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At Tesse in West Hollywood, CA, sommelier and co-owner Jordan Ogron pairs modern European cuisine with the wines of Côtes du Rhône.



Crushing on **Côtes du Rhône**

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Crushing on CÔTES DU RHÔNE

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PHOTOS BY TODD WESTPHAL

Jordan Ogron, co-owner of French restaurant Tesse in West Hollywood, CA, selects a Côtes du Rhône from the shelf at his adjacent wine shop, Boutellier.

Côtes du Rhône wines “represent the true meaning of incredible value,” says restaurateur and wine shop owner Jordan Ogron of Tesse and Boutellier.



AVAILABLE IN A WIDE SPECTRUM OF FLAVORS, CÔTES DU RHÔNE WINES OFFER A WORLD OF PAIRING POSSIBILITIES

If there's one thing most wine buyers in the U.S. can agree on about wines from the Côtes du Rhône, it's that the region possesses an extreme value proposition. Is there any question that Rhône Valley producers turn out some of the highest-quality wines at the most affordable prices the world over?

After spending a week touring the Crus of the Southern Rhône this past October, I was floored by the quality of the 250-plus wines I tasted, mostly from the 2015 and 2016 vintages with a smattering of older and newly released 2017s. I was particularly astounded, however, by the local prices: Some of my favorites sold for less than €12. Once stateside, even with markups, these wines deliver unheard-of structure and

complexity in the under-\$30 category, but how much longer will we be able to brag about the low price of such quality wines?

To delve further into the topic, we sat down with a serious Rhône enthusiast: Jordan Ogron, the co-owner of West Hollywood's new Tesse restaurant and adjoining Boutellier wine shop. During our chat, Ogron discussed his new projects, his love of Côtes du Rhône wines, and what he thinks the future holds for Rhône wines in the U.S.

Ogron partnered with Bill Chait, the force behind Bestia, République, and The Rose, to open Tesse and Boutellier in June 2018. An alum of L.A. restaurants Rivera (winner of a “Two Wine Glass” *Wine Spectator* award in 2012), Fraîche, Fig & Olive, Bestia, The Standard in Hollywood,

and the Hakkasan Group, Ogron offers a wealth of experience and knowledge he's now pouring into a new vision of French dining and cuisine on the Sunset Strip.

“Tesse” is a contraction of the French word *delicatesse*, which means “delicacy” or “thoughtfulness,” and according to Ogron, the French use “tesse” as a colloquial term for charcuterie. Fittingly, the classic pâtés, terrines, and saucisses dished up by Executive Chef and partner Raphael Francois accompany carefully curated selections from Ogron's global wine list, which, of course, skews French.

Joining the ranks of Wally's Beverly Hills and Heritage Fine Wines, Boutellier brings yet another alluring wine shop to the west L.A. area. The retail portion, which exhib-

Ogron at Tesse, his new restaurant on the Sunset Strip, with a selection of Côtes du Rhône wines.



its a stunning shrine-like presentation of wines, boasts a selection of bottles retailing from \$15 and up—way up. For the most part, facings are unique to the shop, and while a different selection graces the wine list at Tesse, there is some crossover.

BANG FOR BUCK

On the subject of high-quality, value-driven offerings at the \$20–\$40 mark, Côtes du Rhône wines frequently come to mind for Ogron. “I think they represent the true meaning of incredible value,” he says. “Most Côtes du Rhône or Côtes du Rhône Villages are on wine lists between \$45 and \$60 and are just a great value for the quality.”

Ogron, however, isn’t stuck solely on the present. “In the next decade, I can only imagine that there will be more to choose from,” he says. “More wineries, more winemakers—famous or not—making wines in the Côtes du Rhône with real competition taking hold and growing.”

An avid sports enthusiast (the Buffalo Bills and the Anaheim Ducks are his teams), Ogron also plays golf with friends when time permits. And although he grew up around wine, he studied opera in college. So, how exactly did this sports fan and opera whiz end up owning a restaurant? “I love this question because of the words ‘end up,’” Ogron says with a chuckle as he recalls the winding road

of his career. “I don’t think anyone ‘plans’ on being in this industry, but for many of us who are, I feel like we somehow naturally gravitate toward it. Because of my upbringing with wine, I was taking a peek at the construction of Rivera [John Sedlar’s restaurant with Bill Chait] in 2007, as I lived in the apartment above the restaurant. I ended up meeting Bill and started my career as the assistant sommelier at Rivera.”

Just over a decade later, as co-owner of one of L.A.’s hottest new openings, he’s intent on making his own mark on the flourishing wine scene of Tinseltown—one of the most challenging markets in the U.S.

“I created a wine program that coincides with how people dine in L.A. As most restaurants focus on shared plates or ‘center of the table’ dining, my thought was, ‘Why should people be subjected to a full glass of wine while so much food is hitting the table in a short period of time?’” he says. “With that in mind, at Tesse we pour by the half-glass or 3-ounce pour so each guest has the opportunity to try an array of wines throughout their experience, enhancing their meal.”

GROWING DEMAND

At Tesse and Boutellier, Ogron covers just about every inch of the spectrum in regard to Côtes du Rhône wines: offering everything from Côtes du Rhône and Côtes du Rhône Villages labels to the various Crus. “We have over 30 different labels between the wine store and the restaurant,” he says. “They are total crowd-pleasers and give you quite the bang for your buck.”

The facts and figures tell the same story: 371 million bottles of Côtes du Rhône wines were sold in 2017—with 16 percent of all wines exported reaching U.S. shores. Of those bottles, 60 percent were Côtes du Rhône and Côtes du Rhône Villages—the biggest value-drivers—with the Cru appellations coming in at 30 percent.

Could those numbers shift? Ogron believes so. “I definitely think there will be an increase in imports as the wine industry is growing exponentially every year,” he says. “That being said, just as I predicted a decade ago with Rioja wines and Spanish wines in general, I do think that you will see price increases for Côtes du Rhône wines as demand grows. I don’t think you will see a lot of changes in style or any changes in appellation laws.”

Whatever the future holds, lovers of Côtes du Rhône wines—and on- and off-premise buyers in particular—are experiencing a heyday thanks to a string of excellent vintages starting with 2015. While critics have gushed over the brilliance of that harvest, the 2016s are shaping up to be even better, according to several winemakers I spoke with in the Southern Rhône. As for the 2017 and 2018 harvests, quality is high again, but yields were reduced in both years, so make sure to stock up on those 2015s and 2016s to weather any reduced allocations in the subsequent pair of vintages.

After talking at length about Côtes du Rhône wines, Chef Francois dished up some of the Tesse’s culinary staples to pair with a few dynamite selections by Ogron. If you’re an L.A. resident or visiting soon, add Tesse and Boutellier to your list of “must-visit” places—and if you’re a lover of Côtes du Rhône or haven’t yet been bitten by the Rhône Valley bug, get ready to discover some marvelous bottles. ■■

JORDAN OGRON'S CÔTES DU RHÔNE SELECTIONS AND PAIRINGS

E. Guigal 2009 Côtes du Rhône

"The 2009 Guigal was shockingly a huge wine: Almost 10 years old, it's drinking like a current vintage. This is more of a classic pairing here. The wine is quite smoky and full of black pepper, which is also the description of our **skirt steak**, making this what I like to call an 'out of control' pairing."



Domaine Beau Mistral 2009 Rasteau Côtes du Rhône Villages "The 2009 Beau Mistral has notes of black fruit, white pepper, and herbs. The bouquet is smoky, making this a great match for our **chicken** dish. It's wood-fire grilled and the sauce poured over it is full of herbs (mostly tarragon) that just make this a heavenly pairing."



Tardieu-Laurent 2016 Les Becs Fins Côtes du Rhône Villages

"The 2016 Tardieu-Laurent CDR is quite a serious wine. It's drinking better than most Châteauneufs I've tried recently—definitely a big, 'bang for your buck' wine. This could use some time to age, so pairing it with our **bucatini** was a home run: The fat from the bone marrow cuts through the heftiness and tannin of the wine. Our homemade duck prosciutto in the dish brings out the wine's gamey flavors."



Domaine Père Caboché 2016 Côtes du Rhône "The 2016 Père Caboché is an excellent representation and expression of classic Côtes du Rhône. I love this wine with our **beef tartare** because there's a good amount of black pepper used in the dish and the wine has notes of black pepper, red fruit, and some tobacco that really complement it."

