

TASTING REPORTS

Exploring the Past and Future of E. Guigal's La La Wines

Rhône vintner Philippe Guigal presented the 2020 vintage of his family's famed single-vineyard Syrahs—including a surprise bottling—at the Wine Experience



Rhône fans at the 2024 Wine Experience got a once-in-a-lifetime treat: a tasting of E. Guigal's "La La" Côte-Roties, perhaps the most famous wines made in France's Northern Rhône Valley. Production is small and prices are high, and they were among the first Syrahs to showcase single-vineyard winemaking in, and draw significant attention to, a previously unheralded appellation. (They're also the focus of *Wine Spectator's* March 31, 2024, cover story.)

Closing out the weekend's seminars, E. Guigal head Philippe Guigal brought the 2020 La La wines for the audience to taste, which is, on its own, an astounding opportunity. But there was a very welcome surprise.

Some backstory: The La Las come from vertiginous vineyards in Côte-Rotie, and E. Guigal only rarely adds a new *cuvée* to the lineup, when it acquires or plants a distinctive new vineyard site. The first La La is La Mouline, which debuted with the 1966 vintage. La Landonne arrived with the 1978 vintage, and its source is a vineyard planted to celebrate Philippe Guigal's birth. La Turquie was launched with the 1985 vintage. See where this is going?



A fourth La La wine, *La Reynarde*, is on the way. Named after the stream running between the Côte Brune and Côte Blonde *lieux-dits*, its vineyard (on the Brune side) was planted in stages starting in 2010 to commemorate the birth of Guigal's twin sons. The wine won't debut until 2026, with the 2022 vintage, which is when all the plantings had reached maturity. But, in a singular moment, Guigal treated the Wine Experience audience to a preview of *La Reynarde* from the 2020 vintage, alongside the three other wines.

Tasting Some of the World's Finest Syrahs

La Mouline (96 points) was first in the horizontal tasting. "This was the original La La wine," explained *Wine Spectator* senior editor and Rhône taster Kristen Bieler. "This little plot of vines was spotted by [Guigal's grandfather Etienne Guigal, who founded the domaine], and he had his eye on it for years before he was able to start his own winery and purchase the plot with [his son] Marcel." Bieler noted that Philippe refers to this wine as "the most Burgundian-style of the three."



"La Mouline uses 11 percent *Viognier*; this is very significant," said Guigal. "And it's a *field blend*. We're not picking [or vinifying] the two grapes separately ... That's a very traditional, very historical way to make wines in the Rhône."

Next up was *La Turquie* (96), which could be considered a stylistic bridge among the La Las. "[It's] an expression of a wine that is a Côte Brune with accents of Côte Blonde," Guigal said. "It has a little bit of *Viognier*, 7 percent, [which] brings finesse, elegance and delicacy." But he also observed that the wine's energy and spice notes are comparable to *La Mouline*'s.



Bieler asked Guigal to expound on a crucial technical point: E. Guigal is known for its lengthy *élevages* and use of **new oak**. “Now, the pendulum swings back,” said Bieler. “[Other winemakers] are pulling away from new oak, wanting to create wines that are a little more accessible earlier.”

Guigal explained that his domaine doesn't necessarily make these wines to be consumed in the first few years. “We have a long-term vision,” he added. “If you taste the '66 vintage of La Mouline, it's a wine that has spent 40 months in new oak. It's totally impossible today to find any trace of oak in the wine.”



Before the audience tasted **La Landonne**—which Bieler noted had achieved a 97-point score—they tried La Reynarde, which solidified the greatest lesson of the seminar: The foremost element of the La Las is a sense of place. Tasting this preview of La Reynarde was like watching an early cut of a movie or listening to a practice recording of a song, yet it was surprisingly characterful and expressive, as Guigal pointed out: “What I find amazing about this wine is that it is made from [vines] that are four and five years old. [Its character] cannot come from the age of the vines. It can only come from the quality of the *terroir*.”