

The Evolution of Expression

A LOS ANGELES DINNER SHOWCASED THE AGEWORTHY WINES OF
DOMAINE ANDRÉ BRUNEL

by Allison Levine

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Son-and-father winemakers Fabrice and André Brunel.

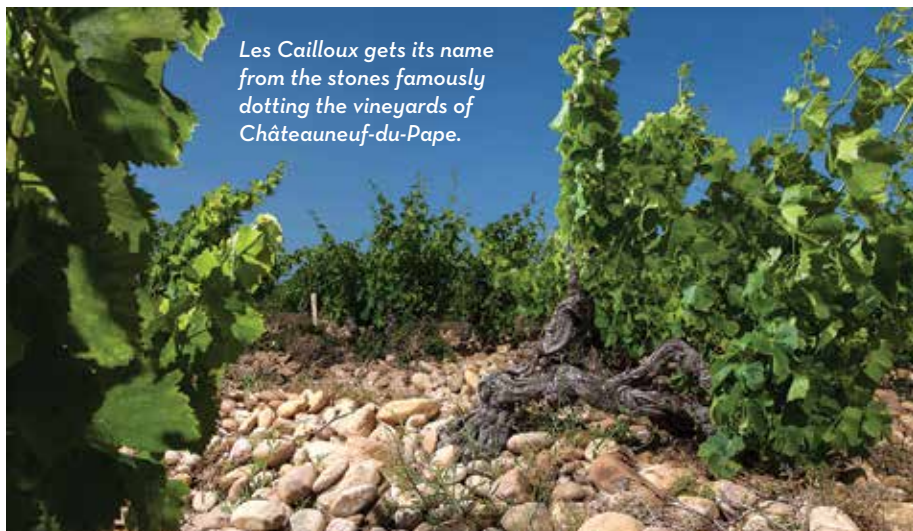
REPRESENTING THE EIGHTH generation of Domaine André Brunel—one of the oldest family-owned wineries in Châteauneuf-du-Pape—winemaker Fabrice Brunel traveled to Los Angeles in late February to showcase three vintages of André Brunel Les Cailloux at a dinner hosted by Gwen Butcher Shop & Restaurant. The vertical tasting provided an opportunity to see how the wine evolves over time as well as to compare the vintages, while the food pairings were designed to showcase them in their best light. “As it is already an absolute pleasure to taste a vertical of a beautifully balanced wine like André Brunel’s Les Cailloux,” explained Louise Jordan, DipWSET and director of communications for Quintessential, the importer of Domaine André Brunel, “I was inspired to [ask the chef to] take the tasting one step further by highlighting the ‘evolution of age’ in the food paired with the wines,” namely three differently aged beef cuts.

While the Brunel family has been making wine since the 18th century, it was not until 1954 that they began bottling it. Les Cailloux was the first label created by the estate; French for “the pebbles,” the name is an allusion to the large oval stones found in the vineyards of Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

Domaine André Brunel has 51 acres of vineyard land in Châteauneuf-du-Pape as well as an additional 170 acres under vine in Côtes du Rhône and Vaucluse. Its red-grape plantings in Châteauneuf-du-Pape include Grenache (70%), Mourvèdre (17%), Syrah (10%), and Cinsault (3%). The fruit for Les Cailloux comes from 75- to 125-year-old vines; the blend is typically two-thirds Grenache from rocky soils and one-third Mourvèdre and Syrah from sandy and shale soils. The Mourvèdre, Syrah, and 70% of the Grenache are

destemmed, and all the grapes are fermented in concrete vats. The Syrah is aged for one to two years in barrel, while the other grapes are aged for 18 months in concrete. The wine is then blended and aged for another six months before bottling. The overall result has great complexity, length, and structure yet freshness and drinkability. The Grenache gives Les Cailloux its aromas of crushed red fruits; Mourvèdre lends the wine its structure; and the Syrah provides deeper color and aromas of fresh black fruits.

Production of the **2015 Les Cailloux** was small, reflecting a vintage marked by spikes of heat followed by rain in September. The wine is fresh, elegant, and well



Les Cailloux gets its name from the stones famously dotting the vineyards of Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

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At Gwen Butcher Shop & Restaurant in Los Angeles, CA, three different vintages of Les Cailloux were served with three different cuts of beef.

PHOTO: ALLISON LEVINE

structured, with good but not overpowering concentration; showing lively fruit notes, it finishes with silky tannins and finesse. At only seven years old, it has another ten years to go. The **2010 Les Cailloux** hails from a vintage characterized by a rainy spring and dry summer, which yielded concentrated grapes. Fruit-driven with mineral notes, it has both structure and freshness and could be aged another 15–20 years. Finally, the **2005 Les Cailloux** came from a good harvest with low yields. Well balanced and structured, it shows maturity in its expressive aromas of leather and dried fruit but is still alive with acidity.

The 2015 vintage was paired with

New York strip and roasted seasonal vegetables, while the 2010 was accompanied by smoked brisket with smoked-potato espuma and the 2005 was served with 30-day dry-aged rib-eye with truffle butter. The attendees at the dinner were in unanimous agreement with the assessment of Fabrice Brunel as to the pairings' success: "I really enjoyed having the wines and dishes served together [simultaneously]. It allowed us to taste and try as we liked, but ultimately, I preferred the original pairings the most," he shared. "The Les Cailloux 2015 with the New York strip was a fresh and bright pairing. The Les Cailloux 2010 with the

smoked brisket was unique, the sweetness of the meat matching the viscosity and richer notes of the wine. And finally, the Les Cailloux 2005 with the 30-day dry-aged rib-eye was a perfect match—both showing signs of aged character but still retaining complementary fruity and juicy notes."

"As the wine aged, so too did its complementary dish," Jordan concluded. "It was a fun and playful way to showcase these elegant, complex, and ageworthy wines." *SJ*

The wines of Domaine André Brunel are available through Quintessential.