

One of the best northern Rhône whites!

John Livingstone-Learmonth

Producer Information: Brothers Pierre and Jean Gonon work their 9 hectares of vines situated around Mauves, Tournon and St Jean de Muzols, birthplace of the appellation St Joseph. The family name is embedded into the history of this sector and can be found throughout the record books as one turns back the pages to learn of the important *lieu-dit* (named parcels) of the villages and the names of those who farmed them. They have continued to develop their small 'domaine' by planting new vines on the hillsides of Tournon and acquiring older vines in St Jean de Muzols.

The massale selection vines average 40 years and are densely planted. The soils are fertilized only with their own composts and plowed for aeration. Only natural treatments are used in the vineyard, including copper, sulphur and plant extracts. Yield are kept very low by short pruning and green harvesting in July, resulting in yields of 30 hl/ha for the reds and 38 hl/ha for the whites. Grapes are harvested only by hand and fermentation takes place only in the presence of indigenous yeasts.

Uninterested in the current trend toward single vineyard bottlings at the expense of the "entry level" cuvées, the Gonon brothers uphold the best virtues of the appellation system and draw from all of their historic parcels, each lending a distinct character, to craft only a single white and a single red Saint Joseph cuvée.

Saint Joseph Blanc, *Les Oliviers* 2006

Terroir: 2 hectares of vines situated around the original St. Joseph village of Tournon, 200 metres up on a renowned parcel recognized long before the creation of the appellation, *Coteau des Oliviers*. The vineyard is a base of granite but much of the top soil is a clay-*galest* stone mix, better for the whites, and enjoys a very unique exposition which affords it an unusually generous amount of sunning and resulting ripeness which lies at the heart of the special reputation that this parcel has earned.

Average age of vines: 40 years and densely planted.

Characteristics of the Vintage: The 2006 growing season in the Northern Rhone, with its mix of warm and cool weather scattered throughout the spring and summer months, can only be considered, by most measures, to have been a classic vintage producing classic wines. As a result, the wines from this vintage might not possess the sheer density of the renowned 2005 vintage, but at the same time they do not lack for concentration, have a charming fresh fruit profile, lovely acidity, most especially important for the whites and should be far more approachable at an earlier stage in their respective evolutions than was the case for the wines from 2005.

Tasting Notes: At once both creamy and fat while lacking nothing of freshness or acidity. Honeysuckle, orange zest, apricot, black licorice and fennel seed notes intermingle while a silky, almost oily texture, coats the palate. This is a world class, beautiful, full bodied wine that lingers on the finish with freshness and minerality.

Grape Varieties: **80% Marsanne**, lending structure and length on the palate & **20% Roussane**, contributing roundness and perfume.

Harvest: All harvesting done by hand in small trays each with a 7.5 Kg capacity.

Vinification: After the grapes arrive at the cellar, they are slowly pressed whole with the assistance of a pneumatic press. The free run juice is then left to settle without refining for twelve hours before being put into casks for the fermentation. As with the Saint Joseph red, only indigenous occurring yeasts are used in the fermentation.

Elevage: The wine then stays for approximately eleven months on refined sediment. The wine is gently agitated, *bâtonnage*, as is dictated by the character of the vintage, up until the assemblage and bottling. The wine is not filtered, which leaves a light natural sediment in the bottle.

Production: 10000 bottles / 833 cases

