

WINE News

Join us on a journey through the Loire.



MAY 31, 2021 FEATURES

- 2 Bernard Baudry Chinon; Franck Millet Sancerre
- 3 Terroir of Cabernet Franc
- 4 Sauvignon Blanc Roundup!

The Unfettered River

By Keith Mabry

The Loire River begins its journey in the Massif Central and winds its way through the greater part of western France some 1,000 kilometers before emptying into the Atlantic. Along this path, the river has carved out some of the best growing areas in all of France, and continues to nurture the cultural heritage along its banks. The wine regions we recognize within the Loire Valley begin in an area known as the Centre-Loire, where Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé make their home. Up-and-coming areas include Quincy and Menetou-Salon, and wines produced a little further upstream in the Côte Roannaise and Châteaumeillant are a delight to those who find them. As we proceed down river, we pass through Touraine, home to some of France’s most famous castles and the region’s greatest values. We pass Vouvray,

Chinon, and Montlouis-sur-Loire, home to the historical cave-dwelling “troglodytes” and where Chenin Blanc and Cabernet Franc become the dominant grapes. We pass through Saumur, last of the Turonian limestone and home to the region’s most powerful reds, and enter Anjou, where Chenin and Cab Franc, and even Cabernet Sauvignon, find new flavors and character over the varied schist soils. We begin to disembark as we approach Nantes and pass through the Muscadet region with its clean, iconic shellfish wines and its varied volcanic soils. The path of the Loire tells ancient stories, but there are plenty of new ones being written today. In this newsletter, we visit some of our favorite places on this path alongside our favorite producers. Join us on this journey, won’t you?

2019 Domaine du Haut Bourg Muscadet Côtes de Grandlieu Sur Lie (\$12.99)

Sadly, we have reached last call on one of my favorite whites to arrive earlier this year. The Haut Bourg is consummate Muscadet with its flavors of apple, pear, peach, and wet stone. A streak of acidity gives it all the right drive and tension to cleanse and refresh the palate and invite another sip. This is (soon to be, was) a great value! **95 DC**



2019 Domaine Vacheron Sancerre (\$36.99)

Vacheron remains a benchmark producer in Sancerre: all Demeter-certified vineyards, incredible terroir, top-notch but non-intrusive winemaking. The drag is usually supply. Luckily, we just landed a parcel that we can offer. For those who love Sancerre or incredible whites in general, this is a gold-standard bottle that will surely impress you and your wine-drinking friends for years to come. **93 RP, 92 VN**



2019 Domaine de la Taille Aux Loups “Clos Michet” Montlouis-sur-Loire (\$29.99)

Vignerons Jacky Blot makes some of my favorite Chenin Blancs in the Loire. Grown on the opposite side of the river from the more famous Vouvray appellation, this racy and dry Chenin has gorgeous intensity with burnished apple, mango, Key lime, and toasted brioche. This is a fabulous wine with decades of life ahead of it. **96 DC**



Riverine idyll in the Loire: swans by Château de Chambord. (Photo: Shutterstock)

Floral, Spicy, Juicy: Chinon of Bernard Baudry

By Andrew Tobin

Chinon is among the wonderful but relatively underappreciated wine regions that generate a lot of staff favorites at K&L, and we are privileged to carry the wines of one such favorite, Bernard Baudry.

Bernard worked as an advisor to the Tours laboratory and studied in Beaune before returning to the Loire and starting his own project on just two hectares in 1975. Now holding 32 hectares throughout Chinon (about 90% of which are planted with Cabernet Franc, with the rest being Chenin), he produces some truly great wines.

The **2018 Bernard Baudry “Les Grézeaux” Chinon (\$27.99)** is grown just north of the Les Granges, separated by a river and near the bottom of the slope in Sonnay, on gravel and clay soil. It’s the oldest plot on the estate, with the vines being around 60 years old. The nose is wonderful, with notes of violet, raspberry, blackberry, and a rich cured meat quality that helps broaden it. The palate is remarkably vibrant, full of bright blackberry, raspberry, and aging violet, with a touch of pepper. The finish is spiced with notes of fennel and punctuated by an even more pronounced floral note that makes this wine long and luscious.



The **2019 Bernard Baudry “Les Granges” Chinon (\$19.99)** is grown mostly on sand and gravel, with the vines being around 30 years old. The nose is considerably brighter on the Les Granges, focusing more on cassis, blackberry, and black pepper, but maintaining those notes of violet. The palate is a touch lighter than the Les Grézeaux, with a softer feel as well, focusing on sweet blackberry, blueberry, cocoa, and black pepper. The finish is light and floral with a mix of violet and lavender that lingers without being heavy.

The **2017 Bernard Baudry “Les Clos Guillot” Chinon (\$34.99)** is grown toward the top of the hill on limestone and clay on a southeast-facing slope. The plot is the youngest of the three wines, having been planted between 1993 and 2000. This is the most delicate of the wines, filled out with strawberry, raspberry, and the violet similar to the other two, plus a bright touch of pepper. The palate is light and silky, with the strawberry and raspberry forming the backbone, but with more minerality. The effect is more akin to potpourri, with the floral components of the previous two paired up with spice and dried strawberry. **93 VN**

Poetry in a Bottle: Franck Millet Sancerre

By Giovanni Buono

*Sancerre, Sancerre, how debonair,
how lovely you fare;
How widely you pair—
(of course we will share!)
Though others may care,
they can never compare.*

The Loire River is born in the Cévennes mountains in the south of France, and as it meanders toward its end it carves away at the edge of a fat chunk of chalk that connects the regions of Champagne, Chablis, and the lively Sancerre.

In Sancerre this chalky-clay soil and the effects of the river in the area make for aromatically powerful and graceful wines made from primarily Sauvignon Blanc, and also some Pinot Noir.

Franck Millet and his wife Betty represent our strongest foothold in the region of Sancerre, year after year producing spectacular expressions of this wonderful terroir. The 2019 vintage was a showcase year for the region, with a cold start that threatened but barely delivered frost, followed by a hot and dry summer. This combo made for fruit that was aromatically ripe but had plenty of acidity to balance.



Franck Millet, left, with Clyde Beffa Jr., Betty Millet, and Keith Mabry.

A bottle of **2019 Franck Millet’s “Insolite” Sancerre (\$29.99)** especially shows the poise of this stellar vintage with great wafts of grapefruit, lemon peel, underripe peach, and a subtle hint of capsicum all playing together with great texture and remarkable balance. The winemaker macerates the Sauvignon Blanc grapes at very cold temperatures to extract flavor and nuance to help to make this a wine you should happily age, if you can keep your hands off it.

If classic, clean, fresh, and invigorating Sauvignon Blanc is more your style, then the **2019 Franck Millet Sancerre Blanc (\$19.99)** will be your summer go-to. Keen citrus notes of lime and lemon interplay with tropical fruit and hints of chalk.

And if you didn’t know, Sancerre plays favor to Pinot Noir in a bright, red fruit-heavy, round and juicy style with violets and subtle herbs on the nose. Throw a bottle of **2019 Franck Millet Sancerre Rouge (\$19.99)** in the fridge for a crisp, vivid pairing to roasted poultry or anything umami-rich like mushrooms, or even truffles.



The Terroir of Cabernet Franc

By Keith Mabry

Someone recently asked me describe Cabernet Franc from the Loire Valley. In an oversimplified way, I said, “It drinks like Cabernet Sauvignon with Pinot Noir structure.” But as we dig deeper, Cab Franc is just as terroir-driven as the Pinot Noir of Burgundy. Along the Loire there are several major growing areas that each have a different influence from soil types that make them so magical and distinctive. The big difference between the Loire Valley and Burgundy, though, is the cost of inclusion. For under \$20 a bottle, you can get some of the best terroir-drinking the Loire has to offer.

We start in the renowned Cabernet Franc-producing region of Chinon. The soil type here is most influenced by a tributary river to the Loire, the Vienne. Where the Loire has carved the soils down on the northern side of the appellation, the Vienne has worn down the Turonian limestone that makes this region famous. Resting above that limestone are all the alluvial soils of gravel, sand, and clay that the Loire and Vienne deposited over the last hundreds-of-thousands of years. A top producer in the region who gets more and more of his due each year is Jerome Billard. His 2019 **Domaine de la Noblaie “Le Temps des Cerises” Chinon (\$17.99)** is a tribute to the diverse soil types of this region. Making up about 50% of his overall production, “Cherry Time!” as Jerome affectionately calls this wine, comes from the varied parcels in his holdings. Clay, sand, limestone—each has an influence, but the sum of soil types contributes to the inviting and intoxicating nose of cherries, sage, fresh cut violets, and savory spices that waft from the glass. This is beautifully medium-bodied with sweet tannins, bright acidity, and a wonderfully supple finish. A perfect introduction to the terroir of Chinon and the influence it has at this level. **90 VN**

Progressing down river we visit the region of Saumur. Within Saumur, Cabernet Franc reigns supreme, with more plateaus overlooking the Loire along its south bank. This makes for very

thin topsoils and thick tuffeaux limestone for the vines to try to penetrate. The newer sub-appellation of Saumur-Puy-Notre-Dame is a little further south of the river on some of the highest plateaus. The 2018 **Domaine de l’Enchantoir “Le Pied à L’Étrier” Saumur Puy-Notre-Dame Rouge (\$17.99)** makes for a more structured and earthy style of Cabernet Franc. Showing red and black currant fruit, porcini mushroom, rosemary, and fresh-tilled earth, it harks back to the more powerfully austere and structured wines from another era. That’s not to say the fruit isn’t generous — it is! This just pulls in all those savory notes that make for beautifully classic Cabernet Franc. This is a great bottle to sit back and watch unfold in the glass, and if you’re patient, evolve for a few years in the cellar. **91 WE**

Just west of Saumur lies the region of Anjou, which is bisected by the Loire. Anjou takes on a whole different soil type. Where Chinon and Saumur are influenced by the ancient seabeds that have risen and been carved away by the river and glacial activity, Anjou is much more driven by schist soils. Schist is often thought of as a cooling soil type, giving way to brighter, crunchier flavors. The 2018 **Château Soucherie “Reliefs” Anjou Rouge (\$16.99)** is planted on gravelly schist soils, and with that comes a nose of red raspberries, blueberries, and tobacco. Pretty and perfumed, it also has about 10% Grolleau (an indigenous variety) blended into the cuvée that amps up the floral tones. Crackling with some nerve as well, this a food wine pure and simple. This is a perfect wine to pair up with some beautifully roasted chicken or grilled fish. **91 JD**

So, as our little journey ends, these three wines will give you a meaningful survey of the varied soils and their influence on Cab Franc, the variety. Beyond that, Loire Valley Cabernet Franc is one of the ultimate wines for the table. They are food-friendly across the board, they are inviting and none too heavy, and can make any weeknight just a little more interesting.



Quiet times along the Vienne. Only thing missing from this photo? Hamper-chilled bottle of Cabernet Franc. (Photo: Shutterstock)



Summer in a glass, in the making: View of vineyards around the village of Sancerre. (Photo: Shutterstock)

Sauvignon Blanc Roundup!

By Keith Mabry

From Touraine to Sancerre, Sauvignon Blanc is the most prominent wine grape along the Loire. All the sub-regions have their various take on it, but the calcareous soils along the way are what make this the best region in the world for Sauvignon Blanc production. Here are some of our favorites:

Near the village of Chenonceaux is the winery Domaine du Vieil Orme. Based in the appellation of Touraine, they make outstanding whites and reds from a host of local grapes, but they excel at Sauvignon Blanc. The **2020 Domaine du Vieil Orme Sauvignon Blanc Touraine (\$12.99)** is newly arrived and a stunning value. Filled with grapefruit and lime flavors, it is vibrant and steely, with a gooseberry finish. We call this Sancerre quality but at half the price.

Just across the Loire River from Sancerre lies Pouilly-Fumé. For years I felt Pouilly-Fumé would become the eponymous wine of the region, as one of the Loire's biggest icons, Dagueneau, is based there. But it was overtaken by Sancerre in overall production and sales. Perhaps initially, it was easier to pronounce Sancerre and order it off a wine list. But that's okay—more Fumé for me! The soils in Pouilly-Fumé are very similar to Sancerre but have a bit more silex (flint) which give it its slightly smoky, flinty character. I love it, and no one on our shelves does it better than Marius Tabordet, whose property is adjacent to Dagueneau! The **2019 Domaine Tabordet “Le Champs des Vignes” Pouilly-Fumé (\$21.99)** has an intoxicating perfume of dried lemon peel, pomelo, and crushed rocks. The palate is long, with a mouthwatering finish. It just oozes all the freshness and intensity of the 2019 vintage, too, and will evolve well for a few years to come.

In Sancerre, we have host of great producers we work with. Now in our fourth year of working with her, Aurore Dezat is making some of the most sumptuous and inviting wines in our Direct Import portfolio. Her regular Sancerre is her best to date. The **2019 Aurore Dezat Sancerre (\$19.99)** is filled with zesty flavors of Meyer lemon, verbena, and chalky limestone. It is clean, crisp, and tense on the finish. It remains one of our great values in the category at just under \$20 a bottle.

Showing even more depth of flavor and great to rest for a year or two longer is the **2018 Aurore Dezat “Les Chasseignes” Sancerre (\$29.99)**. A little bit of barrel aging gives this pristine Sauvignon Blanc a nuanced yet mineral-driven focus that is as persistent on the palate as it is electric. Lemongrass, grilled peach, and Key lime pie are just some of the flavors. A not-to-be missed experience! **92 WE**



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