentrated but not a fat style. Elegant, balanced and quite long. **£31.95; BBR**

#### Niero, Cuvée de Chery 2008

★★★★★ (16.5)  
Muted floral nose. Rich and creamy – has some heft but not heavy, with weight, complexity and length. **£38.80; BBR**

#### Paret, Les Ceps de Nébadon 2008

★★★★★ (16.5)  
Peachy nose with a touch of oak.

Medium-bodied but quite concentrated and mineral, with lively acidity. Delicate, with a long, silky finish. **£29.99; OWC**

#### Vidal-Fleury 2007

★★★★★ (16.5)  
Sleek nose of marzipan and peaches. Rich and full-bodied, but has fair acidity and a salty, mineral tang. Quite a long finish. **£38.95; Han**

## Other top Viogniers Argentina



#### Dona Paula, Naked Pulp, Mendoza 2008

★★★★★ (16.5)  
Floral, peachy nose; broad and lush, with ample stone fruit and good underlying acidity. **£11.99; Odd**

## Australia

#### Yalumba, Virgilius, Eden Valley 2008

★★★★★ (17.5)  
Intense apricot nose and florals – almost too scented. Medium-bodied, dry and close to austere. A cool-climate style with grit. Quite long. **£21.85–£22.99; Evy, Maj, PdT, PrV, SLp**

#### De Bortoli, Yarra Valley 2008

★★★★★ (17)  
Spicy, tropical fruit nose. Lean, quite assertive but fresh and balanced apricot fruit; subtle and charming. Quite long. **£13.99; The**



#### Kangarilla Road, McLaren Vale 2009

★★★★★ (17)  
Delicate apricot and honeysuckle nose, has charm. Not much weight but fresh, long and not overblown. **£12.99; Maj**

#### Clonakilla, Canberra 2008

★★★★★ (16.5)  
Refined apricot and stone fruit nose. Creamy, mild and a touch sweet, this is quite a stylish wine – not too complex, but weighty and persistent. **£24–£25.20; SLp, Swg, WMn**

#### D'Arenberg Last Ditch, Adelaide Hills-McLaren Vale 2008

★★★★★ (16.5)  
Heady nose of apricots, oranges and exotic fruit. Medium-bodied, reasonably

fresh but not much complexity. Exotic yet lacks some unctuousness. **£10.50–£12.99; Odd, SLp**

## New Zealand

#### Trinity Hill, Gimblett Gravels 2007

★★★★★ (17)  
Beguiling and flowery apricot nose. Medium-bodied and silky, with lovely acidity and strong typicity. High alcohol isn't obtrusive. **£14.95–£15.45; NZH, Swg**

## Italy



#### Michele Satta, Giovin Re, Tuscany 2008

★★★★★ (17.5)  
Forceful and spicy apricot nose. Deep and textured stone fruit that is plump, juicy, concentrated and long. **N/A UK; www.michelesatta.com**

## Chile

#### Tabalí, Reserva 2009

★★★★★ (17)  
Intense, musky, floral nose. Rich and creamy, with firm acidity and a welcome hint of austerity. Weighty yet fresh and long. **£7.99; SVS, You**

## France



#### Laurent Miquel, Verité, Vin de Pays d'Oc 2008

★★★★★ (17)  
Mild apricot and orange blossom nose. Delicate and elegant, but lacks some body. Has nice sweetness that is balanced by sufficient acidity. **£14.24; Wai**

## USA

#### Alban Estate, Edna Valley 2008

★★★★★ (18)  
Complex nose of mango, banana and mint leaf. Super-rich palate that is spicy, tight and concentrated, with lively acidity and no heaviness despite very high alcohol. **£47; WTr**

All wines are for drinking now to 2012. Only cellar these wines if aged Viognier, i.e. notably low acidity, is to your taste.

For full details of UK stockists, see p114