

France, Rhone: Saint Cosme Retrospective



Louis Barruol standing in his Le Claux Vineyard

The leading producer in Gigondas, Saint Cosme has been run by the passionate and talented Louis Barruol since 1992, when he took over from his parents. Today, he produces four single-vineyard releases (the Hominis Fides and Valbelle come from essentially the same plot) and a classic Gigondas. All four of the single-vineyard releases (Valbelle, Le Claux, Hominis Fides and Le Poste) are almost all Grenache (the Valbelle incorporates 10% Syrah) and are aged in 30% new Burgundy barrels, with the balance consisting of 1-, 2- and 3-year-old barrels. The Valbelle was first made in 1993, the Hominis Fides in 2003, and both the Le Poste and Le Claux were first introduced in 2006. The Valbelle and Hominis Fides both come from sand and limestone-driven soils and a plot of vines located just down the street from the domaine, on the north side of the La Payouse Street, which leads into the Village of Gigondas. The Le Claux lies on the other side of the street and consists of vines planted before 1914 and more clay, gravel and limestone-driven soils, without the sand component that's found in the Hominis Fides. Lastly, the Le Poste comes from a terraced vineyard (there are four terraces, one planted all to white varieties), just up the hill from the domaine that was replanted in 1963 by Louis father, Henri Barruol. The soils are mostly limestone and yellow marl, and this cuvée is always the most elegant and feminine in style. All three of these vineyards are within a 5 minute walk of each other. While these cuvées can be frightfully tannic on release, they round into form with a handful of years in the cellar, and age beautifully. Looking at his classic Gigondas, it's all from estate fruit and is a rough blend of 75% Grenache, 20% Syrah and the balance Cinsault. Aging here is a combination of tank and older barrels.

Looking specifically at this tasting, the idea was to taste through a broad sample set to get a better understanding of how these cuvées evolve. While any day you get to taste in Barruol's cellar is a good one, I was thrilled to see how well his wines had held up over the years. In short, these are some of the finest Gigondas that money can buy.



One of the four terraces of Le Poste

Starting off with two whites, Barruol makes one barrel from his Le Poste Vineyard, which has one of its four terraces planted to Clairette. He first produced the cuvée in 1992, and because no whites are allowed from Gigondas, it's labeled as a Côtes du Rhône. The **2011 Côtes du Rhône Le Poste Blanc** is an impressive blend of mostly Clairette (fermented and aged in older barrels) that offers focused citrus blossom, apple peel, honeysuckle and tinges of minerality to go with a taunt, crisp and medium-bodied profile on the palate. It's a clean, classy and pretty white to drink over the coming couple of years, although as the 2006 shows, it has an interesting evolution and can certainly age. The same blend/*élevage*, the **2006 Côtes du Rhône Le Poste Blanc** is a beauty. Possessing more richness and texture due to its age, yet still beautifully lively and fresh, it offers ample lemon curd, honeysuckle, *crème* and clean minerality in its classy, balanced profile. At this point, it needs food to really shine, but I love its mix of freshness and richness.

Moving to the reds, and starting with the 2007s, this is easily one of the greatest lineups of Gigondas I've ever tasted. It also shows how special this vintage was throughout the entire Southern Rhône. Looking first at the **2007 Gigondas Cuvée Valbelle**, it offers awesome black fruits, ground herbs, peppered meats and olive tapenade-like aromas and flavors to go with a stacked mid-palate, full-bodied richness, and smoking length on the finish. It's an incredible Gigondas and can be consumed anytime over the coming 10-15 years. Even better, the **2007 Gigondas Le Claux** is surprisingly elegant and seamless (it's normally the most structured in the lineup), with notions of pepper, earth, mineral, ground herbs and graphite supported by a rock-star core of darker berry fruit. Gaining richness in the glass, it's a full-bodied, beautifully concentrated Gigondas that perfectly marries the inherent structure of the appellation with a sense of finesse and elegance. It too will continue to thrill over the coming 10-15 years. Even better, and the greatest Gigondas I've ever tasted (aside from perhaps the 2010 of this same cuvée), the **2007 Gigondas Hominis Fides** offers an extraordinary bouquet of crushed rocks, graphite, iodine, licorice and layers of dark fruit that continue to evolve in the glass. It's every bit as good on the palate and offers thrilling concentration, full-bodied richness and massive amounts of fruit, all while staying perfectly balanced, graceful and pure. Given the fruit, it's hard to resist now, yet it will continue to evolve for another 10-15 years as

well. Lastly, the **2007 Gigondas Le Poste** is the most complex and nuanced of the four, with lively spring flowers, olive, game and underbrush-like qualities intermixed with beautifully pure berry-styled fruit. It too is full-bodied, layered and seamless on the palate, with beautiful ripeness and polish to its tannin. Already approachable, drink it over the coming decade or more.

Moving to the 2006s, these are big, rich and classically-styled efforts that scream Gigondas. Starting out, the **2006 Gigondas Le Claux** has a rustic, chewy feel with loads of garrigue, leather, cured meats and tar-like aromas and flavors all present. Possessing the tannic edge of the appellation, it's a full-bodied, rich and concentrated effort to drink over the coming decade. More complete, with more polish and elegance, the **2006 Gigondas Hominis Fides** gives up loads of graphite, tar, cured meats and assorted dark fruits in its full-bodied, silky and seamlessly constructed personality. It still has some tannin to integrate, yet it has the polish and balance to drink well today. It will continue to knock it out of the park through 2026. The first vintage for the cuvée, the **2006 Gigondas Le Poste** is the lightest of the trio, with pretty blackberry, spring flowers, violets, licorice and hints of road tar all emerging from the glass. A medium to full-bodied, silky, elegant effort, it will drink nicely over the coming decade.



The old vines of Hominis Fides

Both of these 2005s show the freshness and tannic edge of the vintage. The **2005 Gigondas Cuvée Valbelle** is brilliant stuff that's still youthful and lively. Possessing classic Saint Cosme tar, asphalt, licorice and savory black fruits, this beauty flows onto the palate with full-bodied richness, bright acidity and building tannin that comes through more on the finish. Showing both elegance and richness, it will benefit from a decant and drink nicely through 2025. Even better, and another awesome Gigondas from Barruol, the **2005 Gigondas Hominis Fides** offers loads of licorice laced black fruits, spiced meats, charcuterie and exotic spices in a full-bodied, rich, concentrated package. There's still ample tannin here, yet they're nicely polished and integrated. It's another couple of years away from maturity and will have two decades of longevity when all is said and done.

The **2003 Gigondas Cuvée Valbelle** is a blend of 90% Grenache, and the balance Syrah, that was aged in 50% new French oak. A big, ripe, full-bodied effort that holds everything together, it gives up notions of black plums, blackberries and cassis to go with pepper, cured meats and roasted herbs. Possessing rock-solid, mid-palate depth and a core of sweet fruit, it's drinking at point, but should have a gradual evolution over the coming 4-5 years.

In this difficult vintage (slightly less so for Gigondas than Châteauneuf), Louis Barruol made a fine **2002 Gigondas**, and it's still enjoyable today. Showing mid-weight garrigue, ground pepper and hints of leather, it's medium-bodied, fully mature, and drops off quickly on the finish. Nevertheless, it has some character. Surprisingly disappointing, the **2001 Gigondas** is mid-weight and soft, without the depth, density or richness of the other vintages. It's still an enjoyable effort, but should be consumed over the coming couple of years. The **2000 Gigondas** (which was the only Gigondas produced by Louis in the vintage) is a soft, supple, and sweetly fruited Gigondas that's showing lots of garrigue, underbrush and sweet cherry-styled fruit in an evolved and fully mature package. I'm a fan, but it should be consumed over the coming couple of years. Similar, yet with a tad more structure and cut, the **1999 Gigondas** (70% Grenache, 25% Syrah and the balance Cinsault) offers rocking dark fruits, ground herbs, underbrush and assorted meatiness to go with a medium to full-bodied, nicely textured feel on the palate. While both the 1999 and the 2000 are fully mature, the 1999 will have a longer evolution.

The **1998 Gigondas Cuvée Valbelle**, which is made from 90% Grenache and 10% Syrah and aged in 20% new French oak, steps everything up a notch. Starting out reticent on the nose, with ripe blackberry fruit, ground pepper, dried flowers and beef blood-like subtleties, it knocks it out of the park on the palate and has full-bodied richness, beautiful density and a savory finish. Fully mature, yet still youthful and with plenty of life, drink it over the coming 4-5 years.

Coming from a vintage described as "fresh" by Louis, the **1997 Gigondas** is fully mature as well, with notions of sweet and sour cherries, dried underbrush and subtle herbal notes rounding out the bouquet. Medium-bodied, the acidity is starting to stick out here, so drink up.



Lastly, the **1990 Gigondas** shows the evolution of these wines, and is still enjoyable today. Made by Barruol's father, aged all in tank, and not bottled until 1995, it too is fully mature, yet offers a beautiful drinking experience with its dried garrigue, leather, toasted nuts, seaweed and beef blood-like aromas and flavors. Classy all the way, with medium-bodied depth and richness and an evolved, seamless feel, it was a fitting end to this tasting. It also confirms the age-ability of these wines, and I think the wines made by Louis today are even better, with additional concentration, purity and structure. They'll have even broader drink windows.

Saint Cosme 2011 Côtes du Rhône Le Poste Blanc (White) Rating : 90

Saint Cosme 2006 Côtes du Rhône Le Poste Blanc (White) Rating : 91

Saint Cosme 2007 Gigondas Cuvée Valbelle (Red) Rating : 95

Saint Cosme 2007 Gigondas Le Claux (Red) Rating : 97

Saint Cosme 2007 Gigondas Hominis Fides (Red) Rating : 100

Saint Cosme 2007 Gigondas Le Poste (Red) Rating : 96

Saint Cosme 2006 Gigondas Le Claux (Red) Rating : 94

Saint Cosme 2006 Gigondas Hominis Fides (Red) Rating : 96

Saint Cosme 2006 Gigondas Le Poste (Red) Rating : 92

Saint Cosme 2005 Gigondas Cuvée Valbelle (Red) Rating : 94

Saint Cosme 2005 Gigondas Hominis Fides (Red) Rating : 96

Saint Cosme 2003 Gigondas Cuvée Valbelle (Red) Rating : 93

Saint Cosme 2002 Gigondas (Red) Rating : 86

Saint Cosme 2001 Gigondas (Red) Rating : 87

Saint Cosme 2000 Gigondas (Red) Rating : 90

Saint Cosme 1999 Gigondas (Red) Rating : 91

Saint Cosme 1998 Gigondas Cuvée Valbelle (Red) Rating : 94

Saint Cosme 1997 Gigondas (Red) Rating : 87

Saint Cosme 1990 Gigondas (Red) Rating : 90

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