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Embracing the Power of Gigondas

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FRENCH winemakers, in their full-on selling mode, love to tell a story in which they serve their own invariably modest wares along with some competitors' expensive, highly rated bottles. Everybody loves the expensive wines on first taste, but at the end of the meal, the winemakers recount with pride, the other guys' bottles are still three-quarters full while their own have been drained dry and second bottles opened. The point? Just because a wine is immediately likable doesn't mean it will remain pleasing over the long haul.

This tale may have achieved all-star status among marketing clichés, but it nonetheless applies particularly well when assessing grenache wines. Few grapes make wines as immediately pleasing as grenache. A first glass envelops you in its rich, powerfully fruity embrace. It's that tricky second glass where the measure of the wine can be taken.

That glass will reveal whether the initial blast of fruit was structured in a way that will refresh, invigorate and energize, or whether it will simply wear you out. The fatigue factor is often a problem with grenache.

It's a hot-weather grape, planted throughout southern France, Spain, California and Australia, and it regularly achieves alcohol levels over 15 percent. Without scrupulous management, especially in the vineyard, those fruit flavors can easily taste hot, jammy and sweet.

Yet, when done right, the sheer fruit-drenched power of grenache can be immensely winning, particularly when the juicy, exuberant fruit is tempered by mineral or herbal flavors that create a sense of complexity.

Grenache is the basis for great wines like [Châteauneuf-du-Pape](#) and [Priorat](#) from Catalonia, as well as many lesser known wines, including Gigondas, Châteauneuf's close neighbor. Perhaps as a result of the increased popularity of Châteauneuf, or its rising cost, I've seen more Gigondas in the last few years, especially on restaurant wine lists, where they are often touted as less expensive versions of Châteauneuf.

DOMAINE DU GRAPILLON D'OR

GIGONDAS

2009 **

\$24

Powerful, jammy fruit flavors with a touch of licorice.



Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

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