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Richard Hemming MW

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## Dom Alary, l'Estévenas 2018 Cairanne

*Oh what a Cairanne! Beaucastel-busting brilliance from an underrated gem, courtesy of Richard in Singapore.*

From £20, \$25.89, AU\$39

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Few wines can compete with Ch de Beaucastel 1978, an iconic Châteauneuf-du-Pape from a legendary vintage – but this unassuming 2018 from the village of Cairanne did exactly that at a recent Rhône tasting I hosted. It's a blend of Syrah and Grenache, in roughly equal proportions, and even as a young wine it demonstrates complexity, depth and charisma, and punches way above its price.

That 2018 was a great vintage in the southern Rhône undoubtedly helps, as does the heritage of Domaine Alary. The estate dates back to 1692 and is currently in the hands of the 10th and 11th generations, Denis and Jean-Etienne Alary, pictured below. Such long lineage doesn't necessarily guarantee quality, but it surely proves that they must be doing something right to have lasted so long. The same might be said of Cairanne, which has grown vines since the 15th century but was only granted its own appellation in 2016 – thanks in no small part to the efforts of Denis Alary himself.

Jean-Etienne Alary has worked at [Seresin](#) in New Zealand and [Henschke](#) in Australia among others, both greatly admired estates. Domaine Alary has been certified organic since 2009 and has 30 hectares (74 acres) of vines, of which 25 are planted to red wine varieties. Winemaking is simplicity itself, with destemmed fruit fermented and matured in

concrete vats.

L'Estévenas is one of four red Cairannes produced at the estate, each of which has a different varietal composition. The high percentage of Syrah in L'Estévenas is perhaps atypical for the appellation, and is almost certainly why I love it so much. The Syrah comes from a plot planted in 1959, reputedly the first block of this variety in the southern Rhône outside Châteauneuf-du-Pape. The wine displays everything I love about the variety: black olive, dried herbs, smoked meats – though less of the black-pepper scent it displays from cooler terroirs. Grenache fills in the gaps with plump red fruit and full body while softening the tannins to make it irresistible to drink now.

From the very first sniff, this Cairanne has that elusive sense of fine wine about it – flavours that go beyond fruit and winemaking, evoking instead the sense of place for which wine is uniquely valued. To achieve this at £20 is rare indeed. Matt Walls describes Domaine Alary as 'one of the most contemporary and exciting estates in the Rhône' in *Wines of the Rhône* (Infinite Ideas, 2021), singling out L'Estévenas as 'aromatically thrilling'.

Domaine Alary's helpful website lists distributors in the UK, USA, France, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, Canada, New Zealand, Switzerland, Australia, Hungary and Sweden. If you can't find the 2018 vintage, the 2019 and 2020 should be more widely available, and also come from strong vintages.

See *our coverage of the Rhône 2018 vintage* for hundreds more recommendations.