There's nothing better than a good friend, except for a good friend with a bottle of wine.

Like many of us most wine drinkers are looking to purchase quality wines at reasonable prices impertinently many will find themselves gravitating toward mainstream wine. Shoppers don't realize that they are shortchanging themselves by overlooking high pedigree wines within the same price point that they wish to shop within. Consumers as well as many collector's settle on highly publicized wine and passing over wines that are not noticed or rated by critics. Much of the best old world wine that an enthusiast drinker can experience is the often-disregarded wine that comes out of the Rhone valley of France. Many of these wines can deliver the elegance of Burgundy and the power and longevity of Bordeaux.

Northern Rhone

The region is divided into two separate demarcated districts, of the two northern Rhone is considered by many as the most prestigious. This is where you will find names like Cote Rotie, Hermitage and the renowned Condrieu. Wineries from the north not only share in common the same grapes, the noble red Syrah grape and classic whites such as Viognier, Roussanne, and Marsanne but the difficulty of working the steep terrain within the vineyards. Some slopes are so treacherous that vines would not grow if not for the man-made terraces allowing for worker and vines alike to have a surface to facilitate in. During harvest winches and pullies are used to get baskets of grapes from vineyard to winery.

Condrieu and chateau Grillet only make wine exclusively from the Viognier grape. The vines of Grillet are planted on terraces so small that some can only contain around 10 vines per terrace making this the smallest AOC in France. Wine from Cote Rotie and Cornas cover les than 500 acres limiting production levels and therefore allowing wines to develop exceptional structure making them suitable for long term aging. Hermitage, Crozes Hermitage and St-Joseph are unique tasting wines that can have savory notes including bacon fat and smells of barnyard characteristics. On their own these wines may not sound appealing but imagine pairing these wines with bacon wrapped beef wellington or a wrapped fillet Mignon or how about a boasted garlic stuffed lamb.

Southern Rhone

In the southern Rhone you will find Cotes-du-Rhone, Cotes-du-Rhone-Villages and the famous Chateauneuf-du-Pape. The topography of southern Rhone is much flatter than its counterpart and the climate is Mediterranean rather than Continental making the diurnal temperature’s more consistent. Two important appellations are Lirac and Tavel, which is noted for producing classic rose. One the eastern river bank of the Rhone river is the famous Chateauneuf-du-Pape. The name translates to the “New Castle of the Pope” Many don’t realize that not all Popes resided in Rome. In fact from 1303-1378 there were 7 Popes that resided in Avignon France known as the Avignon Papacy or the Babylon Captivity. The Babylonian captivity or Babylonian exile is the reference to the period in Jewish history during which a number of Jews of the ancient Kingdom of Judah were captives in Babylonia. After the Battle of Carchemish in 605 BCE.

As of 2009 18 different grape varieties are now permitted in the making of Chateauneuf-du-Pape. It is not required to use all 18 varieties and most do not. The majority of these wines roughly 70% use Grenache as the base blend of the wine. However, Chateau Beaucastel has always chosen to include all approved variety’s in their wines. On rare occasions, you might find a bottle of white Chateauneuf-du-Pape, these are difficult to find because they represent less than 5% of the grapes harvested. That’s correct, white varieties are approved to be grown this means your red wine could actually have small portions of white grapes blended into your red Chateauneuf-du-Pape. Within the southern Rohne you will find many quality wines from districts such as Vacqueyras, Gigondas, and Rasteau

So next time you’re out to purchase a bottle of wine don’t go for the ordinary go for the extraordinary, in a word, RHONE!

Selected below is a small sample of the vast selection of wines to be found at your nearest 21st amendment store. I think you will find that this selection to be a crowd pleaser and well suited for your drinking and dining experience.

2014 Pont Du Rhone Red Blend, Cotes du Rhone, Rhone France ------------------------------------------- $10.98
2015 Grange Des Dames Rose Blend, Ventoux, Rhone France $14.98
2012 Domaine Du Vieux Chene Red Blend, Cote-du-Rhone-Village, Rhone France $23.98
2006 Les Perrines Syrah Saint-Joseph, Rhone France $24.98
2005 Domaine Jaboulet Rose Blend, Crozes Hermitage, Rhone France $25.97
2007 Le Mas des Collines Rose Blend, Gigondas, Rhone France $29.99

Stop in to 21st Amendment at 3404 E. 146th St. Carmel, In 46033. Meet Wine Director Bryan Criswell a Sommelier from the Court of Master Sommeliers and Wine Master from the Wine Education Guild. Bryan will freely consult with you Tuesday through Saturday & assist with any purchase, questions or suggestions that you may have.