

KOT Selections

WINE IMPORT, DISTRIBUTION & ADVISORY

PORTFOLIO

FRANCE

NOVEMBER 2012

PREFACE

About our portfolio

Our current portfolio is drawn from the three Old World countries of France, Germany and Italy, where our drinking and eating experience is widest and deepest. There is a skew towards producers in the cooler areas of these countries; their wines are generally higher in acidity and fresher tasting, tend to pair better with food, and work better in tropical climates. Quantities are limited as we work with small growers whose wines are keenly sought after elsewhere. We also hold personal stocks of each and every wine for our own consumption; in financial parlance, we have 'skin in the game'.

Structure

We have divided our portfolio into regions where our winegrowers are based; and at the start of each section provide a brief summary about the region, focusing on the *terroir* and viticultural practice. In a few cases, our winegrowers span several regions, and we have placed them within their 'home' region, where most of their wine comes from.

For each winegrower, we briefly describe his approach and methods, and where appropriate, historical and regional context. Rather than conventional tasting notes, which are adjective heavy and tend to sound alike, we comment on the available vintage(s) in continuous prose. We do include broad stylistic descriptors and food pairing suggestions for each wine, based on our own experience.

Ratings (lack of)

We do not give the wines points, ratings or stars, preferring not to reduce a multi-dimensional experience to a single unit on a linear scale. Likewise, we do not quote wine reviewers, their tasting notes or the ratings they give out, although we occasionally make references to wine writers whom we respect.

This is because we believe in the importance of context: personal (your preferences), culinary (what is on the table), social (who is at the table) and cultural (what are the expectations). We strongly encourage all our clients to try the wines before committing to any significant orders, rather than be guided by a stranger's recommendations.

Most importantly, because we have tasted (and drunk) every single wine in our portfolio, usually with the winegrower, we trust our intuition and judgment. These are wines which we think are delicious, interesting, and true to their origins.

Orders

Please note that this portfolio is not a trading document, and for that reason we have not included prices, although terms and conditions are appended for ease of reference. There is also a unique SKU (stock-keeping unit) to identify each wine. If you wish to purchase wines from us, please contact us and we will send over a current pricelist.

LIST OF GROWERS

Champagne

P03. Laherte Frères
P05. De Sousa & Fils

Loire

Pays-Nantais (Muscadet)

P08. Domaine de la Pépière
P10. Domaine Pierre Luneau-Papin
P12. Domaine de l'Ecu
P14. Michel Brégeon

Anjou

P16. Clos de la Coulée de Serrant
P18. Domaine du Closel
P20. Damien Laureau
P22. Patrick Baudouin
P24. Clos de l'Élu
P26. Benoît Courault

Beaujolais

P49. Domaine Chamonard
P50. Domaine des Terres Dorées

Rhône

P53. Eric Texier
P56. Domaine du Trapadis
P58. Domaine Pierre Gonon

Savoie

P60. Domaine Dupasquier
P62. Prieuré St. Christophe
P63. Domaine Gilles Berlioz

Saumur-Bourgueil-Chinon

P28. Château de Fosse-Sèche
P29. Yannick Amirault
P30. Bernard Baudry

Touraine

P33. Clos Roche Blanche
P35. Domaine Huet
P38. Francois Pinon
P40. Francois Cazin (Cour-Cheverny)
P42. Domaine de la Charrière (Jasnières)

Centre

P47. Vincent Gaudry

CHAMPAGNE

Champagne as we know it goes through two fermentations: the first to convert grape sugars to alcohol (like in almost all wines), and a second in bottle to create and capture the bubbles. The 'wine' at the end of the first fermentation is called *vin clair*, and the best ones are often delicious in a high acid, electric fashion. High quality *vin clair* is a prerequisite for making great Champagne, which in turn is only possible where the *terroir* is superb, the farming immaculate, and cellar practices prudent.

The primary grape varieties of Champagne are Pinot Meunier, Pinot Noir (both at just over a third of all plantings), and Chardonnay (about a quarter). Each variety prefers different soil types and expositions, but the best sites are typically in the middle of the slightly concave slopes, where there is enough clay topsoil to sustain the vines as they root themselves in the chalk bedrock. Good farming is critical to retaining this topsoil without the addition of large amounts of artificial compost; two common techniques are the planting of cover crops (to reduce erosion and provide natural composting material) and gentle ploughing (to aerate the soil).

A Pinot Meunier *vin clair* is often intensely fruity, while its cousin Pinot Noir is usually more complex, less forward. Chardonnay, on the other hand, is minerally, dense, and typically the most acidic. When blended in the right proportions, the result is much more than the sum of its parts, and requires less trickery in both the *tirage* (added to start the second fermentation) and *dosage* (to top up the bottles) to be a delightful tippie.

We are very fortunate to be working with two growers who hold true to the principles of making great Champagne: Erick de Sousa in the Côtes des Blancs and Aurélien Laherte of Laherte Frères.

Aurélien Laherte, Laherte Frères

Old family, new blood

The Laherte family has deep roots in the village of Chavot, located at the confluence of the Vallée de la Marne and Côtes des Blancs. This means that Aurélien Laherte is fortunate enough to be working with some very fine and diverse terroirs, old vines planted by his



Ploughing in 'Les Clos'

grandfather (including some via *provignage*, also known as *marcottage*), and lesser-known, rarer varieties. He brings to this a dedication to vineyard work (some of the land is in biodynamie, and most of the rest is organic) and a thoughtful approach in the cellar (such as the installation of a second press to shorten the harvest process and ensure fresher juice).

The results are impressive right now, but we think the estate's best years lie ahead as Aurélien builds up the reserve wines which will give his basic Champagnes weight and complexity, and as the vineyards respond to the gentler, more sustainable farming methods.



Region:	Champagne	Website:	www.champagne-laherte.com
Size:	~10ha	Viticulture:	Mostly organic or biodynamic

The wines

Most of the production (only 7,500 cases a year) is in two cuvées: the Meunier-dominated non-vintage Brut Tradition and the Blanc de Blancs (Chardonnay, of course). Both are fine examples of a drier, racier style of Champagne, and will benefit from some bottle aging, as will the 2005 vintage bottling. In contrast, the current 'Les Empreintes' is gloriously fruity and mineral, reflecting the 'imprint' of the 2008 vintage which it is based on. On the more exotic side, we enjoyed the stunning 'Les Clos', a melange of 7 varieties from the 2005-2007 harvests, and the delightful 'Les Vignes d'Autrefois', a chalky, red-fruited Pinot Meunier from very old vines. The 2007 vintage is still young and needs a short decant.

N.V. Brut Tradition (magnums, jeroboams also available)

60% Pinot Meunier from old vines in and near Chavot, with 30% Chardonnay from the Côtes des Blancs and a final tenth from Pinot Noir vines planted near the bottom of Chavot village. Harvested by hand, pressed in a traditional basket press, and depending on the quality of the juice, fermentation in either vats or barrels. There is typically malolactic on the Pinot Meunier but not the Chardonnay, and the dosage is kept quite low at 6-8g/l. The final wine is aged for about half a year before disgorgement, although both Aurélien and ourselves prefer bottles with more age. It's at once both a fruity and racy Champagne, due to the high proportion of old vines Pinot Meunier, and very well-suited as an aperitif.

N.V. Brut Blanc de Blancs (magnums, jeroboams also available)

All Chardonnay from the Côtes des Blancs and around Epernay. There is some malolactic fermentation which begins naturally on the lower acid, higher pH lots, and the dosage is kept quite low at 5g/l. The final wine is aged for about half a year before disgorgement, although as with the Brut Tradition, it will age very nicely for 3-5 years at the very least. It's a creamy, luscious champagne with a real backbone of acid, and can be served either as a powerful aperitif or with fish and shellfish.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-CHA-03-002-NV	NV Brut Tradition	Seafood, simply prepared
FRA-CHA-03-005-NV	NV Brut Blanc de Blancs	Best as an aperitif, although it works with tempura as well
FRA-CHA-03-011-05	2005 Brut Prestige	Decant for an hour or two before serving with fish
FRA-CHA-03-012-NV	NV 'Les Beaudiers' Rosé de Saignee	Absolutely perfect with Cantonese roast meats
FRA-CHA-03-013-07	2007 'Les Vignes d'Autrefois'	Great as an aperitif, great Pinot Meunier fruit
FRA-CHA-03-014-NV	NV 'Les Clos'	Exotic and dry, best with some raw shellfish
FRA-CHA-03-015-08	2008 'Les Empreintes'	Brightness on midpalate works well with root vegetable soups

Erick de Sousa, De Sousa & Fils

A thoughtful vigneron



Erick in his paradise

Erick de Sousa was one of the very first in Champagne to embrace biodynamics, back when it was primarily a farming phenomenon restricted to the Loire Valley. Even today, most vineyards in Champagne still resemble a lunar landscape, with rock-hard, compacted soil. This is especially evident in winter, when growers give up the pretense of growing cover crops between the rows, and save money on herbicides by dousing the fields so liberally with fertilisers that the weeds actually die from phosphate poisoning. So it is quite something to see Erick's immaculate vineyards, neatly pruned and trained, and a delight to walk on soil that isn't deadened from mechanical (large tractors) and chemical abuse.

The winemaking here is also traditional and careful – Eric prefers malolactic fermentation to take place, which softens the wine slightly and allows him to use a lower dosage (added sugar) than would otherwise be the case. The top *cuvées* see some oak, but otherwise neutral containers are preferred as he tries to preserve fruit purity and freshness. In our experience, the wines are much better after a few years in bottle.



Region:	Champagne	Website:	www.champagnedesousa.com
Size:	11ha	Viticulture:	Almost completely biodynamic

The wines

N.V. Brut Tradition

50% Chardonnay, with 40% Pinot Noir and the remainder Pinot Meunier, this is supposedly the floral, easy-drinking wine in the range. It certainly is that, but there's a lot more depth to this wine with some bottle age, and the clean flavours means that it works well in all sorts of settings – in a hawker centre with grilled seafood (careful with the *samba*), at cocktail receptions with assorted canapés, or just with a good book (or TV show, although those seem to be very rare).

N.V. Brut Réserve Grand Cru (magnums also available)

All Chardonnay, from Grand Cru parcels in Avize, Cramant, Le Mesnil Sur Oger, Chouilly and Oger, this is a stonking Champagne. It's quite creamy and rich on both the nose and the 'attack' (when one first sips it), but then the structure starts to assert itself on the midpalate. Decanted for about 24 hours, it really does taste like a very, very fine Grand Cru Chablis.

N.V. Cuvée 3A

The three As in this case represent the three crus where the grapes come from: 50% Chardonnay from Avize, 25% Pinot Noir from Aÿ, and 25% Pinot Noir from Ambonnay. Despite the slightly silly origin of this cuvée (three Grand Cru villages beginning with the same letter, i.e. A), it was fantastically executed by Erick. The Chardonnay provides both finesse and power, while the Pinot Noir fruit is evident on the palate. It's made in a dry, savoury style, and requires some food to show its best.

N.V. Cuvée des Caudalies

Erick's top cuvée from his old Chardonnay vines, this is aged exclusively in oak barrels, some of which is new. At this stage there are about 15 different vintages in the blend, starting with the 1995, resulting in a multi-layered, very complex and utterly delicious wine. It works very well with any rich fish, either cutting through the fat (as with *o-toro*), cleansing the mouth of gelatin (as with turbot), or matching the texture (as with eels). We think it's best about 3-5 years after disgorgement (the dates are on the back label), or with a short decant to allow the wine to come together.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-CHA-02-002-NV	N.V. Brut Tradition	An ideal aperitif, works with a wide range of canapés
FRA-CHA-02-004-NV	N.V. Brut Réserve	Fried chicken, as well as roast suckling pig; any combination of fat and salt
FRA-CHA-02-006-NV	N.V. Cuvée 3A	Lobster or crab, boiled/steamed and served cold
FRA-CHA-02-008-NV	N.V. Cuvée des Caudalies	A fatty, rich fish, or a Bresse chicken with truffles, either Bocuse or Pacaud style

LOIRE – PAYS-NANTAIS

The Pays-Nantais stretches from where the river Loire empties into the Atlantic to just east of Ingrandes, centred on the maritime city of Nantes. It had historically been a red wine producing region, until the severe winter of 1709 (which killed off many vines) and increasing demand for a neutral base white wine (to supply distillers in Holland) led to the widespread plantation of Melon de Bourgogne, which today is better known as Muscadet.

That same neutrality has allowed Muscadet, at its best, to be vivid expressions of otherwise subtle geological differences. The rich loam and clay topsoils of the region disguise their complex origins in the ancient *Massif Armoricaïn*, composed of both magmatic (granite, gabbro) and metamorphic (gneiss, orthogneiss) rocks. Where the granite is quartz-rich, Muscadet is saline and crystalline; with more feldspar, it takes on density without losing verve. On gneiss and orthogneiss, especially in warm vintages, Melon de Bourgogne harks back to its roots further east. And the dark gabbro outcrops around Clisson produce the most primeval wines of all, Ur-Muscadets which whisper of rocks and oceans across decades.

We work with four of the most dedicated growers in Muscadet, and over the last two years there's been a generational shift for all of them. There's of course the intensely hard-working and gifted Marc Ollivier, now joined by the innovative, energetic Rémi Branger. The Luneau-Papin dynasty is now into its seventh generation with Pierre-Marie, who has brought new ideas and a new wine (he also has a newborn son, whom we hope to work with in the future). After a period of uncertainty, the *terroirist* Guy Bossard, who pipes in Bach to soothe his wines, now has Fréd Niger by his side; and last but certainly not least, Michel Brégeon has handed over substantial duties to Fréd (yes, another one) Lailler.

A note on the 2011 vintage

We were there in February 2011, and even then the signs were good; probably too good, on hindsight. Throughout spring, we kept on exchanging e-mails about how early (and easy) flowering had been, how the bunches were ripening evenly, and all seemed set for an August harvest. Then the clouds set in and harvest dates got pushed back; grey rot set in, particularly in moister parcels where the water encouraged mould formation. Most of the sorting was done in the vineyards (our growers harvest by hand, which makes it much easier to only pick good bunches), but it was still pretty grim at the wineries as the grapes came in. Furthermore, even though Melon de Bourgogne ripens quickly when conditions are benign, cloudy summers often result in 'stuck' grapes as the vine prefers to focus its energy on its survival (by growing more foliage) rather than reproduction.

We think a good parallel is the 2001 vintage, but perhaps with a bit more body - the cold summer kept acids high and there's a lot of tensile strength in the old vines wines. We suggest decanting all of them for an hour or so to let the wines uncoil; they will also benefit from being served slightly warmer for broader aromatic expression.

Marc Ollivier & Rémi Branger, Domaine de la Pépière

The gentle giant



Marc, well-grounded

Like the proverbial gentle giant, Marc Ollivier is happiest outdoors, speaks slowly and carefully (in both French and English), and always has a broad smile or laugh ready. He is unstinting when lauding fellow *vignerons* in Muscadet, but just as much praise should go to him for making some of the greatest wines in the region since 1984, when he started the domaine with inherited land.

The dialect word 'Pépière' (which means thirst, e.g. '*avoir la pépière*') had long been associated with his family land due to the presence of a well. Marc has worked incredibly hard and traded shrewdly to convert his initial holdings into some of the best vineyards around Clisson, which he has further improved with organic farming. Recently, he has also been experimenting with different ploughing techniques and cover crops to increase biodiversity and vine resilience.

Marc's wines more than match up to the promise of his land – they are clear, robust examples of granite-based Muscadet, although we are very excited by what he has done on gneiss as well. It's what he doesn't do which makes his wines so outstanding – he doesn't add yeasts to start or speed up the fermentation, he doesn't use enzymes to develop certain fruit flavours, and he doesn't rush to bottle, often waiting more than a year for his top wines. Coupled with a commitment to manually harvesting only the best fruit, it's a recipe for some of the most astonishing wines in the region.



Region:	Loire – Pays-Nantais	Website:	www.domainedelapepiere.com
Size:	~30ha	Viticulture:	Mostly organic

The wines

The domaine white is fresh and pure every vintage, while the later bottling ('AB') has more depth from slightly older vines (about a half-century or more) – both are good for daily consumption. We find it difficult to choose between the *Clos des Briords*, *Clisson* and *Château Thébaud*; the *Clisson* is sharp as a razor, in contrast to the exotic and punchy *Château Thébaud*, while the *Clos des Briords* sits between the two. The gneiss-based cuvée *Les Gras Moutons* is usually lush and round, and we have a weakness for the barrel-fermented and -aged *Clos Cormerais*, which is as unique as it sounds. We also have a small allocation of the *Pépié Bulles*, a thoroughly fun, delicious sparkling blend of Melon de Bourgogne and Chardonnay

2011 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine AB

This is a very crisp, clear expression of Muscadet, and the 'AB' bottling in this vintage has a slightly herbal, white pepper quality. It's what we call a patio wine, to be served when the light is softest around dusk, with some snacks (oysters, of course, but *ikan bilis*, *keropok* and roasted groundnuts all work). It should age very nicely, of course, but we have never been able to keep our hands off the wine for that long.

2010 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine sur lie 'Clos des Briords' (magnums available)

If you take the domaine wine, increase the amplitude and the elegance, then you get the *Clos des Briords*. We think this will age wonderfully – ten-year old examples from less exalted

vintages were fine in both bottle and magnum formats (we have a number of magnums available), and it picks up additional mineral complexity with bottle age.

2010 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine sur lie 'Les Gras Moutons'

A wine we like very much, but probably our least favourite of all his cuvées (when young) as it shows the rounder leanings of gneiss-based Muscadet. It's not just the name (literally, 'The Fat Sheep') playing tricks on us, and it's reliably one of the richest, roundest young Muscadets one can get. There are no older examples as the wine used to be blended with juice from other gneiss-based sites, but if the *Cuvée Eden* (its predecessor) is any guide, this is a wine for laying down and drinking after at least a decade.

2004 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine 'Clos Cormerais'

Aged in a mix of acacia and oak barrels, this is probably Marc's most controversial wine. The practice of barrel-ageing has deep historical roots in the region, although it is debatable just how long the wines stayed on acacia barrels (oak is not indigenous to the region). Marc tries to hold the wine in bottle before releasing it; younger versions can be unpleasantly woody (from the oak) and honeyed (from the acacia). The 2004 is very fine now, we think, and an interesting counterpoint to the rest of his wines.

2009 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine 'Clisson' (magnums available)

Clisson, after years of wrangling, was finally awarded *Cru Communal* status (alongside Gorges and Le Pallet), and this is a more than worthy wine to bear the name. It's still young and full of fruit (the 2009 vintage was remarkable), but there is no mistaking its latent minerality and potential. We would hold it, or drink with full-flavoured food.

2009 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine 'Chateau Thébaud'

Our experience has taught us to be slightly suspicious of special cuvées from the 'best' parcels or oldest vines, especially in areas where the financial incentive is to churn out critic-pleasing, point-scoring beauty queens rather than honest daughters of the soil. While this bottling won't banish our cynicism, we think Marc has done a wonderful job with the wine, extracting the requisite richness (especially in a vintage like 2009) without pushing it over the edge.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-LOI-01-001-11	2011 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine sur lie	Best with simple, clean-tasting dishes, meant to be drunk in quantity
FRA-LOI-01-003-10	2010 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine sur lie 'Clos des Briords' VV	Very flavourful, can be drunk on its own or with lobster and crab
FRA-LOI-01-004-10	2010 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine sur lie 'Les Gras Moutons'	Round and supple, good match for fish in a <i>buerre blanc</i>
FRA-LOI-01-005-04	2004 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine sur lie 'Clos Cormerais'	Quite robust and slightly oaky, works with milder curries
FRA-LOI-01-006-09	2009 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine 'Clisson'	Very clean and saline, comes into its own with tempura and fried whitebait
FRA-LOI-01-007-09	2009 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine 'Chateau Thebaud'	Worth a long decant, and best with fried rice with seafood

Domaine Luneau-Papin

The dynasty

Many growers in Muscadet still speak admiringly of Luneau-Papin's 1976 *Le «L» d'Or*, which was kept on its lees for six years, a hitherto unheard of aging period. Pierre and Monique Luneau have continued championing quality over quantity and they now make a wonderful variety of Muscadet from schist-heavy vineyards in the communes of Le Landreau, Vallet and La Chapelle Heulin. Pierre-Marie, their son and the eighth generation to join the family estate, added the *La Butte de la Roche* parcel in Loroux-Bottereau in 2008, a unique and fantastic serpentine-dominated *terroir*.

Their methods are deceptively simple in the vineyard and cellar: minimal use of chemicals, low yields, hand harvesting, gentle pressing, fermentation with indigenous yeasts and an unhurried *elevage* on the lees to develop complexity and flavour. The results are anything but simple, and speak for themselves.



Region:	Loire – Pays-Nantais	Website:	www.domaineluneaupapin.com
Size:	Almost 40ha	Viticulture:	Low chemical usage

The wines

Each of Luneau-Papin's top plots is vinified separately to distinguish between the respective terroirs. *Les Pierres Blanches*, as the name suggests, has a layer of whitish silt (*placages limoneux*) over its schist bedrock; the resultant wine is ripe yet lithe, while its cousin *Clos des Allées* in Le Landreau is tenser, with more apparent acid from the mica in the subsoil. *Le «L» d'Or* has always been the prestige *cuvée*, a beguiling blend of granite and gneiss influences (structure from the former, body from the latter) buttressed by at least nine months on the lees. It's strikingly rich when young, and multi-layered with age; the best examples improve for three decades. Two of the newer additions to the portfolio are also amongst the most exciting: the *Semper Excelsior*, with extended lees contact, rich and heady, and the *Terre de Pierre*, fabulously exotic.

A note on older vintages

The family, knowing our love for older Muscadet, has very kindly agreed to release limited quantities of the *Le «L» d'Or* and *Semper Excelsior* for sale. We intend to drink most of it ourselves, of course, but we do have vintages back to the 1990s for sale. Please contact us if you are interested in purchasing some. We currently have "L" from 1999 and 2002, as well as *Semper Excelsior* from 2004 and 2005. Both vintages of the "L" are drinking very nicely now, still adolescent in their freshness, while the *Semper Excelsior* strikes us as a 30-year wine.

2010 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine sur lie 'Terre de Pierre'

Pierre-Marie fell in love with the the *La Butte de la Roche* parcel and bought it in late spring 2008. He's worked fanatically on converting the site to organic agriculture, believing that the outcrop of serpentine (a very old metamorphic rock) is capable of producing intense, powerful Muscadet. The 2010 continues where the 2009 left off – full, striking and intensely mineral.

2009 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine sur lie Le "L" d'Or

A terrific warm vintage "L" (as almost everyone seems to call it), this is similar to the 1989 (another ripe "L") in structure. There's plenty of acidity, but also plenty of baby fat and fruit

covering it, such that the initial impression is slightly misleading. But let it air out, and the wine (almost magically) comes into focus. As good as the 1989 is right now, we think this will be in twenty years or so.

2005 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine sur lie Le “L” d’Or

Some winegrowers further up the Loire think 2005 was perhaps one of the greatest vintages ever – even ripening, small berries, no excess heat, leading to concentrated, well-balanced wines. In Muscadet, where picking takes place a bit earlier, the wines don’t show as much of the concentration, but it is evident upon tasting that there’s something special with the wines. After half a decade in the bottle, the 2005 is now starting to sing. One of our favourites.

2007 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine ‘Semper Excelsior’

Aged for 3 years on its lees, with regular *batonnage* (stirring), this is a rich, head-turning Muscadet. The 2007 harvest, while small, was a good one with some very nice grapes; Pierre recognised the quality of this *cuvée* and wisely set it aside for longer ageing. We love the wine with barely cooked shellfish (scallops, clams), with the merest hint of garlic and pepper.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-LOI-02-004-10	2010 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine sur lie ‘Terre de Pierre’	Exotic nose and full profile; works with everything from oysters to fried rice
FRA-LOI-02-005-09	2009 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine sur lie Le “L” d’Or	When young, with simply cooked fish and shellfish; with age, it’s terrific with sashimi.
FRA-LOI-02-005-05	2005 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine sur lie Le “L” d’Or	
FRA-LOI-02-006-07	2007 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine ‘Semper Excelsior’	Its richness calls out for either shellfish, or something simple like a scrambled egg

Guy Bossard & Fred Niger, Domaine de l'Écu

The pied piper of vines

Guy Bossard has recently taken on a partner, Fred Niger, after more than three decades as one of Muscadet's leading lights, and we are now confident that his exemplary work will continue. His commitment in the vineyard is not only apparent when walking through the immaculately farmed land, but also in the results: his 3 terroir-designated Muscadet cuvees. Each wine has its own voice (*Gneiss* – a soprano, lilting and floral, *Orthogneiss* – broad and rich like a baritone, *Granite* – a powerful, pure tenor) while singing faithfully from the vintage's score (e.g. the 2010s are very precise, while the 2009s are fruity and forward).



Guy nosing his terroir

The earth is sweet and clean in his vineyards, and his vines are robust and healthy, the result of 25 years of biodynamic agriculture. The wines are made traditionally and simply, aging in underground *caves* for as long as Guy deems necessary. Sometimes, he ages the wines for an extended period on the lees (*sur lie*), and labels the wine accordingly.

Two of our favourite tidbits about Guy: he pipes music into his cellar (which sits alone in the middle of his vineyards, away from the roads and noise) to calm his wines, and he is one of the few *vignerons* who can still field-graft in the English (or whip-and-tongue) style. He is in many ways a winegrower's winegrower, confident in his craft and justly proud of his results.



Region:	Loire – Pays-Nantais	Website:	www.domaine-ecu.com
Size:	20ha	Viticulture:	Biodynamic

The wines

Relative to other white wines, Guy's wines lean towards the mineral end of the flavour spectrum, and are never heavy or cloying. Although the differences are subtle, they are a remarkable demonstration of the influence of soil type when drunk together. Likewise, the styles and suggested food pairings may be similar, but the optimal pairings for each are different. For example, all three are wonderful with raw oysters, but the *Expression de Gneiss* pairs best with small, sweet fines de Claire, while the *Orthogneiss* requires the richness of a Kumamoto. The *Expression de Granite* is most expressive with a complex flat oyster (*Ostrea edulis*) – either the classic Belon or a briny Galway Bay. (Note: We are holding back the 2010s until we think they are ready)

2009 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine 'Expression de Gneiss'

Almost every vintage, the *Gneiss* is the prettiest of the three *terroir* cuvees, floral, fruity and flirty. The 2009 has some additional weight from the warm year, and there is now a striking clarity on the mid-palate which was not as evident when the wine was first bottled. As with almost all his wines, this finishes with a flourish of acid, and is best suited for drinking within the first decade, ideally with a simply prepared fish – either steamed or grilled *a la plancha*.

2009 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine 'Expression d'Orthogneiss'

In ripe years like 2009, the *Orthogneiss* has an earthy, sometimes mushroomy note even in its youth. This does not indicate rapid development; rather, it is the typical richness of the wine relative to its brethren. On the palate, the cut of acidity is not as obvious as it is with the *Gneiss*

and *Granite*, but it is impeccably balanced. We prefer this cuvée with some age on it to bring out the inherent complexity. Its roundness means that it works well with shellfish, as well as full-flavoured fish innards like liver (e.g. monkfish liver, or *ankimo*).

2009 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine ‘Expression de Granite’

This is always tasted last, and for good reason. The purity and power of the *Granite* are evident just upon nosing, and continue through the palate all the way to the finish. The 2009 was bottled in October 2010 (*Gneiss* in April, *Orthogneiss* in July) when Guy thought it was finally ready. It’s shed some of its early angularity and is now drinking very nicely, although it still has many years ahead of it; the 1998 is still young and fresh, and the 1992 Hermine d’Or (based on granite) on the list at Villa Mon Rêve is wonderful now.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-LOI-03-002-09	2009 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine ‘Expression de Gneiss’	Use as a mineral aperitif or serve with simply prepared light fish
FRA-LOI-03-003-09	2009 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine ‘Expression d’Orthogneiss’	Light, savoury white best with grilled fish or light seafood, e.g. clams
FRA-LOI-03-004-09	2009 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine ‘Expression de Granite’	Intense and very mineral white, able to stand up to oilier fish and seafood

Domaine Michel Brégeon (with Frédéric Lailier)

The Gorgeois hippie



Michel in full flow

Unlike the garrulous, generous, always entertaining Michel, his wines “need years just to begin to speak”¹. Sometimes that’s because they are still encased in their underground womb five years after harvest, resting and soaking up flavour from the lees, but more often they just seem to take a very long time to come round. Whatever the case, it is almost certainly a waste to drink his wines before their tenth birthday, when they start to unfurl into exquisitely poised, minerally marvels.

We do not know why (nor does Michel, when we asked), but we suspect it’s a combination of the gabbro bedrock, which his ancient vines are firmly rooted in, simple, low-fuss farming, and equally straightforward vinification, with no technological and chemical trickery. In certain vintages, he will set aside a *cuve* or two for extended lees aging, bottling only when he thinks it’s ready.



Region: Loire – Pays-Nantais

Website: NA

Size: ~7ha

Viticulture: Low chemical usage

The wines

Michel often makes two or more cuvées of Muscadet each vintage, and the 2005 we have was bottled on 2 March 2011, more than five years after harvest. We think it is extraordinary now, but will only get better in the coming decades. There is also the 2004, a wine we fell in love with immediately. It was bottled in spring 2012, so it has spent over seven years on its lees. His 2011 is also fantastic, fresh and lively, with the signature gabbro minerality. The *Gai Perlé*, his sparkler made from a blend of Folle Blanche and Melon de Bourgogne, is of similar quality and will also benefit from bottle ageing. We have a very small amount of the wines each vintage.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-LOI-05-001-04	2004 Muscadet Réserve	Steamed seafood, unadorned, or raw, substantial shellfish like abalone or ark shell.
FRA-LOI-05-001-05	2005 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine Réserve	Seafood, of course, and prepared as simply as possible
FRA-LOI-05-003-11	2011 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine	Oysters, both raw and cooked, and other shellfish.
FRA-LOI-05-002-NV	NV Méthode Traditionnelle 'Gai Perlé'	Use as one would a light champagne – as an <i>aperitif</i> or with oysters

¹ A quote from an investment banker who is just as big a fan of Michel’s wines.

LOIRE – ANJOU

Three rivers define the Anjou – the Loire, Layon and Aubance, the latter two snaking their way through the *coteaux* (hills) to join the first just west of Angers. While Cabernet Franc, Sauvignon Blanc, Gamay, Grolleau Noir (and sometimes Gris), Pineau d’Aunis are all widely planted on the Paleozoic schist which dominates the landscape, Chenin Blanc is the undisputed queen of the Anjou, producing long-lived, majestic whites along the slopes carved out by the three rivers.

Savennières, north of the Loire, produces powerful, regal whites which require patience in the cellar (we suggest a decade, sometimes two) and at the table (with air the wines blossom in unexpected ways). Standing above the town of La Poissonnière, at the western edge of the appellation, one can see three buttes extend southeast towards the river, each with its own special vineyard: Le Clos du Papillon above Savennières town, La Roche aux Moines (and Le Clos de la Coulée de Serrant) around the eponymous chateau, and La Pierre Becherelle at the end of the town of Epiré. We work with three of the best growers in this appellation: Nicolas and Virginie Joly, owners of la Coulée de Serrant, Evelyne de Pontbriand, custodian of the Château des Vaults (better known as Domaine du Closel), and Damien Laureau, whom we think can lay claim to some of the best-farmed land in all of the Loire Valley.

South of the Loire, sweet wines are more common in the exceptional microclimates along the Layon and Aubance, where the steep banks are protected from the southerly winds, and retain enough moisture close to harvest time to aid the onset of botrytis. That is not to say that the dry wines of Patrick Baudouin, one of the nicest growers we know, are not worthy of mention – the mix of fossil-bearing sand and slatey schist comes through powerfully in his dry wines. Both Thomas Carsin (of Clos de l’Élu) and Benoît Courault are courageous young men who recently set up their own domains, the former making toothsome, great value wines and the latter bringing a monk-like focus to his incredible vineyards. Both of them also do very commendable work with rarer varieties like Pineau d’Aunis and Grolleau.

Nicolas & Virginie Joly, Coulée de Serrant

Favoured by the gods

Jacqueline Friedrich wrote scathingly of Nicolas Joly in her ‘Wine and Food Guide to the Loire’ many years ago, declaring that “if he (Nicolas) ever makes a Coulée de Serrant that lives up to its potential, it will be by accident”. Judging from the wines we’ve tasted, it would appear that accidents have been plentiful at the estate ever since she penned those words. The trend of accidentally great wines also looks set to continue as Virginie, Nicolas’ daughter, expands her role at this fabled estate.



The Joly dogs at play

It is embarrassingly easy to write of the greatness of the terroir, but triteness does not make it any less true – there **is** something special about the patch of land in the middle of Savennières. Within the appellation, there are headier wines (e.g. from its neighbour Roche aux Moines, which typically ripens earlier and gets more botrytis), fruitier wines (e.g. from *Clos du Papillon*, which is always feminine) and even more minerally wines (e.g. from the easternmost butte, *La Pierre Becherelle*). But none of them match the Coulée de Serrant for the combination of intensity, elegance and complexity, sprinkled with a coating of *je ne sais quoi*. This is not to say that the other two wines, *Les Vieux Clos* (where one can discern the *Becherelle* terroir) and *Clos de la Bergerie* (a typical round, rich Roche aux Moines), are slouches; they are at the very top of the appellation.

The agriculture is biodynamic, and the vineyards are now in better shape than ever as the Jolys replant certain sections (*massale*, not clonal, selection, with Guy Bossard helping out with the grafting). In the cellar, Virginie’s influence has been obvious since 2008 – the wines are more feminine, and are less forbidding in their youth. There is now less botrytis on the bunches which are harvested, and in 2009, malolactic fermentation occurred in the cellars (which are usually quite warm even in winter), softening the wines a bit more. The 2010s are very rich and more oxidative in style than the 2009s.



Region:	Loire – Anjou	Website:	www.coulee-de-serrant.com
Size:	~16ha	Viticulture:	Biodynamic

The wines

2010 Savennières ‘Les Vieux Clos’

An analogy we’re fond of making is between the 2008-2010 vintages of the Les Vieux Clos and the Three Tenors (Plácido Domingo, José Carreras and Luciano Pavarotti). The Les Vieux Clos, like the Three Tenors, is perhaps not for those seeking the completeness of Coulée de Serrant², but it is nonetheless a very Joly expression of Savennières. The 2008 is like Domingo, clean and song-like, while the 2009 has a beautiful tone, much like Carreras, and of course the 2010 is the most flamboyant and emotional of the three, just like Pavarotti. We suggest a very long decant for the 2010, perhaps about 24 hours, and drinking it at 16°C (still cooler than what Nicolas Joly suggests). It requires bold, rich food like *kway chap* (braised pig innards), *sup tulang* (mutton bone marrow soup), or a cheese like Stinking Bishop or Epoisses.

² Domingo supposedly remarked that he did not want purists to go to the Three Tenors concerts, suggesting that they were intended for a different audience. In the same way, one is not going to find Coulée de Serrant in the Les Vieux Clos.

2010 Savennières-Roche-aux-Moines 'Clos de la Bergerie'

The Joly family owns some particularly choice parcels in *Roche aux Moines* (a separate appellation from Savennières), and from their plots they make a dense yet fine example. They had even, early botrytis on the bunches, which provides a honeyed backdrop to the unmistakable minerality (from the quartz-rich parcel). We enjoy sipping this wine on its own, letting it unfurl with air, or at the end of a simple lunch with a few straightforward cheeses. The Singaporean equivalent would be a *pei tan chok* (century egg porridge).

2009/2010 Clos de la Coulée de Serrant

When we first tasted the 2008 at release, we were very pleasantly surprised, thinking that the wines were finally approachable soon after bottling, without losing any real power. The 2009 proved to be even more revelatory; recent bottles have been perfumed, elegant (despite the high alcohol) but also with a real sense of place. Texturally, it is probably the most polished young Coulée de Serrant we have had in the last decade, although the structure is very evident on the finish. The 2010 is much richer, with a lot more botrytis at harvest and corresponding notes on both the nose and palate. All are wines to keep for decades.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-LOI-06-001-10	2010 Savennières 'Les Vieux Clos'	Flavourful, rich foods – offal (including beef), creamy cheese
FRA-LOI-06-002-10	2009 Savennières-Roche-aux-Moines 'Clos de la Bergerie'	Hard cheeses, but also any food with lots of <i>umami</i>
FRA-LOI-06-003-09	2009 Clos de la Coulée de Serrant	Not for drinking now, but if one must, on its own or with bread and butter
FRA-LOI-06-003-10	2010 Clos de la Coulée de Serrant	

Evelyne de Pontbriand, Vins du Closel/Château des Vaults

The joyful aristocrat

“I want my vines to feel free and happy – I think it leads to more joyful wines,” Evelyne said as we discussed a tiny patch of bush vines. Chenin Blanc is most typically trained along wires as it is easier to manage vine growth during the all-important summer, when the plant channels its energy into producing shoots and leaves. Evelyne was however experimenting with letting some vines grow unassisted, close to the ground, curious to see what the effects were on the grapes and wine. That she chose old vines in her top vineyard for the trial speaks to her commitment to make the best possible wines; that she couldn’t resist cracking a half-joke speaks to her unbridled enthusiasm for life and wine.



Happy bush vines

In turn, we often like to joke that we don’t work with aristocrats, but would make an exception for someone as gracious and charming as Evelyne. Her family traces its roots back many centuries, and their château is a curious melange of different architectural styles, with each generation feeling the need to add a wing here, a wall elsewhere. The wines are similar, from lands which have been husbanded through the various wars and upheavals, and largely planted to Chenin Blanc.



Region:	Loire – Anjou	Website:	www.savennieres-closel.com
Size:	~18ha	Viticulture:	Organic

The wines

Each of the Savennières (there are usually three, and in some years four different cuvées) are fantastic, but we have a soft spot for the *Eau de Pluie*, made from old vines verdelho planted after phylloxera (a root louse which kills vines) had ripped through the vineyards. For current drinking one cannot go wrong with *La Jalousie*, although it’s worth broaching the 2005 *Clos du Papillon* now as well. We always have several vintages of the *Clos du Papillon* available, but prefer to release one vintage at a time – we are finishing the last of the 2005s, and will be making the 2006 available soon. Currently, there are also two vintages of *Les Caillardières* (2008 and 2004), which are released with a few grams of residual sugar to complement the acidity of a curiously sandy site on one of the highest points of the appellation.

2010 Savennières ‘La Jalousie’

We’ve been asked not to print the story behind the name of this wine, but we can write that it’s a wine we like drinking with food. It’s delicately perfumed and quite easy on the palate, but with food it sings as the underlying minerality comes to the fore. It’s also worth letting the wine air out as it will change over the course of several hours. The wine is most vibrant and complex about 5-6 years after the vintage, but we think the 2010 will age for a bit longer.

2008 Savennières ‘Les Caillardières’

The 2008 is a very pretty wine, as befits a *demi-sec* vintage where the acidity and natural sugar came into balance very nicely. It’s not always easy to find the right equilibrium at harvest time – there was no *Caillardières* made in 2006 and 2007, for example, and yields were very low as the exposed plateau got hit by frost early in the season. We think it will be magnificent once

the sugar is better integrated with the acidity, but there is no problem with drinking this now, whether as an *aperitif* or with a nice river fish, topped with a mushroom-based sauce.

2005 Savennières ‘Clos du Papillon’

There are two great exponents of this famed vineyard, and we think we are fortunate to be working with the more interesting one – the wines are more complex, deeper on the mid-palate, and always, always longer on the finish. The 2005 is no different in this regard, albeit richer on the palate than one would expect at this age. The savoury, almost herbal quality is beginning to show, and we think it has come out of a slightly difficult stage where it sometimes showed oxidatively. Currently, we think it plays off very nicely against a rich, gelatinous dish (turbot, or pig trotters), but with some more age it’ll work with firmer-fleshed seafood like abalone.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-LOI-08-002-10	2010 Savennières ‘La Jalousie’	A dish with <i>wok hei</i> (perhaps <i>hor fun</i>) or yakitori to play up the minerality
FRA-LOI-08-003-08	2008 Savennières ‘Les Caillardières’	Delicate fish, either whole or in quenelles, with a creamy sauce
FRA-LOI-08-006-05	2005 Savennières ‘Clos du Papillon’	A wine rich enough for slow braised pork trotters, or a grilled whole turbot

Damien Laureau

The farmer



Damien totally rocking it

Damien Laureau comes from a cereal farming family near Versailles, but made the switch into grape-growing just over ten years ago when he acquired some land in Savennières. Walking around his various vineyards (including a new plot just above the village of La Poissonnière which we are very excited about), one wonders if farming ability is somehow transferable across generations and crops. The soil is clean-smelling, moist and well-aerated, crumbling just so in the hand to reveal tiny tendrils of other plants, worms and various insects. The biodiversity of his land is astonishing, which Damien believes is essential to the health of his vines and therefore the quality of his wines.

All that work would be wasted if the *élevage* was sloppy, but Damien is just as careful in the cellar as he is in the vineyard. Grapes are manually harvested from each plot and vinified separately in a spick and span cellar he has just moved into. He doesn't 'force' the wines, preferring to let them have time to ferment dry and find their own equilibrium. As a result, the three wines he makes are distinct yet related expressions of the Savennières terroir.



Region:	Loire – Anjou	Website:	www.damien-laureau.fr
Size:	~10ha	Viticulture:	Organic

The wines

The *Les Genêts* is meant to be drunk fairly young, but it ages well for up to a decade even in poorer vintages; his *Roche aux Moines* is ripe and fleshy, as befits the warm vineyard, and the *Bel Ouvrage* is always outstanding – a broad-shouldered, muscular wine with a real streak of minerality. All three wines are superbly structured, and will benefit from bottle aging or a short decant in their first five years.

We have a wine from his very first vintage (1999), which he worries is going into decline. As with older wines, there is bottle variation, but so far we've had only one bottle which was really past it; the other dozen or so have been very good, albeit in an austere style. It's instructive to taste it alongside the 2009, for Damien's winemaking has changed over the years.

2009 Savennières 'Les Genêts'

2009 was a warm and sunny year in Savennières, leading to some very ripe wines in the appellation. Damien has channelled that sunshine into greater intensity rather than outré fruit flavours with the *Les Genêts* – it's an expressive wine on the nose, and quite linear on the palate, approachable now, although we think it best to wait a few years.

1999 Savennières 'Les Genêts'

A library release from Damien's very first vintage. Unlike its younger sibling, it's a much more intellectual wine, with compote and honey replacing the fresh fruit of youth. There was significant botrytis in this vintage, which means the wine smells sweet, even though it is dry. Not everyone will like this sort of wine, but we think it's very nice now with some simple food or a cheese plate.

2009 Savennières 'Le Bel Ouvrage'

The wine, harvested late and aged in oak barrels (some new) is undeniably rich, but it's the potential that's astonishing. It's especially intense on the finish, and we think it will only get better with some age. We were very surprised to find out that this wine saw full malolactic fermentation - the robust structure suggested otherwise.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-LOI-07-001-09	2009 Savennières 'Les Genêts'	Its strong streak of minerality plays off well against many smoked dishes
FRA-LOI-07-001-99	1999 Savennières 'Les Genêts'	Let this wine provide the counterpoint to cheeses instead of honey or jams
FRA-LOI-07-002-09	2009 Savennières 'Le Bel Ouvrage'	A square, large wine, best suited for robust dishes like roast fowl

Patrick Baudouin

Le prince revient

Patrick Baudouin has come a very long way since re-founding the ancestral estate started by his great-grandparents. When he returned in 1990, the well-situated land was in terrible shape, and the winery building even more run-down. As with many of our vigneron, Patrick chose to focus on rehabilitating the vineyards, converting to organic, sustainable agriculture in 2002 (although he had given up chemicals long before). Meanwhile, renovations have only just started at the long planned for *cave* and tasting room at Princé, although he has started replanting vines around the building!

Patrick is a deliberate *vigneron*, taking his time to consider how best to approach his land and wines, and reflective, willing to admit where he might have gone wrong and able to make the necessary adjustments. His recent vintages are fascinating to follow; in all cases the later wines are more precise and purer, even in warm vintages like 2009. One gets the sense (and we think he realises it too) that he has come to terms with the diverse plots he has.



Region:	Loire – Anjou	Website:	www.patrick-baudouin.com
Size:	14ha	Viticulture:	Organic

The wines

Patrick makes a large array of very fine *cru*-designated wines from land around Chaudefonds-sur-Layon and St-Aubin, with a couple of very fine north-facing plots planted with old vines in the latter area. In good years, Patrick makes minerally, thrilling Chenin Blancs from these vines – *Les Saulaies*, full of verve, and *Les Gats*, slightly richer but girdled with just as much acidity. We personally prefer the *Effusion*, a blend of various younger vine parcels which is usually more approachable, and the full-bore *Le Cornillard*, harvested from an amphitheatre just east of Chaudefonds. On the sweeter end, Patrick makes both a light on its feet *Les Bruandières* (typically with less sugar) as well as a denser, more botrytis-influenced *Maria Juby* (the name of his great-grandmother). With the 2009 vintage, he now has wines from *Quarts de Chaume*, the basic *QdC* made in a graceful, elegant style, while the cuvée *Maria Juby* (same great-grandmother, different wine) is more concentrated yet paradoxically purer.

A note: when we speak with the *vignerons*, a common lament is how sweet wines are being shunned by the market, whether within France or globally. The days of the infamous sugar hunters (where some seemed to compete to see how much sugar one could fit in a bottle) in the appellation have passed, we think, and many of the newer wines, while still containing substantial amounts of sugar, are now better-balanced and can be consumed with a wide range of food. Just as there is a place for dry Chenin Blanc, we think the *moelleux* style can be just as terroir-transparent and compelling. Give them a try, especially the nicely-poised ones from Patrick Baudouin. We also have a limited number of half-litre bottles, which is a nice size for sweeter wines.

2009 Anjou Rouge ‘Coteaux d’Ardenay’

About a quarter of Patrick’s land is planted with both Cabernets (Franc and Sauvignon), and from the best south-facing parcels he makes a particularly intriguing blend. The maceration times are shorter here, to avoid leaching too much ‘green’ into the wines, so the wine depends on acidity rather than tannins for structure and definition. The 2009 is very ripe, quite lush in

the mouth, and should be better in a few years time. It's a wine we'll gladly drink with a leaner cut of beef (an *onglet* with lots of *frites*), as well as well-spiced mutton kebabs.

2009 Anjou Blanc 'Effusion'

Made from parcels both around Chaudefonds (on the same slopes as the *Ardenay*) as well as St-Aubin, this is a terrific young vines cuvée. While it's vivacious and full of fruit, it's hardly a facile wine - the minerality persists from nose to gullet, and with air it really blossoms. We really like using this as an *aperitif* when something friendly yet serious is called for.

2009 Anjou Blanc 'Le Cornillard'

Made from very old vines in the eponymous vineyard, the *Cornillard* shows all the schist-y minerality of Anjou Chenin, while combining it with a grace and elegance of Chenin from the Touraine. The tell-tale sign is perhaps the structure imposing itself on the finish (very few Vouvray *secs* finish like that), which also augurs well for future development. It's structured enough to work with something like a veal chop, but we prefer it with crayfish and other crustaceans, steamed and eaten while still warm.

2004 Coteaux du Layon 'Les Bruandières'

The 2004 is much closer to a *demi-sec* than a *moelleux*, with its bright acidity (still fresh at this age) and fruit-driven (as opposed to botrytis-dominated) finish. The wine has come together nicely, and lives up to the reputation of the *Bruandières* slope as one of the finest in St-Aubin. It's still very young, so there is absolutely no rush to drink it now, but we've found that it works very well with *rillettes*, *pâtés*, and even *foie gras*.

2009 Quarts de Chaume

Quarts de Chaume is better known for flamboyant, heavily botrytised, very sweet wines, but Patrick has somehow made a very clean, fresh wine from the heart of the appellation. The palate is incredibly supple, and the wine is characterised by fruit intensity, with the botrytis playing a supporting role (which we prefer). Dessert wines are usually best drunk on their own, or with cheese; a sweet dish can obliterate the subtleties of a good dessert wine, and this *Quarts de Chaume* has plenty to offer the astute drinker.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-LOI-10-001-09	2009 Anjou Rouge 'Coteaux d'Ardenay'	Leaner red meats work well with the acid structure of this wine
FRA-LOI-10-002-09	2009 Anjou Blanc 'Effusion'	Wonderful as an <i>aperitif</i> , or with a Cantonese roast meat platter
FRA-LOI-10-003-09	2009 Anjou Blanc 'Le Cornillard'	It's a very structured wine, and can work with a variety of seafood
FRA-LOI-10-004-04 FRA-LOI-10-005-04	2004 Coteaux du Layon 'Les Bruandières' (50cl and 75cl available)	More <i>demi-sec</i> than <i>moelleux</i> , works with fatty, salty food
FRA-LOI-10-006-09 FRA-LOI-10-007-09	2009 Quarts de Chaume (50cl and 75cl available)	Still young, so better on its own, or with a cheese plate

Thomas Carsin, Clos de l'Élu

A spontaneous choice

Thomas Carsin cut his teeth working as a viticultural consultant in Champagne and Provence before finding some woefully cheap land in Coteaux du Layon, near the town of Saint Aubin de Luigné, including the *Les Bruandières* vineyard. Planted on the 25 or so hectares were old, uncloned vines of lesser-known indigenous varieties such as Grolleaux Noir and Gris, and Pineau d'Aunis. He resisted the commercial temptation to rip out the old vines and worked hard to restore the vineyards to full health; most of the land is now or about to be certified organic, and more importantly, the vines are once again producing grapes and wine worthy of the terroir.



Pondering the pruning

Given his inquisitive (he says nomadic) nature, and the range of land and grapes he can work with, it is no surprise that many of his wines resulted from deliberate experiments in the cellar (albeit of a low-tech nature).



Region: Loire – Anjou

Website: www.closdelelu.com

Size: ~30ha

Viticulture: Largely organic

The wines

We love the tiny quantity of *Espérance* that he ships to us, a clearly *Angevîn* rendition of Pineau d'Aunis, darker and deeper than its Touraine cousins to the east. The blend of the Gamay and Grolleau Noir (*Indigène*) from plots in and around *Les Bruandières* is deep and savoury, more soil- than fruit-driven. Thomas also makes two sparkling wines: a fascinating rosé from Grolleau Gris, the colour of freshly caught salmon, and finished in the bottle (i.e. *methode ancestrale*), while the other is a dry, undosed blend of Chenin Blanc and Chardonnay. Of the more common varieties, his Cabernet Franc (*l'Aiglerie*) is incredibly suave, the short carbonic maceration bringing out the ripe fruit cleanly without losing minerality or verve, while the *Terre!* is a very fine example of schist-based Sauvignon Blanc. We also have a small quantity of the 2010 Coteaux du Layon, which is clean, fresh and easy to drink.

2010 Terre!

From 15-20 year old Sauvignon Blanc vines planted on the middle of the mildly convex Layon slopes, the 2010 is a forward, ripe rendition of the grape. It's hand-harvested, fermented without the addition of yeasts or enzymes (which so often accentuate certain flavours at the expense of balance), and bottled in early spring the next year to preserve freshness. Meant for drinking within five years, it's delicious with simply prepared river fish, or with grilled stingray, razor clams etc.

2010 Terre! (Special Bottling)

From 15-20 year old Sauvignon Blanc vines planted on the middle of the mildly convex Layon slopes, the 2010 is a forward, ripe rendition of the grape. It's hand-harvested, fermented without the addition of yeasts or enzymes (which so often accentuate certain flavours at the expense of balance), and bottled in early spring the next year to preserve freshness. Meant for drinking within five years, it's delicious with simply prepared river fish, or with grilled stingray, razor clams etc.

2009 L'Aiglerie

We tasted this several times from the vat when we visited, because we were trying to figure out how Thomas made such juicy, fruity Cabernet Franc from soils which typically produced thin, uninspiring red wines (while the whites are justly celebrated). He says the grapes are round and ripe when they are harvested, and he lets them ferment ever so slightly before pressing them for the juice. Whatever the case, it's a sprightly wine which opens up nicely with a bit of air, or even better, with some grilled meat.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-LOI-09-001-10	2010 VdP Val de Loire 'Terre!'	Ripe and balanced Sauv Blanc - simply prepared fish and seafood
	2010 VdP Val de Loire 'Terre!' (Speciale)	Ripe and balanced Sauv Blanc - simply prepared fish and seafood
FRA-LOI-09-003-09	2009 Anjou Rouge 'l'Aiglerie'	We like this when grilling outdoors – sausages, pork chops, chicken wings
FRA-LOI-09-006-10	2010 Vin rouge de France 'Espérance'	Terrific with a range of Indian food, both Keralan and Punjabi

Benoît Courault

Perfectionist hipster

Whisper it softly, but we don't import many of the wines we drink when we're in Europe because we don't think they'll survive the trip to Asia. Mostly these are wines which have been loosely (but stridently) grouped as *vins naturels* ('natural wines'), or low-intervention wines – organic or biodynamic farming, no addition of yeasts or chemicals, no fining or filtration, and very often no addition of sulfur either during fermentation or just before bottling. These wines can be brilliant *in situ*, but even a short trip (say, to a Paris wine bar) can wreck the more delicate bottlings. So as much as we adore many of the wines, we've resisted the temptation to import their wines, until Benoît Courault came along.

He ticks all the boxes for a hipster-vigneron: lives in a trailer (!), worked with some of the godfathers of the natural wine movement, ploughs with a horse, and bypasses the AOC system by bottling the wines as "Vin de France". However, unlike many of them, he speaks gently but persuasively of what he's trying to achieve with his farming and winemaking – a search for purity and fidelity. Benoît is careful where many hipsters are sloppy, sceptical where others are unquestioning, and (most importantly) humble and ready to learn where others are set in their ways. For example, he's moved from destemming the grapes before crushing to whole-cluster fermentation, believing that the stems provide some tannic backbone and character.

The estate is still small, and he works with old vines of Chenin Blanc, Cabernet Franc and Grolleau Noir (absolutely one of our favourite varieties, capable of great depth without sacrificing freshness). He's been making wine under his own name for less than five years, and they have been delightful in different ways. We're taking a chance on him, and so should you.



Region:	Loire – Anjou	Website:	None
Size:	~6ha	Viticulture:	Organic

The wines

The old vines Chenin Blanc cuvée, *Gilbourg*, is usually the star of the line-up, but we think what he's done with Grolleau Noir and Cabernet Franc is equally praise-worthy. *Les Tabeneaux* is a wild blend of the two grapes (70% Cabernet Franc, 30% Grolleau), fresh and delightful. There's a touch of carbon dioxide which helps preserve the wine, and it's worth decanting the wine to let it open up. *La Coulée* is more serious, 100% Grolleau Noir from old vines – it takes about 2-3 years to knit together, and then it's a perfect melange of fruits and freshness. The varietal Cabernet Franc *Les Rouliers* is probably our favourite of the lot, meant to be aged and drunk with a lightly seared meat – perhaps a pigeon breast, still rare in the middle, with the distinct minerality of both the wine and food playing off each other.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-LOI-32-001-10	2010 Vin de France Les Tabeneaux	Classic <i>vin de soif</i> , drink it with scrambled eggs on toast
FRA-LOI-32-002-10	2010 Vin de France La Coulée	Try this with an oily fish (e.g. herring), slow-cooked or smoked
FRA-LOI-32-003-10	2010 Vin de France Les Rouliers	A mineral, blood-rich meat with the tang of iron

LOIRE – SAUMUR, BOURGUEIL & CHINON (SABOCHI)

We depart from convention by treating Saumur, Bourgueil (including St-Nicolas de Bourgueil) and Chinon as a single sub-region; Saumur is usually grouped with Anjou to the west, and the other appellations with Touraine to the east. It is in fact an area of transitions – from the Touraine’s chalk to Anjou’s ancient rocks, from the continental climate of the centre to the softer maritime weather of the coast – and of conflict – between two Celtic tribes (the Andes and the Turones), through two dynastic families (the Plantagenets and the Capetians), to the present day.

The area is best known for its red wines, aided by the combination of a warm climate (for the latitude), which allows Cabernet Franc to ripen, and chalky soils, which lend an elegance and suppleness to the tannins. In all three areas there’s a clear distinction between the chalky slopes (or *coteaux*) and the alluvial plains closer to the river, with the former typically producing longer-lived, more powerful wines. There are naturally exceptions to such generalisations, and increasingly one can find savoury, deep wines made from vines well-rooted in the sand and gravel near the river bank. The whites, made from Chenin Blanc, are remarkable, combining the finesse of Vouvray and the power of Anjou, and not as famous (or pricy) as they used to be.

From west to east: Guillaume Keller is making intense and pure Saumurs (both white and red) at his family’s beautiful estate of Château de Fosse-Sèche, while Yannick Amirault is slowly handing over the reins of their Bourgueil estate to his son, ensuring the wines remain as powerful and well-structured as ever. In Chinon the Baudrys are going through the same process, with Mathieu back from his globe-trotting training; the wines, like the son, are suave and sophisticated.

Château de Fosse-Sèche, Guillaume Keller

A special place

Sitting on the southwest periphery of Saumur-Champigny, Château de Fosse-Sèche covers an area of about 45 hectares, of which only 17 are given to vines (Cabernets Franc and Sauvignon, Chenin Blanc). Fields of alfafa (grown as silage for farm animals), hedges and oak stands wrap around the vineyards like a protective cocoon, and are a bit of a shock for anyone more accustomed to the monocultural landscapes that dominate the supposedly better vineyards of the region. Guillaume believes that he needs to preserve the ecological balance of the area in order to make great wines, and is therefore willing to limit the area under vine cultivation.

The terroir is also different here – instead of the chalk more common in this area, the vineyards sit on the silex-heavy Brossay plateau; the wines (both red and white) are often more like their Angevin cousins to the west, rather than their Saumurois neighbours, with a denser mid-palate and more overt minerality in youth. The estate was bought by the Keller family in late 1998, and Guillaume, the energetic young son, has moved wholeheartedly into organic cultivation. He thinks it will take many years for the balance to be fully restored, but is convinced by recent growing seasons and harvests. Despite fairly high levels of oak, the wines have a clarity of flavour and more than enough structure to age wonderfully.



Region:	Loire – SaBoChi	Website:	www.chateaufosseeseche.com
Size:	17ha	Viticulture:	Organic

The wines

Most of the estate is planted to Cabernet Franc (9ha), with some Cabernet Sauvignon (3ha) and Chenin Blanc (5ha). Both the basic white and red are very, very good indeed – the *Arcane* is a fresh but powerful Chenin Blanc, reminiscent of the Anjou with its honeyed overtones, while the *Eolithe* (a term for prehistoric flint tools) is an intense, mineral red with plenty of substance. It typically takes a few years for the oak to blow off, after which it becomes a darker version of a classical Saumur rouge. Both are terrific with the classic matches of the region – the *Arcane* with fish, and the *Eolithe* with something a bit gamy. The *Les Tris de la Chapelle* requires time to integrate the botrytised flavours, and is best with a cheese plate as its intensity overwhelms even red wines (i.e. it should be served later in a meal). Finally, the *Réserve du Pigeonnier* takes at least a decade to come around – it's a bit oaky and dense in youth, but slowly and surely develops. The 2008 should develop nicely, if the 2000 is any guide.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-LOI-33-001-10	2010 Saumur Blanc 'Arcane'	A fruity, forward style of Chenin, best with fish
FRA-LOI-33-002-09	2009 Saumur Rouge 'Eolithe'	Very nice with game birds – woodcock, pheasant, grouse.
FRA-LOI-33-003-09	2009 Saumur Blanc 'Les Tris de la Chapelle'	A rich, dense Chenin Blanc, best with lots of age and a creamy, ripe cheese
FRA-LOI-33-004-08	2008 Saumur Rouge 'Réserve du Pigeonnier'	A hearty côte-de-boeuf, or a mushroom tart – something rich and flavourful

Yannick & Benoît Amirault, Pavillon du Grand Clos

The humble craftsman

Yannick Amirault has been quietly making some of the best wines in Bourgueil since he took over the then tiny estate in 1977, preferring to let the wines speak for themselves. He has made incremental adjustments over the last 35 years: decreasing yields, cutting out fertilisers, rejecting the use of herbicides, using only indigenous yeasts, eschewing filtration, and so on. Thus, despite increasing the amount of land he works tenfold, the wines have improved every single vintage, moving ever closer towards a Platonic interpretation of his vineyards.

Yannick remains genuinely humble; when we spoke about other producers in the area, he was quick to praise their work and downplay his role as a standardbearer for the commune. He works with land in both Bourgueil and St.-Nicolas de Bourgueil, covering a variety of different soils, from the alluvial, gravelly plains near the river, up through the terraces (sand and chalk) to the claty and chalk coteaux. The grapes ripen at different speeds and in different ways; there's often brighter, sweeter-tasting fruit from the gravelly river banks (which retain heat well throughout the night in summer), but more intensity and concentration from grapes grown on the slopes (from the greater exposure to sunlight).



Region:	Loire – SaBoChi	Website:	www.yannickamirault.fr
Size:	~19ha	Viticulture:	Organic

The wines

These differences of *terroir* come through forcefully in all of Yannick's wines, even the *rosé*. Spending up to a year in oak barrels most vintages, it is structured, fruity and a wine for the dinner table. In St.-Nicolas de Bourgueil, *La Source* is the early drinker, to be quaffed from a carafe, while *La Mine* works nicely with *charcuterie*. *Les Malgagnes* is always the most extracted of the three, owing to the long maceration time. In Bourgueil, we love *La Coudraye* for being an inimitable mix of freshness and minerality (from the silica on the slopes), but *Les Quartiers* is perhaps his most interesting year in, year out. It's classic clay-chalk grown Cabernet Franc, recalling the best slopes of Chinon but with an undertow of masculinity. Both *Le Grand Clos* and *La Petite Cave* require time to come together.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-LOI-22-002-10	2010 St.-Nicolas de Bourgueil 'La Mine'	Lightly chilled with a whole roast chicken and herbed potatoes
FRA-LOI-22-003-10	2010 St.-Nicolas de Bourgueil 'Les Malgagnes'	Decant several hours, serve with a lamb chop or rack
FRA-LOI-22-004-10	2010 Bourgueil 'La Coudraye'	Charcuterie, especially pork, or a Hainanese style pork chop
FRA-LOI-22-005-09	2009 Bourgueil 'Les Quartiers'	Yannick suggests a cheese plate; we like it with macaroni and cheese
FRA-LOI-22-006-09	2009 Bourgueil 'Le Grand Clos'	A bit too young now, but perfect for beef brisket or a flavourful cut
FRA-LOI-22-007-09	2009 Bourgueil 'La Petite Cave'	A simple roast duck or game fowl; venison also works nicely

Bernard & Mathieu Baudry

Sons of the soil

The Baudry tasting room has a display case which illustrates the soil types of their various vineyards; while talking up the soil is a common (and abused) marketing strategy, Bernard and Mathieu are serious enough to try and show the approximate depths of the top- and subsoil for each parcel. This attention to detail without losing sight of the bigger picture, is characteristic of the family's thorough and thoughtful approach to vine husbandry and wine making.



Terroir illustrated

Their careful farming and cellar work has produced an array of suave, finely-poised wines, privileging elegance over power. Mathieu does not think that Chinon can or should be a dark, intense wine, even in exceptional vintages like 2003. Instead, Cabernet Franc, when properly grown and harvested at the right time, gives supple wines, where neither the tannins or acidity overwhelm the wine in its youth, but provide enough structure for extended aging. The older wines are lovely, albeit more rustic approximations of what the current wines will become; an 1989 Grezeaux was fantastic in 2011, and a 1996 Domaine still singing after almost 2 decades.



Region:	Loire – SaBoChi	Website:	www.chinon.com/vignoble/bernard-baudry
Size:	~30ha	Viticulture:	No chemicals

The wines

2010 Chinon Blanc

We often tell Mathieu that he should graft some Chenin Blanc over the existing Cabernet Franc vines, such is the beauty of the white which comes from the top of the slopes (too cold and windy for Cabernet Franc). It's a wine which delights as it surprises, morphing from a seemingly simple lemon-infused, fruit-forward wine into a waxy, honeyed *vin de meditation*. We had the 2000 recently, which was a more difficult vintage, and it is just beginning to take on additional complexity. It's a useful halfway house between Anjou and Touraine, equally at home with a fish dish or a goat's cheese.

2010 Chinon

Typically a blend of wines from two different plots (which are harvested and vinified separately), with the majority from a parcel at the top of the plateau above the winery. It's meant to be an early drinker, with an expressive bouquet, but always has impeccable balance and ages wonderfully. The 2010 is wonderfully balanced, although we counsel a short decant before serving.

2010 Chinon 'Les Grezeaux'

It is perhaps fitting that the *cuvée* which we usually like best is almost the least typical of the appellation. It's a very gravelly parcel without much chalk, and in warm vintages can lead to blowsy, flat wines in the wrong hands. The 2010 Grezeaux is a marvel – elegant, supple, but with just a hint of wildness. We intend to age our bottles for a long time, but if you need to drink one now, an autumnal mushroom dish (*girolles*, with some butter and ramps) is just right for bringing out the full flavours of this wine.

2010 Chinon 'Le Clos Guillot'

This wine comes from a mixed parcel which is primarily chalk, but with some clay near the top of the slope. It's a masculine, broad-shouldered wine, especially in vintages like 2010 when the grape skins were well developed. Compared to the 2010, it is slightly more graceful with a caressing finish. It will drink well for quite some time, so there's no rush, and a short decant will liberate some of the fruit.

2009 Chinon 'La Croix Boissée'

The biggest and most backward of Baudry's wines, it nonetheless displays its origins most clearly - both the acidity and the fine-grained tannins can only be due to the chalkiness of this parcel. The oak (mostly used) has receded but the wine is very far from being ready. If past vintages are any guide, this wine will require a couple of decades to fully blossom. We've had very good matches with a well-aged, minerally steak.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-LOI-15-001-10	2009 Chinon	Charcuterie, of course, but also fresh cheeses
FRA-LOI-15-002-10	2009 Chinon 'Le Clos Guillot'	Game birds, as well as hare and even wild boar.
FRA-LOI-15-003-10	2009 Chinon 'Les Grezeaux'	Mushrooms with a hint of earthiness, either sautéed on in an omelette
FRA-LOI-15-005-09	2009 Chinon 'La Croix Boissée'	We would prefer that you age the wine; otherwise a rare steak
FRA-LOI-15-006-10	2010 Chinon Blanc	A fresh log of goat's cheese, gently grilled with some honey

LOIRE – TOURAINE

The Touraine is a fractal of the Loire, a quilt of tributaries, undulations and villages thrown over a bed of chalk. The tufting is different in each appellation: scattered sand and gravel in Chinon and Bourgueil (please see our SaboChi section), loam on the Vouvray plateau, silex in Jasnières and the Coteaux-du-Loir and rich clay in Cheverny and Cour-Cheverny. Long considered the garden of France for its natural bounty (and beauty), it's almost home to an almost bewildering variety of grapes and *vignerons*.

In the main appellations along the Loire, one can find both crunchy, minerally Cabernet Franc and tender yet strong Chenin Blanc, but strike out to the tributaries and the varieties remain stubbornly diverse. There's spicy, perfumed Pineau d'Aunis everywhere one cares to look, intense, nervy Romorantin in its final bastion of Cour-Cheverny, not to mention fruity, friendly Grolleau. Even varieties associated with other regions abound here: Malbec, called Côt locally, less tannic and more refined in this climate, Gamay, with a touch more spine than in Beaujolais, and Chardonnay, almost always unoaked and the better for it. To the east, the influence of the *Centre* (e.g. Sancerre, Pouilly-Fumé) region is apparent, as vineyards are given over to fragrant, supple Sauvignon Blanc, and silky, high-toned Pinot Noir.

The *vignerons* themselves are just as diverse. We find ourselves reaching for a bottle from Clos Roche Blanche more often than not, gluggable on their own, versatile with food. Vouvray's depth and complexity only become apparent with age; François Pinon's wines as measured, as gentle as his speech, while Huet continues to make regal, seemingly immortal wines. François Cazin makes great Cheverny (hobbled by the appellation regulations) and Cour-Cheverny every single year. And the father and son duo at Domaine de la Charrière define traditional Jasnières – evocative mirrors of one of the most marginal appellations along the Loire.

Catherine Roussel & Didier Barouillet, Clos Roche Blanche

“Didier? Freaking genius”

Suzanne Blanchet, in her 1982 ‘Les Vins du Val de Loire’, wrote of Catherine Roussel, “*Elle apporte le raffinement et le doigté que seule une femme sait avoir*”³. Nearly three decades later, that remains true at one of our favourite estates, Clos Roche Blanche. Catherine, together with Didier Barouillet, is still making some of the most graceful, serene wines we have ever tasted. The quote about Didier is from another winegrower whose command of idiomatic English surprised us.

Catherine’s great-great-grandfather, Constant Ragot, in a moment of madness (and genius), had decided that the estate (also known as ‘La Tesnière’) should have a vineyard, and set about excavating the land (bringing the chalk closer to the surface), planting ambitiously, and simultaneously building one of the most hideous houses in Europe (Catherine kindly describes it as kitschy). The resulting estate, Clos Roche Blanche, sits on top of a hill halfway between the towns of Pouillé and Mareuil-sur-Cher, just off the banks of the river Cher. The drone of vehicles along the A85 to the south is only audible in winter, when there is less foliage; the vineyard is otherwise as peaceful and calming as the wines that come from it.



Region:	Loire – Touraine	Website:	NA
Size:	~6ha	Viticulture:	Organic

The wines

Since 2008, when they rented out part of their land (and the Chardonnay vines), they only make a couple of whites from old Sauvignon Blanc vines. The #2 zips across the tongue, without ever seeming harsh or tasting confected, while the #5 (from 2010) is rounder and softer from the extra year in old oak. The ‘Pif’ is a delightful *vin de soif*, with its Côt and Cabernet Franc (in 1:2 proportion) teasing the best out of each other. It will mellow with age, but the fruit is so vibrant now that it can be drunk without regret. The Gamay is striking, sharing a resemblance with Beaujolais but clearly from chalky soils, while the l’Arpent Rouge (Pineau d’Aunis) is spicy and exotic.

2011 Gamay

When Didier and Catherine told us that they had rented out close to 75% of their Gamay vines, our hearts sank. Year in, year out, they grow and make one of the most delicious Gamays outside of Beaujolais, with the chalk terroir inevitably showing: the tannins are fine-grained, almost powdery, and there’s an acid spine which keeps the wine tasting fresh, as if it was bottled the day before. They have kept one hectare of Gamay vines for themselves, and continue the fine tradition in 2011 – a crunchy, lively wine with perfect balance. Slightly chilled, it’s perfect on a weekend morning with some grilled pork chops.

2011 Pif (Cabernet Franc/Côt)

Like its namesake (one of Catherine and Didier’s many dogs), Pif is a friendly, lively mongrel wine with a big nose and a bigger heart. It’s possible to identify the various contributions from the two parent grapes in the young wine – the snap of acid from the Cabernet Franc, a crunch of tannin from the Côt (otherwise known as Malbec). As it ages (even though we get admonished for keeping the wine), the two come together, a Côt hand in a Cabernet Franc

³ Roughly translated: “She brings an elegance and light touch which only a woman possesses”.

glove. The 2011 is one of the clearest examples of ‘honest’ wine we have come across - a wine for drinking, not tasting.

2010 Sauvignon No. 5

The number 5 is usually a selection of riper bunches (not from the same parcel every year), which Didier thinks would benefit from a more oxidative *élevage* in large oak containers. In 2010, the wine is rich, somewhat backward, and benefits from decanting. The latent minerality is most obvious on the finish as the guava and apricot flavours recede. Unlike most Sauvignons this one should age beautifully.

2011 Sauvignon No. 2

Catherine and Didier rented out almost two-thirds of their vineyard in 2008, citing old age and a desire to focus on making the wines they love. They have retained the majority of their ancient (at least 50 years old) Sauvignon Blanc vines, testament to the affection they have for the resultant wine. It’s always hand-harvested, and then depending on the vintage, macerates for up to a day at low temperatures before being crushed. Fermentation then proceeds naturally in INOX (stainless steel) vats and the wine is typically finished by spring. It’s an addictive wine, smooth and easy-drinking when one doesn’t pay attention, complex and sublime when one does.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-LOI-14-001-11	2011 Cuvée Gamay	We drink this whenever we have Hainanese curry rice
FRA-LOI-14-002-11	2011 Pif	A <i>ratatouille</i> , or any other hearty stew (not seafood)
FRA-LOI-14-004-10	2010 Sauvignon #5	Simply grilled fish – the wine will continue developing with air
FRA-LOI-14-005-11	2011 Sauvignon #2	Baked summer vegetables, or a simple seafood <i>hor fun</i>

Domaine Huet, Hwang family & Jean-Bernard Berthomé

The emblem

Anthony Hwang, the proprietor of Huet since 2003, describes himself as a steward of the estate and the land, which reflects not just the iconic status of this fabled domaine but also his commitment to ensuring that the vineyards and the wines continue to be the stars of the show, rather than trophies to be shown off. Having seen for ourselves how fraught the succession at many estates can be, we are extremely glad that the Hwang family have brought in both capital and commercial nous while remaining mindful of the domaine's standing.

The vineyards, which were converted to biodynamism in phases beginning from 1988, are under the watchful eye of Jean-Bernard Berthomé, and visiting at harvest is revelatory. A lot of indifferent sparkling wine is made in Vouvray, typically from unripe grapes and heroic amounts of sugar at all stages of the process (during the primary alcoholic fermentation, to expedite the second, bubble-producing fermentation, and to dose the wines before they are sent to market). At Huet, they try to harvest ripe grapes (i.e. later than most of their neighbours), even for the sparkling wines, so that the wine is not a green-apple generic fizz. It means greater risk, of course, and lower yields, but the *pétillants* at this estate are marvellous, perhaps some of the best in the world.

They are just the start, of course – Huet makes a range of dry, off-dry and sweet wines, depending on the vintage conditions, and classified according to the site where the grapes come from. The original vineyard, *Le Haut Lieu* (“the high place”) surrounds the original house which Victor and Anna-Constance Huet purchased in 1928, and is classic Vouvray terroir – set on a gentle slope north of the Loire, with rich clay covering the soft limestone bedrock. The topsoil is a bit thinner (both in depth and richness) at *Clos du Bourg*, and *Le Mont* is somewhere in between the two. We have a special fondness for wines from *Le Mont*, but all three vineyards produce characterful wines worthy of their reputation.

A note on Noël Pinguet's departure and residual sugar

Noël Pinguet, Gaston Huet's son-in-law and the third generation winemaker of the estate, resigned from Huet in October 2011, a decision which was finalised in February 2012. We are not going to gloss this over as a good thing, for Noël was a remarkable winegrower and winemaker; all one has to do is to take a wander through any of the three primary vineyards at any time of year, or drink any wine made by him (from 1976 onwards). His departure is also about three years earlier than planned for, although both J-B Berthomé and Benjamin Joliveau have been with Huet for some time now, and the former has always been closely involved in running the estate.

There has been much speculation as to why Noël resigned; one commonly cited reason is that the Hwangs wanted to make more *secs*, given the lower risk levels (since the harvest for dry wines is usually earlier and simpler) and greater commercial demand. While we are unable to comment directly on whether that was a cause, we will note that the *secs* at Huet always sell out before the *demi-secs* and *moelleux*. That is unfortunate given the quality, ageworthiness and versatility of the sweeter wines; we would all do well to drink more *demi-sec* and *moelleux*, making use of their residual sugar to pair with local food. Perhaps if there had been more demand for the sweeter styles, the gap between meeting commercial objectives (by making drier wines) and making what we think is the most natural style of Vouvray wouldn't be so obvious. We will never know, of course.

We do know, and can write, that both Anthony and Sarah (his daughter) are deadly serious about maintaining, if not surpassing, the high standards which Huet has achieved over the past nine decades, and we are amply confident that they will succeed.



Region:	Loire – Touraine	Website:	www.huet-echansonne.com
Size:	~35ha	Viticulture:	Biodynamic

The wines

There is the full range of dry and sweet wines at Huet in addition to the always superb *pétillants*. In terms of sugar levels, the *secs* typically have about 10g/l (similar for the *pétillants*), the *demi-secs* closer to 20g/l, the *moelleux* 50g/l, and 70g/l and above for the *1er Trié*. The sugar levels only tell part of the story, though; the wines possess vibrant acidity and are impeccably balanced. The *secs* are good for early drinking, but age very nicely, while the *moelleux* and *1er Triés* (including the cuvée Constance) need time to come round; usually about a decade or so. For us, the *demi-secs* are the most versatile and what we turn to when there's a difficult food or dish – artichokes, asparagus, a vinegary *lor mee*, or Shanghai-style hairy crab. They drink well young and age gracefully, and in our experience are far less likely to close down completely compared to their drier and sweeter brethren.

2007 Vouvray Pétillant Brut

The 2007 continues a very fine run of rich yet minerally sparklers from Huet. Disgorged in late 2011, this is still very young and nervy, and takes a bit of time in the glass to come round. It's a style of sparkling wine we appreciate – at less than 4 atmospheres of pressure (Champagne is usually closer to 6), it tingles the palate gently, relying more on its acidity to deliver the trademark blend of fruit, cream and minerals. It should age well but can be drunk now, either as an aperitif or with seafood.

2002 Vouvray Pétillant Réserve Brut

This departs from the normal *pétillant* at Huet in two crucial aspects: firstly, the grapes were harvested ripe enough for a secondary fermentation without any addition of sugar (or *liquer de tirage*), and at disgorgement it was dosed with a *sec* rather than a *moelleux*. It's therefore more vinous than the normal bottling, and sings with food; it would be a waste to use it as an aperitif at this stage of its evolution. Although already complex, it has all the tension of a young wine, and absolutely requires time for it to show its best.

2001 Vouvray Clos du Bourg demi-sec

We like this wine very much as an accessible example of how a Clos du Bourg demi-sec ages – it is a bit broader than expected for the 2001 vintage, but the residual sugar comes across as richness rather than sweetness. At this stage of its development it's actually very useful with pork dishes; either with a good dose of salt (*rillettes*, Cantonese roast pork), or cooked simply like *shabu-shabu*.

2009 Vouvray Moelleux

It's almost always easier to discuss the trio together. All three wines are babies right now, but conform to the expectations: the *Le Haut Lieu* is the lightest of the three, fresh and zippy on the palate and finishing quite dry, while the *Clos du Bourg* shows more complexity and minerality on the nose, as well as grip in the finish. The *Le Mont* is the roundest and biggest of

the three, and will need more time to come into focus. These are wines for laying down, not current drinking, although they are fascinating to follow over several days.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-LOI-30-001-07	2007 Vouvray Pétillant Brut	Use as an aperitif, or with breakfast eggs and toast
FRA-LOI-30-002-02	2002 Vouvray Pétillant Réserve Brut	We really like this with fish, either steamed or fried, but not raw or semi-cooked (e.g. sashimi, ceviche)
FRA-LOI-30-006-01	2001 Clos du Bourg Demi-Sec	Very good with pork, but also any earthy dish, such as chicken with a cream and morel sauce
FRA-LOI-30-009-09	2009 Clos du Bourg Moelleux	They are very primary now, and not anywhere close to reaching their potential. They will work nicely with foie gras now (in place of Sauternes), as well as with a cheese course.
FRA-LOI-30-010-09	2009 Le Haut Lieu Moelleux	
FRA-LOI-30-011-09	2009 Le Mont Moelleux	

François Pinon

Precision winegrowing



A rare off-balance moment

Our first and lasting impression of François is just how exact he seems, not in a cold, mechanical way, but rather like a genial mathematics teacher who will make sure you understand calculus. Perhaps it's his training and previous profession as a psychoanalyst, but we think he must always have been like this. When asked, he laughs and shrugs it off, saying that his childhood was a long time ago. Whatever the case, his personality comes through each and every wine he makes – these are some of the most wonderfully poised Vouvrais we've ever had, with plenty of character and style.

This is largely due to his meticulous vineyard and cellar work, which he goes about without fuss or drama. The pruning is short (i.e. low yields) and tidy, the ploughing thorough yet gentle, the harvest completely manual, and the fermentations and *elevage* unhurried. He prefers a gentle hint of bitterness in his Vouvrais, noting that it's characteristic of the older wines, which comes from the skins and seeds. The wines are always balanced, no matter their age, and with air they unfurl like spring blossoms, the initial notes (be it quince, or jasmine) receding to allow the earthier, mineral notes through.

It's always a pleasure visiting him, walking through the various parcels, talking about the weather, and then settling down to taste through the various wines, first from cask, then from bottle, and then back to the casks for the young sweet wines. We take our time with the wines, and we leave feeling like we've learnt something, and are better people for it.



Region:	Loire – Touraine	Website:	NA
Size:	~15ha	Viticulture:	Organic

The wines

Although François calls the wines *demi-sec*, both the terroir bottlings are often closer to *sec-tendre* in texture and sweetness, giving just the faintest impression of sweetness rather than being apparently off-dry. There are two reasons for the level of residual sugar: firstly, to balance the naturally high acidities from his parcels, and also to ensure that the wines do not have too much alcohol (theoretically they could reach about 14% ABV in most vintages). When weather conditions permit, he also makes several sweet cuvées, starting with the normal *moëlleux*, which is always elegant and well-balanced, and depending on the amount of botrytis in the vineyard, either a *Première Trie* or a *Cuvée Botrytis*. Once in a while he'll make an astonishing *Cuvée Novembre*, harvested very late and meant for long cellaring.

2009 Vouvray 'Les Trois Argiles'

The three clays, denoting the richer soils from which this cuvée is harvested and made. The 2009 vintage was ripe and forward, and on both the nose and palate this is an expansive, rich wine. There's a very slight hint of balancing bitterness on the finish, which will integrate over time if bottlings from the previous years are anything to go by. We adore this wine with a fine soft cheese plate; its fruit brings out the plays off against the tanginess of a young *chevre*, while there is enough acidity to work with a *coulant* (runny) Vacherin.

2009 Vouvray 'Silex Noir'

The *Silex Noir* comes from the quartz-rich soils, and carry a keener edge than *Les Trois Argiles*. The minerality is always more overt, and the overall profile slimmer. In 2009, it's almost as round as its sibling, but the tingle of acidity is never far from the surface, and consequently it pairs well with some of the traditional food of the region: pork rillettes, rillons (cubed rather than shredded, but otherwise like rillettes) and river fish.

2003 Vouvray Moëlleux

The record 2003 heatwave vintage acquired a bad reputation as many producers made heavy, tired-tasting wines which didn't have the balance to age. Not so at Pinon, where the moëlleux is clean and fresh, despite the obvious botrytis. The rich texture comes from the clay soils, which retained more water over the hot, dry summer. Try it now with a light but flavourful dessert - perhaps a plain *panna cotta*, a *flan* or even a sago-based dessert.

2003 Vouvray Première Trie (50cl)

From *surmaris* (over-ripe, shrivelled) grapes, the *Première Trie* is honeyed, rich and very pure, like a distillation of all that is good about Vouvray. What's particularly impressive is that this never becomes cloying, despite the fact that it's one-tenth sugar! It's good for sipping on its own now, or in lieu of dessert, and we think it will easily age for a couple more decades; the 1989 was fantastic recently.

2005 Vouvray 'Cuvée Botrytis' (50cl)

This is the type of sweet Vouvray we adore: aromatic and powerful on the nose, and wonderfully balanced on the palate, the richness perfectly counterbalanced by the acidity. It's never easy to determine when to stop the fermentation on a sweet wine, but François gets it right more often than not. The result: a delicate yet intense wine.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-LOI-17-001-09	2009 Les Trois Argiles	Soft cheeses, scrambled eggs with chives (there's an affinity)
FRA-LOI-17-002-09	2009 Silex Noir	Charcuterie, steamed fish (both Cantonese and Teochew style)
FRA-LOI-17-003-03	2003 Moelleux	Lighter, airier desserts with a touch of creaminess
FRA-LOI-17-004-03	2003 Première Trie (50cl)	We like the sweeter wines on their own, or with local kueh which are not too sweet.
FRA-LOI-17-005-05	2005 Cuvée Botrytis (50cl)	

François Cazin

The forgotten children



Family portrait from c. 1960

Along a river full of vinous oddities, Cheverny and Cour-Cheverny are so off the beaten track that they might as well be mainstream. Like much of the eastern Touraine, the two appellations are a patchwork of clay and sand-dominated parcels, with hints of silica (silex) and chalk peeking through, especially in the heart of the region. Cheverny is largely planted to the same varieties as the rest of Touraine (Sauvignon and Chardonnay, Gamay, Pinot Noir, Cabernets Franc and Sauvignon, and handfuls of Pineau d'Aunis), but its brethren Cour-Cheverny is the last bastion of Romorantin, a late-ripening, powerful grape which used to be more common.

François Cazin has been working diligently on the same land since 1976, well before the two appellations were awarded AOC status in March 1993 (his family have lived and worked there for five generations – the family photograph is from the 1960s). He makes a variety of wines in both appellations in the same painstaking fashion: almost no chemical intervention, hand-harvesting, natural yeasts, and a patient *élevage* before releasing the wines. “It’s how things have been done in my family,” he replies matter-of-factly.

Most of his holdings are in heavier clay soils, with more silex in Cheverny, chalk in Cour-Cheverny. The Cheverny blanc, usually a Sauvignon-dominated blend, gets some interest from a small Chardonnay component, while the Cheverny rouge is a toothsome blend of Gamay and Pinot Noir. We also like the Cheverny rosé, usually a 50/50 blend of Gamay and Pinot Noir. François makes 2 different cuvées of Cour-Cheverny: a dry, intense version, and a Cuvée Renaissance with up to 20 g/l of sugar, tasting more *sec-tendre* than *demi-sec*.



Region:	Loire – Touraine	Website:	NA
Size:	~20ha	Viticulture:	Conventional, but low chemical use, hand-harvested

2009 Cour-Cheverny

There are only about 50 hectares of Romorantin left, and François owns about a tenth of that, including some of the choicest plots. The vines are old (the youngest are about 40, and even those were largely propagated via *marcottage*), and the exhilarating minerality of Romorantin shines through when the juice is handled simply and gently. It’s complex even at this age, and will develop nicely for many years to come, although Romorantin does shut down for 5, sometimes 10, years in its adolescence. Any dish with hints of smoke helps to bring out the remarkable scent of fresh hay which characterises so much young Romorantin, so we like it with tea-smoked pigeon in the Cantonese style, dry Memphis-style barbecue and smoked haddock and trout.

2009 Cour-Cheverny Cuvée Renaissance

When conditions allow (and the vintages have been kind recently), François makes an off-dry Romorantin reminiscent of Vouvray demi-secs. It’s a wine where the velvet barely conceals the iron within, even in a riper, softer year like 2009. We like sipping on at the end of meals with an array of cheese – the acidity cuts through the softer cheeses, while the 20g/l of sugar

buttresses semi-soft cheeses nicely, and there is plenty of body and complexity to complement years-old Gruyere and Comte.

2010 Cheverny Blanc

In this vintage, there's about 80% Sauvignon and 20% Chardonnay. The Sauvignon is currently more dominant, although the Chardonnay is more obvious on the finish. There's a nice vein of acidity, although the wine is approachable as both cepages underwent malolactic fermentation. We drink it with both fresh and aged goats' cheese, and also like it with other simple dishes such as grilled firm-fleshed fish.

2009 Cheverny Rouge

About two-thirds Gamay (the maximum permitted under AOC rules), with some Pinot Noir supporting, the straight Cheverny rouge (there's also a cuvée 'Le Petit Chambord') is delightful, early-drinking wine. The Gamay grapes undergo some carbonic maceration to give it that burst of fruit in youth, and it's a wine reminiscent of Beaujolais from a cooler year - fragrant, forward and zippy. Great with poultry across the spectrum, from a tender chicken to gamy pheasant, especially with lots of butter (as with a fricassée).

2010 Cheverny Rosé

50% Gamay, made with free run juice, and 50% Pinot Noir bled off the crushed grapes (*saignée*). It's vinified in stainless steel tanks and then blended before bottling. The 2010 is very ripe and full, and should benefit (unlike many other rosés) from further ageing. Drink it with perfumed yet delicately-flavoured foods, like a saffron-scented pilaf, or to capitalise on the extra body of this vintage, with something robust like dumplings - Polish *pierogi*, Nepalese *momo*, or Chinese *jiaozi* and *guotie*.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-LOI-16-001-09	2009 Cour-Cheverny	Smoked or air-dried food to play off the Romorantin flavours
FRA-LOI-16-002-09	2009 Cour-Cheverny Cuvée Renaissance	Hard cheeses, strongly flavoured foods, e.g. anchovies
FRA-LOI-16-003-10	2010 Cheverny Blanc	Grilled fish and seafood, dressed simply with an acidic sauce
FRA-LOI-16-004-09	2009 Cheverny Rouge	Roast poultry, pork and veal chops
FRA-LOI-16-005-10	2010 Cheverny Rosé	Substantial food like dumplings, or sausages and <i>rösti</i>

Joël & Ludovic Gigou, Domaine de la Charrière

The virtuoso duo



Musing on Jasnières before lunch

The Gigou family still stand out amongst the very fine crop of talented winegrowers in Jasnières. Their 1990 Sélection Raisins Nobles was, and remains, a stunning tapestry, each vibrant flavour weaved seamlessly into a textured warp of acidity and minerality. Our first encounter with it was in 1998, and almost fifteen years later, it's a wine which still astounds. It's now just an occasional treat for us, but we are happy to have the recent wines, now made collaboratively by Joël, who started the domaine in 1974, and Ludovic, his son.

We think it's apt that both father and son play volleyball (although Ludovic teases his father about creaky knees). Like the sport, Jasnières is a niche appellation that typically only true enthusiasts enjoy, and the father and son team are now making some fantastic wines in tandem - one setting the other up for a spike, as it were. They work by hand on their portion of the crescent-shaped slope which makes up the appellation. For the parcel which goes into their 'Clos St. Jacques', Joël wields the *secateurs* alone for the final pruning, picking which shoots to keep and which to trim back.

Both Pineau d'Aunis and Gamay thrive here, where the heat retained by the river Loir (a tributary of the Loire) is essential for the even ripening of the grapes in a very northerly region. The Gigous make a particularly fine, dark and spicy Pineau d'Aunis, often needing a couple of years to settle fully. However, it is their Chenin Blancs which we love: the understated, minerally 'Cuvée du Paradis', meant for early drinking (i.e. within the first 10 years), the intense, concentrated 'Clos St. Jacques' from old vines (always better after at least a decade), and the fabulously elegant Sélection de Raisins Nobles, a botrytis-infused yet terroir-transparent sweet wine. In 2008, they even made a wine from a couple of barrels which had gone rogue (their words), which was almost denied AOC status. It's called 'Duo Majeur', and is a very fine example of how powerful Chenin Blanc can be without ever losing its sense of grace.



Region:	Loire – Touraine	Website:	www.gigou-jasnieres.com
Size:	13ha	Viticulture:	Organic, uncertified

The wines

A note on the 2007 vintage and difficult wines

The 2007 vintage, simply put, was not an easy one. Jasnières is a humid appellation, and it's a constant battle to get canopy management just right over the crucial summer months. Too much foliage, and a wet spell leads to mildew and rot; too little, and sometimes the grapes just don't get ripe enough (and yields fall as the vine concentrates on surviving rather than reproducing). Despite the summer rain and clouds, Joël and Ludovic made great wines, taking advantage of the (relatively) dry pre-harvest and harvest period to get in healthy, whole grapes with a lot of flavour. These are not wines we recommend or sell lightly - they are severe now, very high in acid (albeit tartaric rather than malic), low in pH, and need many more years to settle down. The Cuvée du Paradis (the Clos St. Jacques is being held back until it calms down) will benefit from extended aeration should you choose to open a bottle now; the oxidative

flavours take, in our experience, 3-4 days in a half-full bottle to show. We also recommend drinking it at closer to 16°C, as with a young white Burgundy or an old Champagne. It reminds us of the 1994 vintage, but with more concentration, as well as the 2000 vintage.

Speaking of which, we also have the 2000 Clos St. Jacques, which even Joël thinks is a difficult wine. We try not to draw facile parallels, especially with art, but in its impenetrability the 2000 most closely resembles a late Mark Rothko. It is a wine which we are certain many will dislike, but we love it for exemplifying the tensile strength of the most memorable Chenin Blancs we've ever had. Similarly, the 2008 Duo Majeur is likely to be a limited, experimental run, but the indigenous yeasts in a particular corner of the Gigou cellar have made a wine so intense that it was only bottled after 30 months on its fine lees. It's mildly oxidative and quite odd, but a wonderful wine nonetheless.

2007 Jasnières 'Cuvée du Paradis'

This rendition of the Paradis (as we call it) is so minerally that it's easy to mistake for the Clos St. Jacques. It's a *silex*-lemon sorbet at the present moment, refreshing and somewhat austere. We strongly recommend decanting a few hours ahead of time, and letting oxygen work its magic; otherwise it's best to practice patience with this wine. As is usual with this cuvée, cold seafood is wonderful – the acidity and salinity play off each other, and the wine keeps the palate from getting fatigued. Try something like steamed *gong gong* (a type of conch) without any condiments, or a grey shrimp salad (one of our favourite dishes when eating out in Brussels with the wine merchants).

2008 Jasnières 'Cuvée du Paradis'

The 2008 is hands down one of our favourites in recent years – clean, citrusy, complex Chenin Blanc that is just starting to put on weight (and some make-up). It's very punchy on the attack and full of sustain on the finish, to the extent that we think it would actually work well as an intense style of *aperitif*. It simultaneously cleanses and primes the palate, something we find useful towards the end of a meal as well with an assortment of cheese.

2008 Jasnières 'Clos St. Jacques'

There is a very light dusting of sugar (just under 10g/l) on this wine, and like Vouvray and the rest of the Touraine, 2008 in Jasnières was perfect for *sec-tendre* and *demi-sec* wines. The wine starts out and finishes dry, with the sugar evident on the mid-palate as a pleasing richness and roundness rather than perceptible sweetness. It's terrifically poised, and a great wine to match against chicken in a cream and morel sauce, or with a range of *dal* (especially *dal makhani*) and some good *naan*.

2009 Jasnières 'Clos St. Jacques'

Looking at just the technical details, the 2009 and 2008 are not far apart, but the wines are completely different – the 2009 is mouthfilling where the 2008 is intense, and sweet where its elder sibling is savoury. It's a very clean Clos St. Jacques, with the concentration coming from a small amount of *passerillage* (grapes partially dried by wind while still on the vine). There is just a bit of spice on the finish, which works well with grilled fish and poultry.

2009 Coteaux du Loir Pineau d'Aunis

Many more *vignerons* are now bottling Pineau d'Aunis without blending, but that was not the case when Joël started in 1994. Sometimes they age (witness the ripe 1997), and sometimes they don't, but it's always a beguiling, peppery wine, with fantastic mouthfeel. We like the 2009

very much, and think it will be one of those that age like a watercolour painting – the loss of some brightness more than compensated for by a deepening of texture. Use it as one would a strongly-flavoured rosé – outdoors, on a patio, with as much food as it's possible to fit on a picnic mat. It's versatile, wonderful and pure.

2008 Jasnières Sélection de Raisins Nobles

Perhaps Joël should only make late harvest wines – the 2008 is the real deal. It's too easy to run out of superlatives and adjectives when describing this wine, so we're not really going to try. We will add that it's fantastic with some aged *crottin* (goat's cheese), very gently warmed and served with day-old *levain*, accented with a clove of roasted garlic or some Mirabelle plum compote.

1997 Jasnières Sélection de Raisins Nobles

In its youth, the 1997 was a (slightly) thicker version of the 2008, and it has now matured sufficiently for us to offer for sale. We do not think it's at peak yet, but the sugar (80g/l) and acidity have integrated nicely, meaning it can now be deployed in the middle of a meal, and not just towards the end. Away from the table, it is unsurprisingly quite charming as a sweet *aperitif* (yes, we sometimes drink with French grandmothers), although our favourite way to consume a bottle is slowly, contemplatively as a post-dinner *vin de meditation*.

2000 Jasnières 'Clos St. Jacques'

We shared a bottle of this with Mathieu Baudry (of the near-eponymous winery in Chinon) when we tasted with him (he got the vintage right but the appellation wrong), and he was intrigued enough to want to keep the bottle for several days. We were fascinated enough with this wine to want to import it, but as the note above cautions, it is not for everybody. It is a thought-provoking wine, and we think far more revealing of the terroir of Jasnières than perhaps any other wine we've ever had from the appellation.

2008 Jasnières Duo Majeur

What if someone decided to make a mildly oxidative, *ouillé*-style Jasnières from a ripe and powerful vintage, only bottling after over 30 months in the barrels? We have our answer with the 2008 Duo Majeur, which came into being as a couple of barrels refused to complete their fermentations, and both father and son sensed that there was something special about the wines. There are the nutty tones of a wine that has seen extended barrel maturation, but it also has a remarkable freshness from the acidity of the vintage. It's concentrated and delicious, like the great Savagnins of the Jura, and benefits from similar food – aged hard cheeses, nuts, and poultry cooked with the same wine.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-LOI-19-002-07	2007 Jasnières Cuvée Du Paradis	Simply done seafood to bring out the wine's minerality
FRA-LOI-19-002-08	2008 Jasnières Cuvée Du Paradis	A cheese plate or something similar; useful at Thanksgiving or Christmas
FRA-LOI-19-003-00	2000 Jasnières Clos Saint Jacques	By itself, perhaps with bread.
FRA-LOI-19-003-08	2008 Jasnières Clos Saint Jacques	Great with milder curries, or anything creamy
FRA-LOI-19-003-09	2009 Jasnières Clos Saint Jacques	Grilled fish and poultry

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-LOI-19-004-97	1997 Jasnières Sélection Raisins Nobles	On their own, both are superb, and require only the simplest food to bring out additional nuances
FRA-LOI-19-004-08	2008 Jasnières Sélection Raisins Nobles	
FRA-LOI-19-006-08	2008 Jasnières Duo Majeur	Toasted almonds (lightly salted), anchovies, even asparagus

LOIRE – CENTRE

More than any other part of the Loire, the wines of the Centre have swayed to the dictates of Parisians' fickle tastebuds - from steely, green Sauvignon of the 1970s meant to be gulped while dragging on a *Gitanes*, listening to Gainsbourg or Brel, to the equally thirst-quenching reds (usually, but not always, from Pinot Noir) that populated countless wine lists in the 1980s, to the machine-harvested, enzymed and yeasted New World wannabes of the 1990s, the winemakers here have managed to keep demand and prices high by adapting to the Parisian (and global) thirst for instant gratification beverages. In short, it is not really a region for someone wishing to find honest wines.

But there is a different *Vignobles du Centre*, one that shares more than just chalk bedrock and soft weather with its less preening neighbours in the Touraine and Auvergne. It is populated by a mix of stubborn traditionalists, who hew to their time-honoured methods of wine growing, and a band of young, exciting (and excitable) *vignerons* who see the potential in this region's vineyards and vines. Both groups are less beholden to Parisians and fashion than the large estates, and often work organically (if not biodynamically), harvest by hand, and take pains to let the *terroir* show through, eschewing aromatic yeasts, enzyme additions and the planting of clones selected for high yields and flavour properties.

We are very proud to work with one of the best and most vociferous of the new breed, Vincent Gaudry, who makes an astonishing range of white and red Sancerres, each wine pulsating with character and deserving of attention.

Domaine Vincent Gaudry

Biologically yours

When someone is as earnest in his belief in biodynamism as Vincent is, it's easy to mock all the seemingly crazy things he does – signing off e-mails with *Biologiquement Vôtre* (“organically yours”), following the biodynamic calendar closely, even naming one of his Sancerre blanc cuvées after Rudolf Steiner, the founder of the biodynamic movement. But a look at the vineyards, a sip of the wine, and one begins to wonder whether there isn't something more to biodynamism.

When he took over the family domaine in 1993, Vincent immediately started switching over to organic agriculture, convinced that this was the only way to farm sustainably. As he delved more into the specifics of farming with each vintage, he moved ever closer to adopting biodynamism, finally gaining Demeter certification in 2004. The 8 hectare domaine has both dominant soil types in Sancerre, clay-chalk (often called *terres blanches* for their white colour) and weathered, compacted chalk (*caillotes*), but Vincent also has several silex-heavy parcels, which always produce wines of shimmering minerality.



Region:	Loire – Centre	Website:	www.vincent-gaudry.com
Size:	8ha	Viticulture:	Biodynamic

The wines

Vincent makes four, sometimes five, different Sauvignon Blanc cuvées and two Pinot Noirs, all of which we import. *Le Tournebride* is the early-drinking, most Sancerre-like of all his Sauvignon Blancs, made from an *assemblage* of grapes from all three soil types. It's intense, clean and finishes beautifully. The old vines cuvée, *Mélo die de Vieilles Vignes*, is chalk-based, and has more richness both on the nose and palate, while *L'Esprit de Rudolf* (named for Rudolf Steiner), has a smoky quality from the silex soils. The latter is stunning when given some air, and ages beautifully. *A mi-chemin* (“Halfway”) is perhaps the most exotic, often pushing against the limits of what should be possible in Sancerre. We adore this wine. Of the red wines, *Vincengétorix* is a handy reminder that Sancerre used to be predominantly Pinot Noir country, with a pleasing crunch on the mid-palate, while *Le Sang des Serfs* is bright and mineral, a worthy alternative to Burgundy.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-LOI-31-001-11	2011 Sancerre Blanc 'Le Tournebride'	Goat's cheese, of course, but also a whole range of fish dishes
FRA-LOI-31-002-10	2010 Sancerre Blanc 'Melodie de Vieilles Vignes'	Needs something a bit punchy, such as crayfish or crab
FRA-LOI-31-003-10	2010 Sancerre Blanc 'L'Esprit de Rudolf'	Very good with aged goat's cheese, or Cantonese style roast chicken
FRA-LOI-31-004-09	2009 Sancerre Blanc 'A Mi-chemin'	We really like this with a large seafood platter, simply cooked
FRA-LOI-31-005-10	2010 Sancerre Rouge 'Le Sang des Serfs'	A slightly gamey dish (venison, pigeon) to play off the bright fruit
FRA-LOI-31-006-10 FRA-LOI-31-007-10	2010 Sancerre Rouge Vincengétorix (magnums available)	Slightly chilled, perfect with a herbed roast chicken or grilled salmon

BEAUJOLAIS

Perhaps one of the best examples of unintended (beneficial) consequences was Philip the Bold's 1395 ordinance that the Gamay grape be exiled from his duchy (Burgundy) in favour of Pinot Noir. In the six centuries since, Gamay has found a natural home in the Beaujolais, just a few miles south of Mâcon.

A naturally prolific vine, Gamay on rich soils tends to produce insipid wines; on the poorer soils of Beaujolais, that exuberance is expressed not through higher yields but greater depth of fruit. The granite and schist rocks of the region weather to produce a thin, sandy soil (which the locals call *arène*), naturally low in nitrogen, which also washes away easily on the convex hillocks. This causes industrial farmers in the region to perpetuate a sad cycle: overuse of chemical fertiliser (especially nitrogen), leading to rapid weed growth, necessitating herbicide use, and an accumulation of acid in an already acidic soil, making nitrogen fixing ever more difficult (and thus requiring more nitrogen addition).

We work with growers who are justly proud of their farming methods, and whose wines reflect the landscape: fruity but not facile, just the right amount of sunshine and cheer, and quite often, a cool, dark edge on the mid-palate and finish, as if the grape seeds were made of granite and schist. Good Beaujolais can often be aged for up to a decade, but it never takes us that long to finish the bottles we can get our hands on.

In Morgon, Jean-Claude Chanudet, who took over from his father-in-law at Domaine Chamonard, is making delicious, long-lived Morgon and Fleurie, while Jean-Paul Brun fashions a wide array of terroir-transparent, honest Beaujolais from his diverse holdings.

Jean-Claude & Geneviève Chanudet, Domaine Chamonard

“Pas mal, non?”



JC explaining erosion

In Villié-Morgon and Beaujolais, winegrowers still speak of Jules Chauvet, a chemist and negociant who was one of the pioneers of what is loosely known nowadays as the natural wine movement: painstaking work in the field and during the harvest to pick only healthy grapes, natural fermentations, no sulphur during élevage, and bottling without fining or filtration. Joseph Chamonard was one of the earliest adherents, making wines which were completely unlike any others in the appellation, and today his daughter Geneviève and son-in-law Jean-Claude Chanudet carry on his legacy, making long-lived Morgon (the 1995 is superb now) and Fleurie.

Jean-Claude farms completely naturally, preferring to preserve the biomass in the vineyard as far as possible. The cellar is bare, with wines either bubbling away (in winter and sometimes spring) or resting before bottling. It's the exceptional vintages where his wines really stand out; without losing the imprimatur of that year's climate, he somehow manages to tease the wines towards a balanced, proportionate state. In 2003, a hot, dry year which led to many unbalanced wines, it was by accelerating the fermentation and retaining a good proportion of the lees (the wine is still turbid, but wonderful now). When asked how he knew what to do, he shrugs apologetically, “I don't know - the grapes tasted different, and it just seemed like the right thing. Didn't turn out too bad, eh?”



Region:	Beaujolais	Website:	NA
Size:	4ha	Viticulture:	Organic

The wines

Morgon – two vintages

We are fortunate to be able to offer two vintages from Jean-Claude and Geneviève. The 2008 is starting to *morgonner* (‘to become a Morgon’) and is absolutely fantastic now, straight from the bottle, while the 2011 is bright and fruity at this stage of its life. These are some of the longest-lived Morgons we've come across, and they age beautifully, gaining complexity and depth without sacrificing the inherent juiciness and zippiness of Gamay.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-BEA-02-001-08	2008 Morgon	Lamb chops, either simply grilled, or from a tandoor oven
FRA-BEA-02-001-11	2011 Morgon	

Domaine des Terres Dorées, Jean-Paul Brun

Conscientious craftsman

Jean-Paul might not forgive us for mentioning this, but a fond memory from 2001 involved sitting outside his garage, watching a recently acquired swimming pool robot do its work. He had a huge grin on his face, as if nothing in the world was better or more interesting than watching a small machine work its way around his pool. In the decade since then, we've become utterly convinced that he takes just as much satisfaction from a job well done in his vineyards and cellars, growing and making a range of distinctive, terroir-driven wines.

Jean-Paul works extremely hard in every single one of his plots, whether the grapes end up in a lieu-dit bottling (such as the powerful, punchy 'Le Buissy') or the 'L'Ancien', so named because he wanted to adhere to ancient methods of wine making. He's not an ideologue - he uses some chemicals in the vineyard (but rarely), and chaptalises (also rarely), primarily to prolong fermentations - but he is very much a purist as a craftsman, aiming to express the natural fruit of the Gamay grape and the differences between his varied plots.



Region:	Beaujolais	Website:	A decade in the making!
Size:	~30ha	Viticulture:	Lutte raisonnée, some organic

The wines

We are extremely fortunate to have secured allocations for all his wines, from the fun and zesty FRV100, his now-classic L'Ancien, through to the various crus (Côte de Brouilly, Fleurie, Morgon, Moulin à Vent), as well as the delicious, gulpable Beaujolais Blanc Classic.

2010 Beaujolais Blanc

A little-known fact - Jean-Paul started out making white wine from inherited Chardonnay vines before getting his hands on the old vines Gamay which now go into the L'Ancien. The 2010 is perhaps the best young one we've tasted in almost a decade, allying the ripe melon aromatics with the textural crunch of pear and apple skin on the palate. It makes us wish for a plate of steamed shellfish (or snails), with the barest hint of garlic, parsley and butter, on a picnic table.

2010 Beaujolais l'Ancien

If only more Beaujolais was like Jean-Paul Brun's L'Ancien - fastidiously farmed, meticulously made, it doesn't try to be an alcoholic bubblegum beverage nor a poor cousin to its Burgundian relatives further north. No carbonic maceration, but no over-extraction or new barrels either, just clean Gamay fruit backed by the snap of acid from the granite, especially clean in 2010. It's one of those lovely warm weather drinkers - especially useful in Singapore, where summer never seems to end.

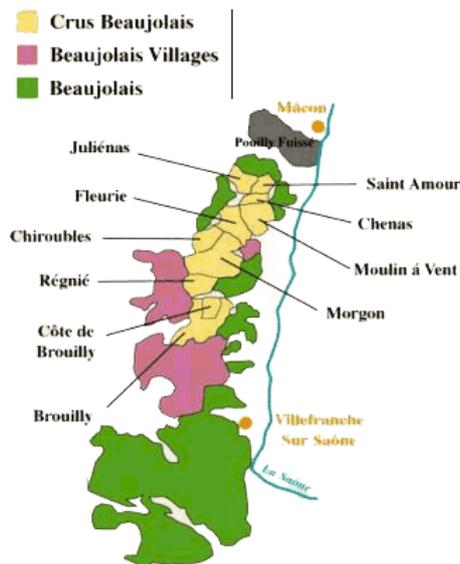
2009 Beaujolais l'Ancien 'Le Buissy'

When Jean-Paul mentioned that he was thinking of bottling a special cuvée from his oldest and best vines from limestone-dominant vines in south Beaujolais, we were worried that he was jumping on the prestige bottling bandwagon. To be frank, he has, but in the best possible way: it's not just a concentrated version of the l'Ancien (although it certainly is more intense), but rather an acknowledgement of Gamay's roots further north: the telltale chalk minerality and suppleness that come from ageing in old oak barrels. The 2009 is particularly large-framed (for Beaujolais), and cuts through an *onglet* steak better than a knife.

2010 Fleurie 'Grille Midi'

Jean-Paul says with a shrug, "I could bottle all of my Fleurie as 'Grille Midi', since it's the same vineyard, but this is the best bit". And so it is, with a sultry nose and a straight-backed posture, a wine with impeccable breeding. It's a wine which will really reward patience, as it will develop complexity over the next decade (especially in magnum), but for drinking now we like something with fat and salt to tease out the minerality: pork scratchings for purists, charcuterie for those who require a bit of protein.

2010 Crus Beaujolais



From the deep South of the region (traditionally regarded as a backwater), Jean-Paul has steadily accumulated grape sources and land in the various crus, including some very limited bottlings. We like the way he's expressed the individual characters of each of the crus, without lapsing into caricature. His Côte de Brouilly has plenty of power to go along with the trademark minerality of the appellation, and is typically the most linear of his wines. The Fleurie, on the other hand, is floral without being cloying, fresh, lithe and very pretty. The Morgon is expressive, serious, and with a real zip, bearing little resemblance to some of the more outlandish Beaujolais being made nowadays, while the Moulin à Vent is classic – intense, concentrated but not at all heavy. As befits the vintage, all are fresher tasting and lighter than the 2009s, and meant for early consumption within 5-7 years.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-BEA-01-002-10	2010 Beaujolais Blanc	Delicately flavoured white meats and shellfish
FRA-BEA-01-006-10	2010 Beaujolais l'Ancien	We like this on its own, oddly, but also with cheeses
FRA-BEA-01-020-10	2010 Beaujolais l'Ancien (magnum)	
FRA-BEA-01-007-09	2009 Beaujolais l'Ancien 'Le Buissy'	Very flavourful, can be drunk on its own or with lobster and crab
FRA-BEA-01-012-10	2010 Fleurie 'Grille Midi'	Meat, cooked rare, or eels with morels and cream
FRA-BEA-01-008-10	2010 Côte de Brouilly	Use this as you would the l'Ancien, especially good for daily drinking
FRA-BEA-01-009-10	2010 Morgon	It's become a tradition for us to drink this with frog legs in cream sauce
FRA-BEA-01-010-10	2010 Moulin à Vent	Of all the crus, the one we like most with local curries
FRA-BEA-01-011-10	2010 Fleurie	Pair this with something aromatic like hot-smoked meats

RHÔNE

The two wine regions commonly known as the northern and southern Rhône are like distant cousins, bound only by the eponymous river and the cold, northerly wind known as *le Mistral*. Even these two common threads turn abruptly in the space of just 50 kilometres between Valence and Montélimar - the Rhône widens and slows, while the *Mistral* accelerates as both water and wind funnel out towards the Mediterranean.

The traditional vine training systems attest to the difference in wind speed, with vines climbing up (and above) posts on leeward slopes in the north, and bush vines pruned close to the ground in the south. Unsurprisingly, the two regions produce distinct red wines, especially in the way they age. In the north, Syrah's natural acidity and tannins (especially when fermented in whole bunches, as is traditional) frame its development, while the blended wines more typical of the south draw on the sweetness and fat of the generous Grenache. The whites also differ, but more in degree than in kind. The natural flamboyance and richness of Viognier, Roussanne and Marsanne is restrained in the northern Rhône's continental climate, and counterbalanced by more neutral varieties (e.g. Clairette, Bourbolenc, Picpoul Blanc etc.) in the south.

Amidst this diversity, we are delighted to be working with Eric Texier, an old friend, and Helen Durand of Domaine du Trapadis. Both have exceptional vineyards outside of the well-known appellations, from which they make equally exceptional wines. We also have a tiny allocation from Jean and Pierre Gonon in St-Joseph, whose wines are vibrant testimonials to the potential elegance of Syrah.

Eric Texier

The terroir sleuth



Eric, c'est quoi ce truc?

when going through the various barrels from all the plots of land he's picked up.

Eric Texier and us go back a long way - YiXin bought his first wine from Eric halfway through Lionel Jospin's tenure as the French Prime Minister. There have been several Prime Ministers since, and we've also seen Eric lose several vineyards due to the property boom (and continually depressed wine prices outside of fashionable regions), whether it's 'Les Pends' in Crozes-Hermitage or 'Les Cardinières' in St-Gervais. This might seem like an esoteric point until one tastes at Eric's cellar

- his talent for discovering obscure but great terroir is evident

We suspect he's managed to find those plots due to a unique combination of passion (he loves the old style Rhône wines), inquisitiveness and scepticism (as one would expect from a former nuclear engineer). He's best known for his wines from Brézème, both white (Roussanne) and red (Syrah), and recently he's also bought a parcel in Saint Julien en Saint Alban (also Syrah) from across the river. Further south, Eric also vinifies both white and red versions of Châteauneuf du Pape - concentrated and graceful wines which age well.

Eric owns some of the land, and has most of the rest under long term contracts, which specify viticultural practice; many of the plots are now certified organic. In the cellar, he has moved towards more traditional methods, eschewing the methods and chemical aids which help wines do well in competitions but reduce their usefulness at the dining table. As a result, these are not facile wines for simple drinking, but require patience and understanding. His wines have outlasted Jospin, Raffarin, de Villepin and Fillon, and we're confident they'll still be delightful when Ayrault, the incumbent Prime Minister, steps down.



Region:	Rhône	Website:	www.eric-texier.com
Size:	~3ha, otherwise bought in	Viticulture:	Mostly certified organic

The wines

2009 Brézème Rouge

Looking at a map, Brézème looks too far south to produce great Syrah, but the vineyards have been cultivated for centuries, with a corresponding reputation amongst 19th century gourmands (Parisien price lists from that period list Hermitage and Brézème together). The slopes, despite facing south to southwest, never get too baked as the skies are often overcast, and the long ripening period produces wines of exceeding grace. They're not usually wines for early drinking, but the 2009 has enough flesh to be approached now with a suitable decant.

2009 Domaine de Pergaud Saint Julien en Saint Alban Rouge

Eric uses the Domaine de Pergaud designation for wines from old vines, and the Saint Julien en Saint Alban (a mouthful, like the wine) vineyard is the latest, and possibly greatest, addition to his holdings. It's on the west bank of the river, a curious agglomeration of gneiss, granite (both broken up) and sand (deposits from the glacial age). As it was cultivated by a religious order, the vineyard is untouched by modern viticultural practices - no chemicals, no clonal selection, just old Syrah vines. We love this wine.

2010 Brézème Blanc

Roussanne is a difficult grape to work with in the vineyard, being susceptible to mildew and rot, and is usually late to ripen fully. If harvested unripe, it produces a bland, flat wine (Roussanne has low natural acidity); while over-ripe examples are oily and lifeless on the palate. Eric's example is very different - he manages to get the exotic aromas without resorting to special yeasts and enzymes, while retaining as much acidity as possible through careful pruning and canopy management. This wine comes from a parcel about the size of a football field, although Eric is encouraging replanting by the local growers.

2009 Domaine de Pergaud Brézème Blanc (Vieille Roussette)

We always joke with Eric that he needs to keep on creating new old vines (juxtaposition intended) cuvées so that he can charge higher prices for essentially the same wine. So the price is indeed higher on this wine, but for very compelling reasons: the fruit is at once denser and purer, from nose to gullet, interlaced with striking minerality, with a telltale chalky texture reminiscent of our favourite Roussannes from Savoie to the east. It's quite a wine, and one which will need many decades to show its best.

2007 Châteauneuf-du-Pape Blanc

To our knowledge, we've never had a Clairette/Bourboulenc blend that is as good as Eric's Châteauneuf-du-Pape Blanc. There's some Grenache Blanc thrown in as well, for good measure, but this wine gets all its aromatic complexity from the *terroir* (it's rocky, like much of the appellation) and the patient *élevage*. Eric thinks it drinks best within the first five years, but we like it with a bit of age when the flavours really round out. Fantastic with a rich seafood dish, e.g. snow crab simmered with uni, or local oyster omelette (but be sparing with the chilli).

2011 Opale (Viognier)

Close to a decade ago, YiXin was working as a vineyard hand in the Mosel when he got a call from Eric, who wanted to visit some German winegrowers to find out how to make low-alcohol, off-dry whites. Somewhat bemused, he took Eric to a selection of *winzers*, and tasted the result a year later - an early-picked Viognier with its fermentation stopped at 7% ABV by reducing the temperature (this was traditionally achieved by rolling the barrels out of the cellars during the cold German winters). The 2011 is thrilling and fresh now, clean as a whistle.

2009 Domaine de Pergaud Brézème Rouge (Vieille Serine)

This wine comes from some of the very best parcels in Brézème, particularly one near the top of the *coteaux* which ripens very late. The old vines, many (re)-planted just after the Second World War, produce a small crop which are intense without being extracted. The vinification is ultra-traditional here - whole cluster pressing, long maceration and a slow *élevage* to allow the wine to find its own equilibrium. Having tasted old examples of Brézème from other winegrowers (before Eric arrived on the scene), we have no doubt this wine will age wonderfully for about two decades.

2009 Séguret VV

Usually the most effusive of Eric's Grenache-based reds, the Séguret is strikingly rich on the nose, yet retains remarkable freshness on the palate; Eric thinks it's a combination of the very cold dawns and dusks (even during summer) and the limestone soils. Almost pure Grenache (there is always a bit of Carignan and Clairette), it carries its weight remarkably well. We like this a lot with meaty dishes and local sausages.

2009 Mâcon Bussières Très Vieilles Vignes

One of the very first wines Eric made was a Mâcon, and he's kept at it ever since, refusing to betray the *Bussières* terroir with high yields or over-oaking. At the southern limits of the limestone ridge, Bussières pairs the trademark ripeness of the Mâcon (apricots, honey on the nose, roundness on the palate) with limestone-derived acidity. It's a Chardonnay with real panache, and will easily hold for another five years.

2009 Châteauneuf-du-Pape Rouge

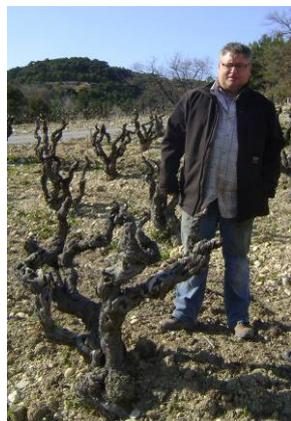
Eric sources his Grenache from La Crau, the famous vineyard towards the northern end of Châteauneuf-du-Pape, and his Mourvèdre from the other end, close to Avignon. The two grapes work like Laurel and Hardy; while Grenache is more physically imposing (like Hardy), it never quite gets its way over the relatively diminutive Mourvèdre (Laurel), and the duo, to employ a cliché, is greater than the sum of its parts. It's fantastic with a rich, beefy dish – from slow-braised beef shin to flash-cooked steak.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-RHO-01-001-09	2009 Brézème Rouge	Enough acid to cut through most burgers and moist cuts like ribs
FRA-RHO-01-003-10	2010 Brézème Blanc	Works very well with pork dishes, e.g. Teochew-style braised trotters
FRA-RHO-01-004-09	2009 Domaine de Pergaud Brézème Blanc (Vieille Roussette)	As with the young vines version, but decant ahead of time
FRA-RHO-01-005-07	2007 Châteauneuf-du-Pape Blanc	Lobster poached in clarified butter – ooh la la!
FRA-RHO-01-006-11	2011 Opale	Bake a cheese (e.g. St-Marcellin) with some honey and fresh fruits
FRA-RHO-01-007-09	2009 Domaine de Pergaud Brézème Rouge (Vieille Serine)	Works well with leaner and gamy meats, e.g. venison
FRA-RHO-01-008-09	2009 Séguret VV	We use this like a baby Châteauneuf, with red meat
FRA-RHO-01-009-09	2009 Mâcon Bussières Très Vieilles Vignes	White meat in a cream-based sauce, or a seafood <i>hor fun</i>
FRA-RHO-01-010-09	2009 Châteauneuf-du-Pape Rouge	Decant well ahead of time and serve with a côte de boeuf

Helen Durand, Domaine du Trapadis

The real deal



Helen likes his vines short

Vines are traditionally pruned close to the ground in the Southern Rhône to protect them against the fierce northerly wind known as the Mistral, which can exceed speeds of 100km/h. However, this method of vine training requires both skill and dedication, and makes machine harvesting complicated, so the trend in the region has been to train the vines on wire, especially at the larger estates.

That is not the case at Helen Durand's Domaine du Trapadis, founded in 1850 and still a traditionalist in a region which has changed rapidly. Helen prefers the old pruning systems, and eschews the aid of synthetic fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides, believing that his hard work pays off in terms of greater biodiversity in this vineyards.

Despite his serious attitude to both viticulture and vinification, Helen is jovial and full of (often self-mocking) quips in person. It is also no surprise, given how closely he shepherds the berries from vineyard to the cellar and eventually into the bottle, how much his wines resemble him – cheerful, sunny and toothsome Grenache-based wines well-rooted in the land, its people and their traditions.



Region:	Rhône – South	Website:	www.domainedutrapadis.com
Size:	23ha	Viticulture:	Organic

The wines

2010 Côtes du Rhone Rouge

Helen puts almost all of his young vine Grenache from the famed villages of Rasteau and Cairanne into the basic Côtes du Rhone, to make a wine which is approachable young, but with sufficient stuffing to age. The 2010 is a vibrant, fruity wine, taking its backbone and concentration from an extended maceration in cement tanks. It's a world apart from the dark, dense and alcoholic Grenaches which dominate the landscape nowadays, and a refreshing return to tradition.

2010 Côtes du Rhône-Villages Rasteau

Rasteau usually produces forbidding wines, difficult to drink when young – purply, burly, even unruly. Without sacrificing too much of that rustic character, Helen has made a more civilised, and in our view more graceful, Rasteau, based largely on old vines Grenache (70%) which produce a minerally wine. It's big-boned and well-toned, with the 10% each of Syrah, Mourvèdre and Carignan providing subtle accents.

2009 Côtes du Rhône-Villages Rasteau 'Les Adrès'

The grapes for this cuvée come from several old parcels in Rasteau – Mourvèdre from the plain, and most of the Grenache and Carignan from a slope above. The vines are about 65 years old, producing very low yields of 15-20 hl/ha (twice that is common in the appellation), and the expectation is that the wine would be one of those blockbuster, almost black wines. That is manifestly not the case with this wine, which carries its richness and intensity well – the firm acidity due to the low yields and not harvesting over-ripe grapes, and tannic structure from

a short maceration rather than oak (although there is always a little bit). It's perfect for some of the tougher (and flavourful) cuts of beef, cooked gently.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-RHO-03-003-10	2010 Côtes du Rhône Rouge	Served very lightly chilled (~16°C), it's ideal with grilled meats and pot roasts
FRA-RHO-03-006-10	2010 Côtes du Rhône-Villages Rasteau	A rare (or even <i>bleu</i>) steak, a hearty stew, or a proper cassoulet
FRA-RHO-03-007-09	2009 Côtes du Rhône-Villages Rasteau 'Les Adrès'	Slow-cooked, pepper-crusting beef brisket, or a straightforward roast duck

Jean & Pierre Gonon

Incroyable



Jean, pondering

Very few nowadays associate Syrah with elegance and finesse, which we think is a result of the traditional wines of e.g. Maurice Gentaz (Côte-Rôtie), Raymond Trolat (St-Joseph), Marcel Juge (Cornas) being eclipsed in the market by slicker, better-marketed competitors. Syrah does have a feminine, beguiling side, when the aromatics tend towards lilacs and crushed raspberries, and the wine relies on a combination of acidity and tannin, rather than just the latter, for structure. It requires extraordinary terroir (granite beneath, steep slopes), backbreaking work (no chemicals, stake training, hand harvesting) and uncommon intuition to fashion such a wine.

We're therefore extremely fortunate and delighted that Jean and Pierre Gonon in the sadly underestimated appellation of St-Joseph are doing just that. They have some of Trolat's land, of course (Jean is extremely charming), but the core of their holdings are in Tournon (darker, more tannic) and Mauves (always a hint of lilac, with fresh acidity). The lots are picked and fermented separately, usually because they ripen at different times, and each cask is terrific; tasted in a sitting, it's an unforgettable lesson in terroir. Blended together, the wine becomes incredible - polished, sleek yet completely authentic.



Region:	Rhône – North	Website:	N/A
Size:	~10ha	Viticulture:	Organic

The wines

2010 St.-Joseph Rouge

The 2010 is a bit of a relief for classicists after a run of either very ripe (e.g. 2009) or rain-soaked vintages (e.g. 2008). There is so much potential that it's a shame to drink this now, but even young it's a magical wine. The aromatic notes are delicately, evenly folded on themselves like a *millefeuille*, and the palate and texture resemble a perfect marmalade, where the fruit purity is enhanced by just the right amount of bitterness, and the smooth jelly is perfectly counterpoised against the bite of the peel.

A note: quantities of this wine are extremely limited, and we are loath to break up cases, so this wine will only be sold in 6-bottle lots. We also have a few magnums available for sale.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-RHO-02-001-10	2010 St. Joseph Rouge	Drink it with offal when young, and game birds with more age

SAVOIE

The vineyards of Savoie run north-south along the Rhône as it flows from Lake Geneva, before parting ways at Lake Bourget - the river westwards as it follows its glacial ancestor's path, and the vineyards towards the southeast as they cling to the southern ridges of the Massif Bauges. The soils evolve continually, from gravel and molasse north and east of Lake Bourget (scooped out and deposited over time), through the Kimmeridgian chalk screes on the Mont du Chat, to the cappucino swirls of marl and dark limestone of the Cluse de Chambéry.

The native white grapes are Jacquere, Roussanne and Altesse (sometimes locally referred to as Roussette). Jacquere produces delicately perfumed and poised wines, to be enjoyed in any season - in winter, with raclette next to the fire, in summer, outdoors on a terrace with simply cooked fish. Roussanne, for us, reaches its greatest heights in Chignin, where the exotic fruit and generous texture are exquisitely supported by Alpine acidity. In the right hands, Altesse is a noble wine, to be enjoyed after at least a decade of aging. Similarly, the local red grape Mondeuse requires considerable cellar time to come round, and is just as majestic as its grandchild Syrah.

We are very privileged to be able to work with the fifth generation of Dupasquiers (David and Véro) to work the western slopes of the Lake Bourget, the magician of Mondeuse, Michel Grisard, and the wonderful couple of Gilles and Christine Berlioz in Chignin.

The Dupasquiers – Noël, David & Véronique

Buvabilité

The Dupasquier family have been farming the steep slopes of Jongieux for five generations, and Noël is now gradually stepping back from an active role to let his offspring, David and Véronique manage the domaine. Given that the name of their village is ‘Aimavigne’, it should not be surprising that all three of them speak fondly of the vineyards, which are in terrific shape. Nearly everything is done by hand and on foot; driving a tractor on the mountainside is difficult work, David claims. Cellar techniques are simple and largely traditional as the family don’t see a need to change what worked for their predecessors. Noël famously has the patience to let wines age in the cellar before release, preferring that they find their internal balance first.



Noël amongst his vines

Perched near the top of their holdings is an outstanding restaurant, Auberge Les Morainières, which has older vintages of Dupasquier’s ‘Marestel’ in their cellar, a useful (if expensive) fallback when one realises that it’s almost always sold out at the domaine. While that is the wine which has garnered the most plaudits, it’s the notion of ‘buvabilité’ (a French neologism meaning drinkability) which characterises their entire range of wines.



Region:	Savoie	Website:	FB: domaine.dupasquier
Size:	14ha	Viticulture:	Lutte raisonnée

The wines

2009/2010 Vin de Savoie Jacquère

Jacquère always puts us in the mood for raclette, a simple Alpine dish of gently heated cheese (usually the eponymous cow’s milk cheese), served with potatoes, charcuterie and pickles. Both grape and dish are part of the Savoyard landscape, and form a marriage of complements – the wine’s acid spine help refreshes the palate, and its fruitiness highlights the savoury nature of the cheese. In 2009, a warmer vintage, the wine is easy to drink on its own, but even better with some food. The 2010 is slimmer and better-suited as an aperitif.

2009 Vin de Savoie Roussette

The chalky slopes around Jongieux are well-suited to producing perfumed and powerful Roussette; the slopes ensure that the vines get plenty of sun, while the chalk manifests itself in the spine of the wine. Even in sumptuous vintages like 2009, where the fruit leans towards the exotic spectrum, the wine is perfectly balanced. It’s best with a short decant to let it unfurl a bit, and works with simple dishes; we’ve had very good success with lightly-dressed salads.

2009 Vin de Savoie Rosé (Gamay/Pinot Noir)

When we asked Noël why he kept the rosé in the cellar for an extra year, he smiled and asked us whether we thought it was better than one from the most recent vintage. We tasted both of them, and it is like comparing a newborn and a toddler; there’s the shock and joy of the new with the former, but a toddler is more distinct and in many ways more fun. So it is with the Dupasquier rosé – a bundle of floral, spicy fun, all the better after more than a year resting in the Savoie mountainside. If the 2008 is anything to go by, the 2009 will take on extra

complexity with some cellaring; for current drinking, it's best not to gulp it too quickly and let it evolve in the glass.

2009 Vin de Savoie Gamay

Jongieux is only about a hundred miles southeast of Beaujolais, but the intervening mountain range means that Gamay takes on a different personality without losing its essential character. Furthermore, the Dupasquiers eschew carbonic maceration in favour of a traditional alcoholic fermentation, believing that the fruit will emerge after bottling. The wine is supple without being too sleek, and with air all the elements start to come into focus: brambly fruit powder-coated with minerals, framed by a curve of acid which arcs up towards a sweet, clean finish.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-SAV-01-001-09	2009 Vin de Savoie Jacquère	Raclette, of course, and its close cousin fondue
FRA-SAV-01-001-10	2010 Vin de Savoie Jacquère	
FRA-SAV-01-007-09	2009 Vin de Savoie Roussette	Fish, of course, but rich enough for most white meats as well
FRA-SAV-01-003-09	2009 Vin de Savoie Rosé (Gamay/Pinot Noir)	Drink this outdoors, chilled, with a simple salad
FRA-SAV-01-004-09	2008 Vin de Savoie Gamay	Roast chicken, both European and Cantonese style

Michel Grisard, Prieuré St. Christophe

The magician of Mondeuse

The text from Virginie Joly (of Coulée de Serrant) read: “Go see Michel. You won’t regret it”. We obeyed, and did not regret it at all. Based in the village of Fréterive at the southern end of the Massif des Bauges (there’s some very fine cross-country skiing there), Michel works biodynamically with his Mondeuse and Altesse vines, convinced that both grapes can make some of the noblest wines in the world. He hails from a family well-known for their skill as vine nurserymen (the Savoie is home to many of France’s best and most important nurseries), but left the family business to pursue his dream three decades ago as a headstrong young man. He has not mellowed with age, at least where wine is concerned, and speaks proudly and fiercely of various other projects he is involved in.



Michel goes all out

Like many others, Michel was initially sceptical of biodynamics, but he decided to try it out on some plots starting in 1994, with mixed results. The following summer, still a sceptic, and with some vines succumbing to disease, he asked François Bouchet (perhaps the leading light of biodynamics) to help out. He was told that the earth was exhausted from non-stop monoculture, and a homeopathic spray was applied to the affected patch. The vines recovered quickly and were soon more verdant than their conventionally (i.e. with chemicals) cultivated neighbours. Since then, he’s been an ardent advocate of the methods, but more importantly, urging his fellow vigneron to pay more attention to their soil and agricultural practice.

We confess that the reasoning behind many of the practices strikes us as downright odd, but we cannot argue with the results, and especially not in this case. The vineyards are now in very good shape (although Michel says revitalising the land will take a long time), and the wines absolutely worth seeking out.



Region:	Savoie	Website:	NA
Size:	6ha	Viticulture:	Biodynamic

The wines

Mondeuse is genetically related to Syrah (most experts think it’s a grandparent of Syrah, and originally came from Italy over the Alps), and it can taste similar in its youth, albeit with slightly coarser tannins. With age, it puts on weight and drops some of the vibrant acidity, and develops great complexity. Michel prefers to age his Mondeuse for a few years before releasing them, when the wines are a bit less wild and easier to taste. Michel makes a few cuvees of Mondeuse - there’s always a Tradition, more linear and rustic, while the Prestige is riper, larger-framed and benefits from an extended élevage in oak barrels, mostly secondhand from Bordeaux châteaux.

In all, there’s only a tiny amount of wine, although Michel is now devoting himself full time to Prieuré St-Christophe again. Please contact us for what is available from him, as we typically have a few vintages of the Mondeuse and the most recent vintage of the Altesse in stock.

Gilles & Christine Berlioz

The wild ones

We were originally going to print the picture which adorned the New Year's card Gilles and Cathy sent us. It was a post-harvest photo of them and their pickers (as well as some itinerant help) completely naked except for some strategically placed vine leaves. Fortunately good sense (and taste) prevailed and instead we scoured our archives for this equally revealing (in a different way) photograph of Gilles and one of the horses he uses to work their patch of land in Chignin, one of the most serene, beautiful parts of the Savoie.



Gilles and his workhorse

Both Gilles and Christine are earnest but thoughtful proponents of biodynamic farming and winemaking, believing that great wines can only be made when the earth is not abused. Their wines are astonishingly pure and fresh, even though they largely bottle without any addition of sulfur, believing that their cellar methods have stabilised and prepared the wines sufficiently.



Region:	Savoie	Website:	www.domainegillesberlioz.com
Size:	4ha	Viticulture:	Biodynamic

The wines

Gilles and Christine make wines from four of the traditional varieties in the Savoie: Jacquère, high toned and ready to drink young, Altesse, rich and needing time, Roussanne, which thrives in and around Chignin, and Mondeuse, a wild mountain red. As their domaine is so small, we only get a few cases of each wine every year, but we make an effort to keep some older vintages back so that we can offer them for sale when they're sufficiently mature.

2010 Roussette de Savoie

Altesse is an incredibly difficult grape to get just right - often the ripe examples are very flat in the mouth, lacking acidity and verve, while versions made from green grapes are tart, aromatically neutral and uninteresting. In 2010, Gilles harvested early even though the potential alcohol was low, deeming it necessary to prevent the fruit flavours from becoming confected caricatures. It's tremendously pretty now, and we think it will keep well for at least five more years.

2009 Chignin Bergeron 'Les Filles'

From a very experimental plot within 'Les Chateaux', this wine refused to ferment dry, and was bottled with a bit of residual sugar. It's quite soft on the entry, but there's actually fairly stern acidity lurking beneath, and the wine is really starting to come into equilibrium now. We really enjoy it with a good cheese course, or an aromatic dish like scrambled eggs with fresh truffles.

2005 Chignin Bergeron

2005 was a warm year in the Savoie, and in the 'Les Chateaux' plot where this wine comes from, the grapes ripen evenly and quickly. It's at a good place in its evolution right now, with the honeyed apricot notes so typical of aged Roussanne, yet with enough acidity to carry the flavour through to the finish.

2007 Chignin Bergeron

The 2007 is really coming into its own now - the floral notes have deepened, and there's the barest hint of yuzu on both the nose and palate. It's delightful on the palate, starting off tender, almost languid, before tightening up towards the finish. We had it with pork chops over lunch with Gilles and Christine, and have been consuming it avidly with similar dishes here.

Summary

SKU	Wine	Style & Pairings
FRA-SAV-03-001-10	2010 Roussette de Savoie	It's a remarkably aromatic yet light wine, perfect for a fish dish
FRA-SAV-03-002-09	2009 Chignin-Bergeron 'Les Filles'	Very rich and unctuous, best with cheeses
FRA-SAV-03-003-05	2005 Chignin-Bergeron	Its complexity is amplified when paired against simple dishes, like a plain pasta or a wild mushroom tart
FRA-SAV-03-003-07	2007 Chignin-Bergeron	Something substantial like braised pork shoulder or a vegetable stew

POSTFACE

“My author wants his preface to come at the end of the book. This just seems ridiculous to me. I mean, it’s not a post-face.”

- As quoted by C.F. Saller, *The Subversive Copy Editor*

Why drink wine?

Excessive consumption of alcohol is clearly deleterious to health, both by impairing vital functions (especially mental) and stressing key organs such as the liver. We are sceptical of the more outlandish claims for the health benefits of moderate alcohol consumption, and think it’s a mistake to drink wine for health reasons.

Fundamentally, wine is an alcoholic beverage, and we drink it to get drunk – just like food, which we eat to sate our hunger. For us, the journey (drinking, eating) is just as important as the destination (inebriation, satiation), and much more interesting. Thoughtful, measured drinking takes more time and requires attention, but we believe that the experience is enriched many times over. It is also only possible when wine is not just a chemical cocktail, but rather a reflection of the land, the vintage and the people.

So we only import and distribute wines which have something to say about the steepness of the slopes, the heat (or cold) of the vintage, and the decades, sometimes centuries, of painstaking work. There’s no magic formula for making such wines, and indeed there’s a large diversity of views across the growers we work with (sometimes within the same domaine!). But by working with each and every one of them personally and directly, we know that they are real people, growing and making what we like to call ‘honest wines’.

In vino veritas.