

james suckling uncorked

Beaucastel Holidays

A vacation in southern France leads to a trip to Châteauneuf's Beaucastel

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I just got back from a visit to [Château Beaucastel](#), the famous wine estate in Châteauneuf. I was supposed to be taking a few days off in Provence with some friends, but we ended up going to a few wineries. Heading over to Trevallon tomorrow. Can't seem to get away from wine for even a day!

Anyway, it was good to see François Perrin, one of the owners of Beaucastel. He is such a good guy. I have known him since 1985, when I used to go down to the Rhône with my friends from Willi's Wine Bar in Paris. I used to have a big collection of Beaucastels. I remember paying about nine francs for bottles of the 1985 in 1986 as futures. Prices are certainly different today.

François is really excited about the 2007 vintage. He thinks it's his best in years, and right up there with the 1989 and 1990. He says he loves the richness in the wines as well as their freshness. "It was because it was hot and sunny during the day and cool at night," he explained. "This helped the grapes retain their freshness."

Although the 2007 was just bottled about a month ago, I found it wonderfully balanced. It has an extremely complex nose of berries, *sous bois*, milk chocolate, orange peel and spices. The palate is full-bodied, with firm tannins and a crisp backbone of acidity. The aftertaste is full of spices and crushed berries. It reminds me of the 1990 Beaucastel. I'd expect it to receive a classic rating when our office reviews it blind.

The 2007 Hommage à Jacques Perrin is fuller and rounder than the Beaucastel. It is an altogether more impressive wine due to its richness and power. But I still preferred the 2007 Beaucastel because of its complexity and multilayered palate. Its fresh, racy backbone of tannins and acidity really turned me on. I think the Hommage, which has yet to be bottled, is also worthy of a classic score.

François says that Beaucastel reds always have to have the firmness and freshness. He admits that sometimes that goes against the trend in the region for making high-alcohol fruit bombs. "I just don't like those jammy thick reds here," he said. The conversation reminded me of a dinner I had this summer with some winemakers from Tuscany, when I served them a bottle of 1998 supercuvée Châteauneuf Vielle Vignes blah, blah. It was undrinkable. It was so high alcohol, jammy and raisiny that we couldn't even finish half a glass. It makes me wonder how those things will age.

I can tell you that Beaucastel ages well. François pulled out a bottle of 1981 that was wonderfully decadent with plum skin, spices and meat aromas following through to a full body, with silky tannins and a fresh finish. It was refined yet opulent and wild on the palate. I have always been a fan of this wine. I remember drinking bottle after bottle of the wine in the late 1980s. Today, I gave it 94 points, non-blind.

A bottle of 1970 followed with a strawberry, berry and flower nose that gave way to a medium body, with firm tannins and a crisp acidity. It was drying a little on the finish. It really seemed Burgundian in style. We finished our glasses of the 1970 and headed out to lunch.

François went with us to his son's restaurant, L'Oustalet, in Gigondas. We sat outside and drank a bottle of 2008 Beaucastel white and then a 2007 Clos des Papes red. (I still think the Beaucastel 2007 is better.) François is excited about his new estate in Gigondas, Domaine Tourelles. The wines were great with our main course of sautéed red mullet fillets over pureed carrots and peas. The starter of cold avocado soup with small prawns and crab was equally satisfying.

All in all, it was a great way to spend the day on holiday. It was a nice break from Italy. It's always good to be in France. What was your last memorable winery trip or wine holiday?