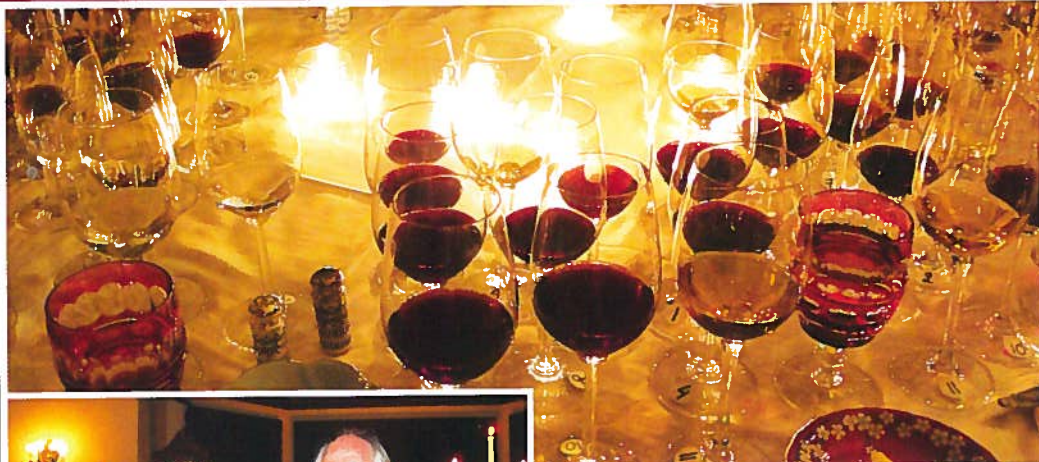


E. GUIGAL AT BLANTYRE



Philippe Guigal, third generation winemaker, and wife Eve



Christelle Cotar and Luc Chevalier of Blantyre

It's where the country's greatest wine dinners happen. Blantyre, the small, splendid luxury country house in the Berkshires of Lenox, MA, is rated the number one small hotel in a Condé Nast Traveller's survey. It has a feudal style architecture, with an English manor main house, and a wine cellar with 19,000 bottles of the world's greatest. It's also a Relais & Châteaux property renovated and managed since 1981 by Ann Fitzpatrick Brown, Blantyre's owner. What Brown does for guests' comfort, her Grand Chef Christopher Brooks does for their dining pleasure. Just in the past year, Châteaux Haut-Brion and Krug Champagnes have had superb wine dinners here, and recently Guigal, the king of Rhône producers, made its first appearance. Guigal is the greatest wine in the northern Rhône, where elixirs like La Mouline, La Turque, Château d'Ampuis are produced in the Côte-Rôtie. The winery has vineyards that date back to Roman times, about 2400 years ago, and portions of terraced Roman walls still enshrine the estate that Etienne Guigal created shortly after World War II — 1946 was not the best or easiest time to start a winery. Guigal wines are the most sought after Rhônes at every major global wine auction, and continue to break records. Philippe Guigal, oenologist and third generation, now runs the wine house, having taken over from his father Marcel,

whom Philippe considers "his best friend." It's difficult to say if the wines are better today than in the past because every wine tasted last October from ten vintages were stellar experiences, especially the incomparable 1966 **Châteauneuf-du-Pape** (deep dark color, soft fruit, abundant tannin — a powerhouse of the Rhône) and the 1995 **Côte-Rôtie Château D'Ampuis**, a wine made only in great vintages, which was sumptuous, elegant, meditative, with a depth that inspired awe. The superstar wines, however, were three

1998s **Côte-Rôtie: "La Mouline"** (elegance itself), **"La Turque"** (boldest of the three), and **"La Landonne"** (the richest of the group). Guigal is as desirable as First Growths because like all the great French estates, they do it right: having perfectly placed vineyards, heeding *terroir*, caring for their vineyards, even doing their own cooperage — only three barrels a day are made, which imparts an oak so soft and sensual you hardly know it's there. Blantyre's Chef Brooks and his Chef de Cuisine Arnaud Cotar are legendary in their food and wines pairings: *foie gras* with cranberries and brioche with **Condrieu "La Doriane 2007"**; scallops and truffles with **Hermitage Blanc 1990**; duck breast, pears and pomegranate syrup with three Guigal wines: **Saint-Joseph "Vignes de l'Hospice" 2003**, **Hermitage Rouge 1990**, **Châteauneuf-du-Pape 1966**; roasted loin of venison with marafiam potatoes; and New England cheeses with **Côte-Rôtie "Château d'Ampuis" 1995**, **Côte-Rôtie "Cote Brune Blonde" (La Pommier) magnum 1990**, and **Ermitage Blanc "Ex-Voto" 2003**. The Guigal family has always admired a phrase by English Renaissance writer Francis Bacon, which adorns the residence: "Nature cannot be ordered about, except by obeying her." Guigal knows their vineyards, obeys what nature gives them, and by so doing proceeds ultimately to order her, to give her the discipline required. It's what all great vineyards demand, what all great vineyards get.

PHOTOS: JUDITH SHEAHAN