

# Loire Valley Wines



*Wines from the Heart of France*

## ***Loire Valley Wine Bureau***

### ***Press Kit*** ***2009***

## The Loire Valley Wine Bureau Press Kit

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## THE LOIRE VALLEY

### THE HEART OF FRANCE

The Loire is the longest river in France, the last wild river in Europe, and much of the surrounding Loire Valley has been designated a World Heritage area by UNESCO. For much of their 630-miles, the banks of the Loire are vineyard country, and the Loire's total wine production makes up the third largest AOC (*appellation d'origine contrôlée*) viticultural area in France. The Loire Valley is

- The largest white wine region in France
- The second largest for sparkling wine
- The number leading region for wines ordered in restaurants in France.

The great length of the river – and the varied terrain, geology and climate through which it flows – make the Loire Valley the only region in France to produce excellent wines of every variety. Red, white or rosé, still or sparkling, dry or sweet, the Loire Valley wines are among the best of their kinds. However, they are not as well known as they deserve to be outside of France. The silty shallows, shifting channels and frequent floods to which the Loire is prone, make commercial navigation difficult and dangerous. Until relatively recently, the wines of the Loire were more easily carried up the Loire's many tributaries and overland to domestic markets, than shipped downstream for export.

### Definitive Wines

The Loire begins in central France and empties into the Atlantic Ocean in Brittany. The first area of more than local interest centers around *Sancerre* and *Pouilly Fumé* in the Centre Loire. Famous for their white wines, which set international standards for Sauvignon Blanc, these two appellations lie on opposite sides of the Loire river. *Sancerre* also produces fine red and rosé wines from Pinot Noir. Less famous, but equally worthy of notice are such Centre Loire wines as *Quincy*, *Menetou-Salon*, *Reuilly* and *Coteaux du Giennois*.

Downstream from *Sancerre*, the river, which has been flowing north, turns to the west and flows through the historic cities of Orléans, Blois, Tours and Angers. As it drops into these fertile plains and warmer climate, the styles of the wines change accordingly. Sauvignon Blanc shares the stage with Chenin Blanc, which achieves a quality in the Loire Valley unmatched anywhere else. In *Vouvray* alone it produces dry, off-dry, fully sweet and sparkling wines. *Anjou Blanc*, *Saumur Blanc*, *Savennières*, *Bonnezeaux*, *Quarts de Chaume* and *Coteaux du Layon* are every bit as fine. Here, red wines are dominated by Cabernet Franc, a grape that is used mainly for blending elsewhere but which attains a quality in the Loire Valley that allows it to stand on its own in such wines as *Chinon*, *Bourgueil*, *St Nicolas de Bourgueil*, *Saumur Rouge* and *Saumur-Champigny*.

As the Loire approaches the Atlantic Ocean, two other grapes unique to the region make wines with a distinctly maritime flavor. Muscadet (more correctly Melon de Bourgogne) and Gros Plant produce wines with the tang of the sea that are the traditional accompaniment to oysters and shellfish.

Despite all their variety, Loire Valley wines share certain characteristics. The mild climate of the Loire insures that the wines, no matter how ripe, will always have a refreshing acidity that balances well with their fruit and alcohol. Although many Loire Valley wines age

magnificently, most can be appreciated in youth. They are best appreciated with food, and they possess enough flavor and body to stand up to almost all styles of cooking, complementing the meal rather than dominating it. These are not wines to be collected and displayed; they are wines to be enjoyed.

## A BIT OF HISTORY

Much of French history has taken place along the Loire, which runs through the geographical and cultural heart of France. It was at the Loire that the Saracen invasion of Europe was turned back (in 732) and that the idea of modern France was born, in 1429 (at Chinon), when Joan of Arc prevailed upon the Dauphin (later Charles VII) to take arms against the English and drive them out of Orléans.

At first the Loire divided more than it united. It separated the Duchy of Aquitaine from the Kingdom of France; it divided the Latin culture of the Mediterranean and the Frankish culture of Northern Europe that have combined to create what we think of as Frenchness, and the ancient languages of the *Langue d'Oc* and the *Langue d'Oïl* from which modern French is descended.

Wine played a part in the region's history from the start. Wine had been among the most valuable commodities since the time of the Roman occupation of Gaul, and wars were fought over control of the wine trade and production. The Loire Valley, as one of the northernmost vineyard areas in Europe, and *the* northernmost with easy access to the sea, was of vital importance in supplying wine to England and the Netherlands. The hundred years war (1337-1453) between England and France was in part a war over control of vineyards.

As France became a unified nation, many of the fortresses that guarded the Loire were razed and their stones used to build pleasure palaces, the magnificent châteaux that now make the Loire Valley the third most popular tourist destination in France. A gentle climate, rich farmland and excellent vineyards made this, the "garden of France," the preferred residence of French Kings and their courts. Despite the wars of religion and other upheavals that characterized French history in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the concentration of wealth and power in the region spurred the growth of local industries and made the Loire Valley, for a time, one of the most prosperous areas in the land.

The great age of the Loire as a pleasure garden and economic center provided an affluent local market for Loire Valley wines. However, as the court moved to Paris and then to Versailles (in the mid-17th Century), and when Louis XIV forced the aristocracy to take up residence there, the Loire Valley suffered. Centuries of farming on the riverbanks and of quarrying *tuffeau* limestone to build splendid cathedrals, *châteaux* for aristocrats, lowly cave dwellings for peasants, as well as other earthworks, had aggravated an age-old erosion problem. Silt made an already treacherous river all but un-navigable. The overseas wine trade and other industries had moved to more easily accessible ports and frequent wars did little to help the export trade. Dutch traders in Nantes were still a ready market for Loire Valley wines that they could ship back to Holland to distill into brandy, but when France and Holland went to war for forty years (starting in 1672) much of the Loire's wine was taken by

barge through the recently constructed Canal de Briare (linking the Loire and Seine), and from there to other parts of France too far north to produce their own wine. Thus, although Loire Valley wines soon became popular in Paris, they were largely forgotten outside of France, and the ability to produce wine in bulk – for cafés in the rapidly growing cities – often took precedence over producing fine wines for the world market.

Although exports to Holland did resume, the French Revolution of 1789, the wars of the Vendée, and the Napoleonic wars of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century all contributed to a further decline in the wine trade in the Loire Valley. The *phylloxera* epidemic of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, which devastated almost all the vineyards of Europe, made matters worse and for a time the wines of the Loire, with a few exceptions, were rarely seen in fine shops or restaurants. But there may have been an advantage to a period of relative obscurity. Rather than adapt to the tastes of export markets and international fashions, the Loire Valley has kept its own style. In the 1930s, with the introduction of *Appellation Contrôlée* legislation, the winemakers of the Loire Valley began, once more, to realize the potential excellence and unique character of their wines. Since then, the wines of the Loire Valley have only grown in popularity. Between 1995 and 2005, imports to the USA grew by 272%, from 16,255 hectoliters to 45,000 hectoliters. Whether white, red, rosé, dry, sweet, still or sparkling, Loire Valley wines are fresh, elegant and clean tasting. Whether enjoyed as part of a meal or on their own, Loire Valley wines are part of the “*art de vivre*” that the French made famous. They are made for the dinner table, and may be some of the most French of French wines.

## Loire Valley Appellations

The Loire Valley produces high quality wines in all styles. All of the wines, whatever their color or style, share the characteristics that make Loire Valley wines unique: freshness, finesse and food friendliness.

### **WHITE WINES**

The white wines of the Loire Valley are perfect wines for spring and summer. Their fruity aromas and refreshing acidity make them ideal for warm weather, when bigger, oaky wines may not satisfy thirst as well. These wines include:

*Anjou Blanc*  
*Cherverny*  
*Chinon Blanc*  
*Coteaux du Giennois*  
*Cour Cheverny*  
*Jasnières*  
*Menetou-Salon*  
*Montlouis sur Loire*  
*Muscadet Sur Lie*  
*Pouilly Fumé*  
*Pouilly Sur Loire*  
*Quincy*  
*Reuilly*  
*Sancerre*  
*Saumur Blanc*  
*Savennières*  
*Touraine Blanc*  
*Touraine Amboise*  
*Touraine-Azay le Rideau*  
*Touraine Mesland*  
*Vouvray*

### **ROSE WINES**

The rosés of the Loire Valley are perfect wines for summer. They are refreshing, full of flavor and complement picnics and barbecues.

*Bourgueil*  
*Cabernet d'Anjou*  
*Cabernet de Saumur*  
*Chinon*  
*Rosé d'Anjou*  
*Rosé de Loire*  
*Sancerre*  
*St-Nicolas de Bourgueil*  
*Touraine*  
*Touraine-Amboise*  
*Touraine-Azay le Rideau*  
*Touraine-Mesland*  
*Touraine-Noble Joué*

**RED WINES**

The red wines of the Loire Valley can be light or full-bodied, but they are never overpowering. The lighter ones (some *Chinon*, *St Nicolas de Bourgueil*, etc) can be served slightly chilled at a summer barbecue, and the more full-bodied ones (*Chinon* from hillside vineyards, *Saumur Champigny*, *Anjou-Villages* and *Anjou-Villages Brissac*, etc.) are excellent wines for autumn or as a slightly lighter alternative to more traditional winter wines. These wines include:

***Anjou Rouge***  
***Anjou-Villages***  
***Anjou-Villages Brissac***  
***Bourgueil***  
***Châteaumeillant***  
***Chinon***  
***Coteaux du Giennois***  
***Coteaux du Loir***  
***Menetou Salon***  
***Reully***  
***St Nicolas de Bourgueil***  
***Saumur-Champigny***  
***Sancerre Rouge***  
***Saumur Rouge***  
***Touraine Rouge***  
***Touraine-Amboise***  
***Touraine-Mesland***

**FINES BULLES®**

Sparkling wines of the Loire Valley, or *Fines Bulles* (fine bubbles) are perfect for the winter holidays, but can be enjoyed for any reason at any time of the year. These wines include:

***Anjou Mousseux***  
***Crémant de Loire***  
***Montlouis sur Loire***  
***Saumur Brut***  
***Touraine Mousseux***  
***Vouvray***

## **SWEET WINES**

The Loire Valley produces some of the best dessert wines in the world. Some are *Moelleux* (moderately sweet) and others *Liquoreux* (very sweet), but all are made from Chenin Blanc. They can be enjoyed as an aperitif at the beginning of a great meal or as the final glass of wine. They also complement *foie gras* preparations, blue cheeses and some desserts.

**Anjou-Coteaux de la Loire**  
**Bonnezeaux**  
**Coteaux de l'Aubance**  
**Coteaux de Saumur**  
**Coteaux du Layon**  
**Coteaux du Layon Chaume**  
**Coteaux du Layon Villages**  
**Montlouis sur Loire**  
**Quarts de Chaume**  
**Vouvray**

## **MAJOR GRAPE VARIETIES OF THE LOIRE VALLEY**

There is no single predominant grape variety in the Loire Valley. Fine wines are made from a large number of varieties, some well known and some particular to the region. This is in part tradition and in part because within such a large area, there are numerous soil types and micro-climates where certain grapes are more successful than others. However, within the variety, all Loire Valley grapes have certain qualities in common. All of them can ripen fully in the relatively short growing season of the Loire Valley. The mild climate also insures relatively high acidity, which gives the wines, no matter how ripe, a refreshing leanness. Thus certain grapes (the Cabernet Franc and the Chenin Blanc, for example) that may not always make first-rate wines in a warmer climate, show their best qualities in the Loire Valley.

**Cabernet Franc**, the most important red grape of the Anjou-Saumur and Touraine region, is a close relative of Cabernet Sauvignon. It ripens earlier than its more famous cousin, making it better suited to the cooler climate of the Loire. It probably originated in Bordeaux, where it is mainly used for blending, but it is so well suited to conditions in the Loire Valley that it stands alone in such famous wines as *Chinon*, *Bourgueil* and *Saumur-Champigny*.

Cabernet Franc, also called Breton locally, came to the region no later than the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It was praised by Rabelais, the great epicurean writer who was born near Chinon, and Cardinal Richelieu selected it for exclusive planting at St. Nicolas de Bourgueil, where it has been grown ever since. It is only in recent years, however, that its particular affinity for the climate of the Loire Valley has been widely recognized and planting has increased markedly as a result. The success of Cabernet Franc in the Loire Valley has sparked interest elsewhere, and winemakers in cooler climates in the New World (notably in New York State) have planted the grape with very good results. However, as with Chenin Blanc and Sauvignon Blanc, international standards for Cabernet Franc are set in the Loire Valley.

Cabernet Franc can make lighter bodied, less tannic wines than many other red grapes and they are generally ready to drink soon after bottling. However, a reputation for refreshing, youthful wines should not obscure the fact that there are full bodied wines made from Cabernet Franc that are capable of aging magnificently over many years. In its youth Cabernet Franc has the aroma of red raspberries and cherries, but it develops more complex notes as it ages. Fine old Cabernet Franc wines can, in the words of one Loire Valley winemaker, be reminiscent of the aromas of a forest after a rainstorm.

Young Cabernet Franc is an ideal red wine for summer. It is sufficiently fruity that it can be refreshing when served slightly chilled, yet it has enough structure to stand up to the flavors of a barbecue. Older, bigger wines are delicious with roasted meats and are probably the ideal accompaniment to the traditional roast leg of lamb with flageolet beans.

**Cabernet Sauvignon**, despite its international popularity, plays a secondary role in the Loire Valley. It is blended in quite a few red wines of the Loire to add weight, and used alone in some rosés as well.

**Chardonnay** is the most popular white wine grape in the world, but in the Loire Valley it is used as a blending grape. It adds structure and richness to sparkling wines and can be used in Saumur Blanc and Anjou Blanc, but it never makes up more than 20% of the blend.

**Chenin Blanc**, also called Pineau de la Loire, may have come to the Loire Valley more than a thousand years ago. It was firmly established by the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and was also praised by Rabelais. Although widely planted in the United States and in South Africa, it attains its highest and most characteristic expression only in a one hundred mile stretch of the Loire Valley between Blois and Savennières. Unlike any other grape except the Riesling, Chenin Blanc can be vinified in a range of styles from austere, mineral, and refreshing to rich, honeyed, and sweet, and its versatility surpasses Riesling in that it also makes excellent sparkling wine.

Chenin Blanc buds early and ripens late. This presents an element of risk in the Loire Valley, which is among the northernmost viticultural areas in France, but the grape compensates in many ways. In those years when the autumn is exceptionally warm, when there is no rain and when frost is late, Chenin Blanc is subject to *botrytis cinerea*. Also called “noble rot,” botrytis is the mold responsible for all great sweet wines, from Sauternes in Bordeaux to Germany’s Trockenbeerenauslese to Hungary’s Tokaji. Botrytis causes the grape skins to become permeable, allowing water in the grapes to evaporate, and causing the grapes to shrivel on the vine. The juice of these overripe grapes is highly concentrated and very sweet, but balanced with a refreshing acidity, the marks of a great dessert wine. The vineyards of *Quarts de Chaume*, *Bonnezeaux*, *Coteaux du Layon* and *Vouvray*, for example, can produce long-lived sweet wines that are the equal of any.

Sweet wines can only be produced in those exceptional vineyards where shelter from wind and exposure to the sun create very particular conditions, but in other vineyards Chenin Blanc produces dry wines of the first quality. The wines of *Savennières* and the dry wines of *Vouvray* possess all the rich pungency of their sweeter counterparts. Although some of these wines are occasionally aged in oak, the taste of wood is always restrained, leaving the character of the grape intact. This fruitiness, paired with the natural acidity of Chenin Blanc make these superb table wines.

Finally, Chenin Blanc is the primary grape for many of the *Fines Bulles* (or fine bubbles), the sparkling wines of the Loire Valley. Although other grapes may be added (according to the standards of the individual appellation) Chenin Blanc is almost always dominant in these delightful wines.

**Côt** is the local name for Malbec, another red grape that makes excellent red wines in other areas, but which is used primarily for blending in the Loire Valley.

**Gamay** is used primarily to make rosé wines in Anjou and Saumur. It can also be used in the blended red wines of those areas. Touraine Gamay is red wine made entirely from Gamay. It can be made in a light, fruity style for consumption *en primeur* (with no aging at all) or in a fuller style for longer keeping.

**Grolleau** (or **Groslot**) is a red grape grown only in the Loire Valley. It is highly acidic and is used mainly for blending, especially in sparkling wines and rosé. In rare cases it is used by itself.

**Melon de Bourgogne** is better known as **Muscadet**, the name of the wine that it produces. This is the dominant grape of the area around Nantes on the coast of Brittany, where the Loire meets the Atlantic Ocean. Muscadet has such a bracing sea tang, and such an affinity for the shellfish of the Breton coast – especially the superlative Belon oysters of the region – that it may come as a surprise that the Melon de Bourgogne is a relatively recent arrival, and its dominance in the region was the result of one terrible winter.

The Melon has a long history but not all in one place. As the name would imply, the variety originated in Burgundy but was removed from the vineyards there in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, as other varieties proved more successful in that climate. However the ability of the vines to withstand frost made it attractive to winemakers in Anjou, where it was also eventually edged out by other varieties. At the same time it caught the attention of Dutch distillers further downstream, who needed large quantities of wine with which to make brandy. The Dutch started planting Melon in vineyards near Nantes, the most convenient port from which to ship the wine to Holland, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. At the time the area was planted primarily with red grapes but when the worst winter in recorded history devastated the vineyards in 1709, causing barrels to burst in the cellars and even freezing the coastal waters, the Melon was one of two varieties to survive and it has dominated the region ever since.

Although it was originally a rather neutral wine, Muscadet producers have refined their techniques in order to make wines with their own distinctive attributes. In particular, the wine can be designated as *Muscadet Sur Lie*, indicating that it has been left on the lees for the winter between fermentation in autumn and bottling in spring. This allows the wine to develop a fuller flavor and a slight carbonation that gives the wine additional freshness. For the most part, these wines are best drunk young, but in exceptional vintages certain *Muscadet Sur Lie* can be kept for several years and, in rare cases, decades.

To an even greater degree than the Sauvignon Blanc and the Chenin Blanc, the Melon de Bourgogne, despite its name, is a grape that achieves its best expression in the Loire. It is rarely planted elsewhere. As Muscadet, however, it produces one of the friendliest, most refreshing wines in the world.

**Menu Pineau** is a red grape particular to the Loire Valley. Once widely planted, it is now used only for blending.

**Pineau d'Aunis**, like the Grolleau and the Menu Pineau, this grape is grown only in the Loire Valley and often used in blends in Touraine. It can also be used by itself to make light bodied red *Coteaux du Loir*.

**Pinot Gris** is grown in the Centre Loire where, unlike its uses in most other parts of the world, it makes rosé wines.

**Pinot Noir** is the red grape of the Centre Loire, most famous in red Sancerre but also in Menetou-Salon and Châteaumeillant. These tend to be lighter wines that one often associates with this grape.

**Romorantin** – Unique to the Loire, this little known white grape is used in the refreshing, fragrant white wines made in and around Cheverny. The appellation Cour-Cheverny was created as a designation for wines made completely from Romorantin.

**Sauvignon Blanc** probably originated in Bordeaux, but it is in the limestone soil of the Centre Loire, that it shows its best, most characteristic qualities. Although widely planted the world over, and highly successful in such widely different climates as California, New Zealand and Chile, all Sauvignon Blanc aspires to standards set in the Centre Loire. The climate here is too cold for later-ripening grapes (such as the Chenin Blanc) but Sauvignon Blanc buds late and ripens early, making it ideal for a region prone to severe frosts and harsh winds. Sauvignon Blanc is rarely blended with other grapes in the Loire Valley and it is responsible for the distinctive characters of Sancerre, Pouilly Fumé, Reuilly, Menetou-Salon, Quincy and Touraine Blanc.

Sauvignon Blanc is almost always dry, yet there is diversity within the refreshing, fruity and almost tart style that predominates these wines, and there are few more vivid demonstrations of the ways in which different soils can determine the character of wines made from the same grape, than to taste the great wines of the Centre Loire side by side.

Much Sauvignon Blanc is made for early drinking. With their distinctive aroma, which reminds some people of gooseberries and other of grapefruit and their fresh, lively acidity, these are ideal wines to drink with the famous goat cheeses of the Loire Valley (the famous *Crottin de Chavignol* comes from the same village as some of the best Sancerre), with cold shrimp or lobster, or with a summer picnic. Nonetheless, the high acidity of Sauvignon Blanc means that the wines can be kept, and a few producers have experimented with aging exceptionally ripe vintages in oak. These wines are richer and take longer to show their best qualities. With time, however, they develop a remarkably fragrant complexity that makes them seem almost sweet, better paired with aged cheeses, and even with foie gras, rather than with shellfish.

## THE WINES OF THE LOIRE VALLEY WITH FOOD

Unlike Provence with its olives and herbs, Normandy with its apples and cream, or Alsace with its *choucroute* and Munster, the Loire Valley, the “garden of France” is not associated with particular dishes or flavors but with the superb quality of its produce. This is the homeland of classic, simple, French home cooking and the wines of the Loire Valley are table wines *par excellence*. The huge variety of styles means that there is hardly a dish for which there is not an appropriate Loire Valley wine. And the qualities that all these wines have in common – a lean and refreshing acidity, lively fruit, elegance and finesse – make them wines that compliment great food rather than competing with it. Nevertheless, certain combinations recommend themselves.

It may be a cliché to pair *Muscadet Sur Lie* with oysters, but, like all clichés, it is based on good sense. The fresh, straightforward and tangy wine matches the briny freshness of raw shellfish like no other. It is also superb with (and in) mussels *à la marinière* and it may have been used in the original *beurre blanc*, a white butter sauce from *Muscadet’s* native Pays Nantais.

Further inland, Chenin Blanc makes richer, more complex white wines. Dry Vouvray can be richly fruity or complex with mineral aromas, but either pairs beautifully with the slight sweetness of scallops and lobster. Intense, pungent *Savennières*, is excellent with a wide range of fresh and smoked fish, as well as with white meats such as veal or sweatbreads. As it ages it becomes more delicate: a superb apéritif.

The great sweet wines of the Loire Valley (all made from Chenin Blanc) are traditionally drunk alone, as an apéritif or after a meal, but they are marvelous with foie gras, with blue cheeses and with Tarte Tatin, the famous caramelized apple tart that was created in the Loire Valley. They also complement almost any dessert that does not contain chocolate, and are especially successful with those made with pears and almonds.

Cabernet Franc red wines (*Chinon, Bourgueil, St Nicolas de Bourgueil, Saumur Rouge, Saumur Champigny and Anjou Rouge*) are wonderfully versatile. They flatter any grilled or roasted meat, and there seems to be evidence that, despite the claims of the people of Chambertin, *coq au vin* originally may have been made with these wines. The richer wines are especially well suited to roast leg of lamb, and the lighter ones, slightly chilled, are ideal wines for a summer barbecue or for salty preparations, like ham, which require a refreshing wine.

The appellations of *Anjou, Saumur* and *Touraine* produce a wide variety of wines for everyday drinking. Whether red white or rosé, there are few better wines to buy in quantity and to keep on hand for whenever one wants a bottle of good, easy wine for a simple dinner at home. *Saumur* may have a particular affinity for mushrooms, as the limestone caves in the area around Saumur also produce more than 40% of France’s cultivated *champignons de Paris*.

The fragrant Sauvignon Blanc wines of *Touraine*, *Sancerre*, *Quincy*, *Reuilly* and *Menetou-Salon* are natural partners for the goat cheeses for which the region is famous. These versatile wines are also excellent partners for shellfish (*Sancerre* gives *Muscadet* some competition as a wine to drink with oysters) and seafood in general. The Centre Loire is also where the best lentils in France (*lentilles vertes du Berry*) are grown and grilled salmon with lentils could be paired equally well with white or red from the region.

Finally, the *Fines Bulles* (fine bubbles), as the Loire Valley's excellent sparkling wines are called, are an excellent way to begin any meal. They pair well with hors d'oeuvre of all sorts, but because of their fruit-acid balance, they go better with a meal than most other sparkling wines. The brut wines are especially good with a late supper of cold roasted meats and the off-dry wines are ideal at brunch or with a dish of fresh strawberries.

### WINE MAKING IN THE LOIRE VALLEY

Wine making in the Loire Valley is not markedly different than in any other part of the world, but it is carried out with the specific attributes of the region in mind. The Loire is one of the France's northernmost viticultural areas. The absence of extreme heat means that even when fully ripe (or over ripe, in the case of sweet wines), the grapes will possess a greater acidity than grapes grown in warmer climates. Grapes grown in the Loire Valley cannot be made into the big, aggressively fruity wines that presently dominate the international market. They can, however, make supple, elegant and refreshing wines with great finesse, that complement a wide range of foods. Whether red, white, rosé, dry, sweet, still or sparkling, Loire Valley wines are vinified in a manner that will emphasize and balance their lively fruit and refreshing acidity.

**White grapes** are pressed as soon as they are harvested, using pneumatic presses that apply gentle pressure to emphasize fruit flavors and to avoid extracting vegetal elements. Controlled temperature, one of the most important technological advances of the last quarter century, allows for a long fermentation, which produces wines with intense aroma and maximum fruit. After fermentation, the wines are racked off of their sediment. Some wines (most famously *Muscadet Sur Lie*) may be left on the lees over the winter to impart a fuller flavor and a liveliness that results from small amounts of residual carbon dioxide left in the wine. The lighter wines are bottled in spring, but more complex wines may be left to mature for a year before bottling.

**Sweet white wines** from Chenin Blanc affected with *botrytis cinerea* or withered by *passerillage* – a combination of sun and wind that causes dehydration of the grapes and concentration of flavors -- must be made with extreme care, as both *botrytis* and *passerillage* compromise the integrity of the skins. Once pressed, the must is fermented very slowly at low temperatures in order to retain the intensity of the fruit aromas. Although a few producers age some of their sweet wines in wood (the slight oxidation that results adds to the complexity of the wine), very little new oak is used. For the most part, the sweet wines are bottled soon after fermentation to preserve the freshness of the fruit. The wines mature slowly in the bottle. Their high acidity balances their sweetness and insures that they will last indefinitely.

For **red wines**, the grapes are partially or fully de-stemmed, depending on the winemaker. The grapes are crushed and placed in maceration tanks where the clear juice takes on color from the grape skins. Full extraction requires a temperature of 25°-30°C (77°-86° F) and the wine at the bottom of the tank must be circulated over the “cap” of skins and stems that forms at the top to obtain homogeneity. This process used to be achieved by treading (*pigeage*), which warmed the must as well as circulating it. Mechanized *pigeage*, used in almost all cellars, is a less picturesque procedure but cleaner and more efficient. The longer the maceration, the more intense the color and flavor of the wine. When this phase is complete, the wine is removed and the cap is pressed. Free-run and pressed wine are then blended for balance (the pressed wine is more tannic). Alcoholic fermentation continues in tanks or barrels, at cooler temperatures, after which some wines will undergo a second, malolactic fermentation in which harsh malic acid is converted to mellower lactic acid. Once this is completed, the wine is racked off the lees and stabilized with sulphites. The wine will be racked several more times to clarify it before bottling. As with the white wines, lighter wines will be bottled the following spring but more complex wines will spend a year in small oak casks.

There are two methods for making **rosé**. In the first of these, the grapes are pressed upon harvesting, as for white wine, but the must will be left in contact with the skins just long enough to take on a faint color. In the second method, the grapes are crushed and allowed to macerate before pressing, as they would be for a red wine, but for a shorter time. The latter process results in fuller bodied wines with deeper color. Once the desired color is obtained, fermentation, maturation and bottling proceed as for white wines.

Although the grapes used may vary among appellations, **fines bulles** in the Loire are made according to the *Méthode Traditionnelle* (developed in Champagne), in which a white wine, which may contain the juice of red grapes, is subjected to two fermentations. After the initial alcoholic fermentation is complete, the wine is left on the lees over the winter to acquire greater character. It is bottled the following spring with a dose of unfermented grape juice, which stimulates a second fermentation in the bottle, creating the *fines bulles* (fine bubbles) for which the wines are famous. Although official regulations stipulate that these wines can be marketed after nine to twelve months in the bottle (depending on the appellation), most producers will age their sparkling wines for two or three years prior to release.

## THE US MARKET FOR LOIRE VALLEY WINES

Although it is the third largest AOC (*appellation d'origine contrôlée*) region in France in terms of volume -- after Bordeaux and the Rhone Valley -- the wines of the Loire Valley have traditionally been under represented on the United States market. There are several possible reasons for this. One is that although certain Loire wines are well known (*Sancerre*, *Vouvray* and *Muscadet*), there is little awareness that these wines are from the same region. Unlike certain other regions of France, the Loire does not produce a generic wine that simply bears the name "Loire" on the label, nor is there a standard, easily recognizable bottle. It is also possible that other regions with longer traditions of exporting their wines (Bordeaux was built on exports to England, and Burgundy has a tradition of exports to Belgium) have had longer to make their products known outside of France, while the greater part of Loire wines have been consumed domestically.

However, all of that has been changing in recent years. Between 1995 and 2005, imports to the USA grew by 272%, from 16,255 hectoliters to 45,000 hectoliters. And in the difficult years of 2003 (which saw a decline in the value of the dollar in addition to international tensions and an unusually hot summer) and 2004 (in which the dollar fell to even lower levels), imports of Loire wine remained constant, unlike many other regions. Imports continue to grow every year to reach an all time high of 56,959 hectoliters (632,878 cases of 9 liters) in 2007, still and sparkling wines combined.

Predictably perhaps, the crisp, refreshing white wines of the Loire Valley represent the bulk of imports to the United States. Sancerre (white) is the leader, with 15,950 hectoliters imported in 2007. Vouvray (still and sparkling) follows, with 14,710 hectoliters, and Muscadet is third, with 5,974 hectoliters.

Although the red wines are not yet as well known, they too are becoming more widely available as wine lovers in the USA are starting to discover wines made from Cabernet Franc.

In general, the wines of the Loire Valley are making inroads for several reasons:

- The wines of the Loire Valley define international standards for wines made from Sauvignon Blanc (the white wines of the Centre Loire), Chenin Blanc (Vouvray, Savennières) and Cabernet Franc (Bourgueil, Chinon), all of which are planted in the New World and which are gaining in popularity. The wines of the Loire Valley represent high quality in a great variety of styles, with a wine for every occasion from picnics to elegant dinner parties, and for every time of the year.
- The wines of the Loire Valley sell for less than comparable wines from other regions of France or from many countries in the New World, including the USA.
- Loire Valley wines, because of their refreshing acidity and the absence of oak, are among the most versatile and food-friendly wines in the world.
- As American taste turns away from heavily oaked Chardonnay, the wines of the Loire Valley represent a lighter, more food-friendly approach to wine.

## THE LOIRE VALLEY WINE BUREAU

The Loire Valley is France's third largest *appellation contrôlée* wine-producing region, its second largest producer of sparkling wines and its most popular region for wines ordered in restaurants in France. The Loire Valley Wine Bureau was created in 2002 by the three interprofessional wine boards of the Loire Valley – the *Conseil Interprofessionnel des Vins de Nantes* (CIVN), *Interloire* (representing Anjou, Saumur and Touraine) and the *Bureau Interprofessionnel des Vins du Centre* (BIVC) – to promote the region as a whole and to increase awareness in the United States of the Loire Valley as a viticultural area.

The Loire Valley Wine Bureau is managed by Teuwen One Image, a New York based public relations firm that specializes in food, beverages and travel. Its mission is to promote the wines of the Loire Valley to media, trade and consumers by means of tastings, media events and other promotions that showcase the variety and unique qualities of the wines.

The Loire Valley Wine Bureau organizes the following events to promote the wines:

- The “Loire Valley Road Show” is the only major wine event in the USA devoted exclusively to the wines of the Loire. In past years the Road Show has been presented in New York City, Boston, Washington DC, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle, with a similar, but smaller event in Miami. In 2008, the Road Shows are taking place in Boston, New York and Chicago.
- Press trips to the Loire Valley
- Media dinners to promote the wines in traditional and innovative pairings
- Consumer events
- Educational seminars

For more information on the Loire Valley Wine Bureau, please contact:

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**FACTS ABOUT THE LOIRE VALLEY AND ITS WINES**

THE RIVER:	The longest river in France, 630 miles The last wild river in Europe Designated (in part) a World Heritage Site by UNESCO
HISTORY:	Ancient boundary between north and south Chinon was where Joan of Arc met the Dauphin The Loire Valley is where many of France's finest Châteaux are located
CULTURE:	The Loire Valley is known as the "Garden of France" The most popular tourist destination in France after Paris Famous cities include Orléans, Tours, Bourges, Angers, Saumur and Nantes
THE WINES:	The Loire Valley produces fine wines in all styles: White, red, rosés, sparkling, still, dry and sweet The most famous names include, Sancerre, Vouvray, Muscadet and Chinon
ANNUAL AOC PRODUCTION:	3 million hectoliters, 79,260,000 gallons
AREA UNDER VINES for AOC WINES:	50,433 hectares (124,618 acres)
THE GRAPES (Major Varieties)	Melon de Bourgogne ( <i>Pays Nantais</i> ) Chenin Blanc ( <i>Anjou-Saumur - Touraine</i> ) Sauvignon Blanc ( <i>Touraine and Centre</i> ) Cabernet Franc ( <i>Anjou-Saumur - Touraine</i> ) Pinot Noir ( <i>Touraine and Centre</i> )
WHY LOIRE?	Fresh White Wines Elegant Red Wines Fine Bubbles Variety, Freshness, Finesse Affordable and accessible Wines for every occasion Wines for all seasons Food-friendly wines Great wine, no attitude Wines from the heart of France
CONTACT:	Members of the trade and the media are invited to contact: The Loire Valley Wine Bureau c/o Benson Marketing Group 230 Park Avenue, 10 <sup>th</sup> floor Telephone: 212-808 6549, Fax: 212-504-2725 Email: <a href="mailto:info@loirevalleywine.com">info@loirevalleywine.com</a> <a href="http://www.loirevalleywine.com">www.loirevalleywine.com</a> <b>Other useful links:</b> <a href="http://www.vinsvaldeloire.com">www.vinsvaldeloire.com</a> (Pays-Nantais-Anjou-Saumur-Touraine region) <a href="http://www.vins-centre-loire.com">www.vins-centre-loire.com</a> and <a href="http://www.maison-des-sancerre.com">www.maison-des-sancerre.com</a> (Centre-Loire region)

## THE WINES OF NANTES

The Pays Nantais has been producing wine since the Roman era. After the fall of Rome, the fortunes of the vineyards fluctuated as waves of barbarian invasions swept over the region, but isolated monasteries continued to grow vines and took advantage of numerous routes of communication to develop overseas commerce. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the local wine trade was dominated by Dutch distillers, for whom Nantes was a convenient port from which to ship the wine that they used to make brandy. It was the Dutch who first planted a few vines of the Melon de Bourgogne, which today makes **Muscadet Sur Lie**, one of the most popular wines in the world.

Although it is the only *appellation contrôlée* of the Pays Nantais, and by far its best-known wine, Muscadet Sur Lie is not the only wine of the region. **Gros Plant** du Pays Nantais also produces crisp tangy white wines. **Fiefs Vendéens** and **Coteaux d'Ancenis** produce red and white wines but are little known outside of their home.

## MUSCADET

*Muscadet* is the best-known wine of the region around Nantes and one of France's most popular wines both at home and abroad. *Muscadet* is made from *Melon de Bourgogne* grape, which was brought to the Loire centuries ago from Burgundy. Not well suited to the *terroir* of Burgundy, *Melon* flourished in the Pays Nantais, as was demonstrated in the winter of 1709, when frigid temperatures ravaged the countryside, exploding barrels, and even freezing the Atlantic Ocean along the coast. Most vineyards were destroyed, but the *Melon* survived, producing wines that perfectly reflect their maritime environment, and which make a natural partner for the superlative Belon oysters of Brittany.

*Muscadet* accounts for 700,000 hectoliters annually (from 200,000 wineries, each averaging 30 acres), making it the largest white wine appellation in France. The vineyards are planted at low altitude and the ocean climate is characterized by large variations in precipitation, temperature and sunshine from one year to the next.

Muscadet appellations include *Muscadet AOC* and three regional appellations. *Muscadet* occupies 8,460 acres of vines, *Muscadet Sèvre et Maine* (located to the southeast of Nantes) stretches over 23 communes for a total of 21,646 acres and an annual production of 476,000 hectoliters. *Muscadet Coteaux de la Loire* covers 24 communes and 497 acres, producing 10,250 hectoliters annually, in the region of Ancenis on both sides of the Loire River. *Muscadet Côtes de Grandlieu* produces 15,400 hectoliters of wine annually on 726 acres. Since 1972, each winery must have its wines approved by an official tasting board before they can use these appellations.

In addition, *Muscadet* produced and matured in accordance with strict guidelines may be designated "*Muscadet Sur Lie*." Keeping the wine on the lees (*sur lie*) over the winter between fermentation and bottling allows the wine's aromas to develop. Carbonic gas produced by this process gives the wine a special liveliness on the palate, often referred to as the "pearls of youth." Producers must respect the regional *appellation* laws regarding pruning,

yield and maturity, as well as techniques of vinification. Approximately 300,000 hectoliters, or about 40% of total Muscadet production, is fermented *sur lie*.

*Muscadet Sur Lie* is crisp, dry and supple. Pale yellow in color with hints of green, it has aromas of fruits, often combined with mineral accents. A slight carbonation and good acidity also contribute to the wine's fresh, lively character. *Muscadet* is best enjoyed within three years of harvest, with exceptions for the great vintages, which can develop richness and complexity for a decade.

## ANJOU, SAUMUR AND TOURAINE

Between the Centre Loire (where Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir are dominant) and the Pays Nantais, (where Muscadet is supreme) lies the region of Anjou-Saumur and Touraine. Just as its name represents a composite, so its wines form a brilliant patchwork of styles, grapes and traditions. There are fifty-four *appellations contrôlées*, and even within these there are variations. A dozen grapes are used in this region – some alone, some blended – to make wines of every description. Not only does the region produce fine red, white and rosé table wines, but this is also where the region of the Loire's great sweet wines and where the *Fines Bulles* (fine bubbles), the Loire Valley's great sparkling wines, are made.

### Appellations Contrôlées of Anjou-Saumur-Touraine

White Wines	Rose Wines	Red Wines	Fines Bulles
<i>Anjou Blanc</i>	<i>Bourgueil</i>	<i>Anjou</i>	<i>Anjou Mousseux</i>
<i>Anjou Coteaux de la Loire</i>	<i>Cabernet d'Anjou</i>	<i>Anjou-Villages</i>	<i>Crémant de Loire</i>
<i>Bonnezeaux</i>	<i>Cabernet de Saumur</i>	<i>Anjou -Villages Brissac</i>	<i>Montlouis sur Loire</i>
<i>Cheverny</i>	<i>Cheverny</i>	<i>Anjou Gamay</i>	<i>Saumur Brut</i>
<i>Chinon</i>	<i>Chinon</i>	<i>Bourgueil</i>	<i>Touraine Mousseux</i>
<i>Coteaux de l'Aubance</i>	<i>Coteaux du Loir</i>	<i>Chinon</i>	<i>Vouvray</i>
<i>Coteaux du Loir</i>	<i>Rosé d'Anjou</i>	<i>Cheverny</i>	
<i>Coteaux du Layon</i>	<i>Rosé de Loire</i>	<i>Coteaux du Loir</i>	
<i>Coteaux du Layon Villages</i>	<i>Touraine</i>	<i>Saumur Rouge</i>	
<i>Coteaux de Saumur</i>	<i>Touraine Amboise</i>	<i>Saumur Champigny</i>	
<i>Cour-Cheverny</i>	<i>Touraine Azay-le Rideau</i>	<i>Touraine</i>	
<i>Jasnières</i>	<i>Touraine-Mesland</i>	<i>Touraine-Amboise</i>	
<i>Montlouis sur Loire</i>	<i>Touraine Noble Joué</i>	<i>Touraine-Mesland</i>	
<i>Quarts de Chaume</i>			
<i>Saumur Blanc</i>			
<i>Savennières</i>			
<i>Touraine</i>			
<i>Touraine Amboise</i>			
<i>Touraine Azay-le-Rideau</i>			
<i>Touraine Mesland</i>			
<i>Vouvray</i>			

## THE WINES OF ANJOU

The ancient Duchy of Anjou is one of the most historic areas in France. Throughout the middle ages, the dukes of Anjou rivaled the kings of France for wealth and power. The vineyards of Anjou cover a wide area south of the city of Angers. Most of the vineyards are on the left bank of the Loire, but there are a few on the right bank as well, most notably those of *Savennières*. Geologically, Anjou is where the *Massif Armoricaïne*, characterized by dark, schist subsoil, meets the pale, *tuffeau* limestone subsoil of the *Paris Basin*. The difference between wines made from the same grapes, but grown on the two different soils, can be impressive.

Anjou produces wines of all colors and styles, and there are smaller appellations within the general appellation of Anjou that are labeled under their own names. Two very popular types of rosé represent the best-known wines of Anjou, *Rosé d'Anjou* (144,472 hectoliters from 2,191 hectares) and *Cabernet d'Anjou* (167,304 hectoliters from 2,712 hectares). The first, very fruity and slightly off-dry, usually includes a high percentage of Gamay although other grapes, such as Grolleau can be used, alone or in combination. The latter, which is often fuller bodied and more deeply flavored, is made from Cabernet Franc and (or sometimes exclusively from) Cabernet Sauvignon.

Red wines outnumber whites and may be made from Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Côt (the local name for Malbec), Pineau d'Aunis, Gamay and Grollet . These may be used alone or (as is more often the case) blended, depending on local standards, but the best red Anjou is made entirely from Cabernet Franc. Anjou appellations include: *Anjou* (164,564 hectoliters of red and white wine from 3,001 acres of vineyards), *Anjou Coteaux de la Loire* (608 hectoliter of white wine from 24 hectares of Chenin Blanc), *Anjou Gamay* (16,383 hectoliters of red wine from 303 hectares of Gamay), *Anjou Mousseux* (4,000 hectoliters of sparkling wines from 61 hectares of vineyards), *Anjou-Villages* and *Anjou-Villages Brissac* (17,346 hectoliters of red wines from 355 hectares of Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon).

As with the red wines, white Anjou can be made from a number of grapes in a variety of combinations. Chenin Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc, and Chardonnay are all planted here but Chenin Blanc holds pride of place. Chardonnay, one of the most popular and versatile grapes in the world, rarely makes up more than 20% of any Loire blend.

It shows no disrespect to these wines to recommend most of them for everyday drinking and simple home cooking. As with most Loire wines, a bright acidity, the result of a mild climate, makes them refreshing wines that pair well with a wide range of foods. The reds may be served lightly chilled, and the whites and rosés are perfect for summer picnics.

Anjou is also home to most of celebrated sweet wines of the Loire Valley -- *Coteaux du Layon*, *Quarts de Chaume* and *Bonnezeaux* all of which are made completely from Chenin Blanc, as is *Savennières*, Anjou's most famous dry white. These wines are all very small productions and are highly prized by sophisticated palates.

## COTEAUX DU LAYON, BONNEZEAUX AND QUARTS DE CHAUME

At the western end of Anjou lie some of France's greatest vineyards for fine sweet wine: *Coteaux du Layon*, *Quarts de Chaume* and *Bonnezeaux*. As with Vouvray and Montlouis sur Loire, at the eastern end Touraine, the only grape allowed in these appellations is the Chenin Blanc. However, unlike Vouvray, which makes dry, off-dry and sparkling wines as well, these vineyards are devoted almost exclusively to sweet wine.

Although the soil varies among these appellations, and the wines express different characters, all are planted on mineral-rich schist, on steep slopes above the Layon river (technically, Coteaux du Layon is the general appellation that includes the other two), which provides thick morning mists that protect the vines from frost. The vineyards face south and southwest, allowing for maximum light and warmth in autumn. These last two factors are essential for the development of *botrytis cinerea*, a microorganism, also known as noble rot that, in years when all conditions are right, causes the grape skins to become permeable. On warm autumn afternoons, the morning mists burn off and water evaporates from the grapes, making the remaining juice intensely sweet and concentrated. Very few sites can provide the necessary conditions and in those that can, there is no guarantee that the weather will cooperate. An ill-timed rain can cause the grapes to rot on the vine, and a sudden frost can destroy the crop. In years when *botrytis* is present, harvest is postponed for maximum ripeness and sweetness. Often the pickers will go through the vineyards several times, individually selecting which grapes will be harvested that day and which will be left on the vine to ripen further. Quantities are always limited. Annual production of Coteaux du Layon is 49,017 hectoliters from 1,694 hectares (which includes some dry and semi dry wines as well), and that of Bonnezeaux is 1,964 hectoliters from 99 hectares. Quarts de Chaume produces a mere 575 hectoliters from 56 hectares of vineyards.

The over-ripe grapes are pressed with extreme care and the wines are fermented slowly, at cool temperatures, to maximize their fruit aromas. These wines are usually bottled as soon as fermentation is complete, but a few producers age some of their wines in wood for more than a year. In these rare cases little or no new oak is used, so that no extraneous flavors will be added to the wine, but the slight oxidation that occurs when the wine is left in barrels adds to the complexity of the finished product. In youth these wines are a light golden color and their aroma is richly floral. Many tasters say these wines suggest acacia, verbena and orange peel. As they age, the color deepens and the bouquet develops, suggesting ripe quince, apricot compote, caramel and exotic fruits as well as sweet spices.

Although their sweetness suggests that these are dessert wines, the underlying acidity of Chenin Blanc makes them much more versatile than one think. They make a superb aperitif and pair well with *foie gras*, white fish in rich sauces and blue cheeses. This is not to say that they are not also excellent with desserts, especially those made with pears and almonds.

## SAVENNIERES

At the western edge of Anjou lies the small appellation of *Savennières*, and its two *lieu dits* – or specified vineyards – *Les Roches aux Moines* and the *Coulée de Serrant*. Curnonsky, the great gastronome and food writer of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century included *Savennières Coulée de Serrant* among the five greatest white wines of France.

Production is small. 124 hectares of vineyards produce 1,700 hectoliters of wine. The stony vineyards lie on slopes of slate and sandstone. They are the only vineyards in Anjou on the north side of the Loire and must be worked by hand, as they are too steep for most machinery. All *Savennières* vineyards lie close to the Loire, where the warmer temperature and morning fog protects the vines from frost, a common problem in the area. The stones in the soil retain heat from the sun, providing much needed warmth as well. Not every year yields a vintage but when they do, the wines are of such intensity and character that they have inspired an almost cultish enthusiasm for centuries. Louis XIV is said to have thought so highly of *Savennières* that he planned (but never made) a trip to visit the vineyards, and two hundred years ago, *Savennières* was much in vogue in Napoleon's court. At that time *Savennières* was a sweet wine in the style of *Coteaux du Layon* and the other great *botrytis* wines that grow nearby. The style has gradually evolved to a point where *Savennières* is now made fully dry, but the wine retains the perfumed intensity of its ancestors, and a few winemakers still make a small amount of sweet wine in the old style.

*Savennières* is made entirely from Chenin Blanc, at the western extremity of the area where that grape can be successful. Yields are kept low to insure quality and concentration of flavor. Grapes are harvested for optimal ripeness, and as with the sweet wines of the region, pickers will make several passes through the vineyards to select individual ripe grapes from bunches that may not yet be ready. Unlike the other great Chenin Blanc wines of the Loire, the first impression *Savennières* creates is not of fruit, but of mineral-rich soil. In this way it can be seen as a contrasting counterpart to *Vouvray* --the great white wine at the eastern extremity of Chenin Blanc country-- the two wines demonstrating the versatility of this remarkable grape and the impact that different soil types can have on the flavors of the wine.

Like all Loire wines made from Chenin Blanc, *Savennières* has a high acid content that makes the wines capable of long aging. Young *Savennières* are refreshing and exciting wines, but with several years in the bottle, the acidity mellows and the bouquet becomes increasingly floral. Complexity may be an overused term for describing wine but it certainly applies to *Savennières*, and writers are often at a loss to find the right words for it. Some speak of acacia flowers and white peaches, others of ferns and jasmine. One celebrated authority on the wines of the Loire avoids the issue by saying “*Savennières* is not a wine for beginners” and a noted New York City Sommelier – noting the full flavor and the ability of *Savennières* to pair with white meats as well as fish – calls it “a red wine masquerading as a white.”

*Savennières* does pair remarkably well with a wide range of foods. The intensity of the aromas and flavors mean that it can hold its own with smoked salmon, with fish in rich sauces, with white meats such as veal and sweetbreads, and with some cheeses. Older, more delicate *Savennières* may be best appreciated by themselves before a meal, when one's palate is most receptive to their fascinating combination of aromas and flavors, and when they can be savored without the distraction of food.

## THE WINES OF SAUMUR

Saumur lies between Angers and Tours, where the dark schist of the *Massif Armoricaine* gives way to the *tuffeau* limestone of the *Paris Basin* and as if to emphasize the geological change, the graceful white Château of Saumur stands in contrast to the imposing, black fortress of Angers. Immortalized in the illustrations for *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (among the most famous examples of French Medieval art), Saumur castle, like many of the great Châteaux of the Loire Valley, is built with the same *tuffeau* limestone that underlies the vineyards of the region. Tuffeau is easy to carve, which made it the stone of choice for medieval castles and cathedrals, and the area around Saumur provided stone for most of the famous buildings of the Loire Valley as well as for Westminster Abbey and other great structures in England. Excavations from building castles and palaces have left a network of hundreds of miles of underground tunnels. These ready-made cellars make Saumur the ideal center for the *Fines Bulles* (fine bubbles) the sparkling wines of the Loire, as the *Méthode Traditionnelle* -- the procedure by which a still wine is re-fermented in the bottle to become a sparkling wine, takes at least nine months and requires extensive cellar space for storage – and many of the great sparkling wine houses of the Loire have their headquarters in Saumur.

The *Saumur Brut* appellation (with 1485 hectares of vineyards) produces 92,000 hectoliters a year. The wines are among the most prestigious sparkling wines of the Loire. They can be made from Chenin Blanc and/or Cabernet Franc, with small additions of Chardonnay and (in rare instances) Sauvignon Blanc depending on the style of the individual producer. Saumur is also the principal region for the production of *Crémant de Loire* (450 hectares of vines). Also made according to the *Méthode Traditionnelle*, Crémant de Loire can include a greater variety of grapes, but all must be hand harvested, yields are strictly limited and the wines must age for at least a year before commercial release. Annual production is 30,000 hectoliters, of which 10% is rosé.

Saumur also produces excellent still wines. White Saumur (like the sparkling wines) is primarily Chenin Blanc, and reds are mainly made from Cabernet Franc. Most of the wines are light bodied and made for early drinking, but as the refreshing acidity that characterizes the wines of the Loire also makes them last, more and more wines from Saumur are made with aging in mind. The *Saumur* appellation produces 55,000 hectoliters of red wine and 25,000 of white from 643 hectares of vines. *Cabernet de Saumur* is a rosé that is generally dryer and lighter than the more famous Cabernet d'Anjou.

*Saumur-Champigny* (83,000 hectoliters from 1,400 hectares) makes somewhat richer red wines that have seen a tremendous growth in popularity in recent years. They are made from Cabernet Franc, but this may be blended (although the practice is rare) with small quantities of Cabernet Sauvignon or Pineau d'Aunis, a grape unique to the Loire Valley.

In addition, the tiny appellation of *Coteaux de Saumur* (12 hectares, producing 400 hectoliters) produces semi-sweet white wines from Chenin Blanc.

In short, Saumur produces a wide variety of wines for every kind of food and for every occasion.

## LES FINES BULLES® DE LA LOIRE

Could there be any more evocative or appropriate name for these sparkling wines than *Les Fines Bulles*, the fine bubbles of the Loire Valley? Fragrant, delicate, refreshing and effervescent, these wines are sufficiently festive and elegant to toast important rites of passage, and friendly and affordable enough to celebrate the end of the workday.

Six appellations are allowed to use the *Fines Bulles* designation: *Anjou Mousseux* (3,500 hectoliters a year), *Crémant de Loire* (30,000 hectoliters), *Montlouis sur Loire* (6,700 hectoliters), *Saumur Brut* (92,000 hectoliters), *Touraine Mousseux* (32,000 hectoliters) and *Vouvray* (51,700 hectoliters). Although the composition of the wine may vary among the appellations, all are from the region of Anjou-Saumur-Touraine and all are made according to the rigorous standards that govern the *Méthode Traditionnelle*.

The *Méthode* requires two fermentations and takes more than a year to complete. First, a still wine is made and kept on the lees over the winter. Contact with the lees imparts a slight carbonation, even before the second fermentation begins. When the wine is bottled, a small amount of older wine and unfermented must is added, causing a second alcoholic fermentation to occur inside the bottle. However, in a closed bottle, carbon dioxide, a byproduct of alcoholic fermentation, cannot escape until the bottle is opened, and the trapped gas creates the delicate foam and fine bubbles (*finest bulles*) of a great sparkling wine. The second fermentation also produces sediment that must be removed in order to obtain a clear, sparkling product. This necessitates an involved process called *remuage*. The bottles are rotated, to keep sediment from building up in one place, and transferred from racks where they rest on their sides to racks where they rest at gradually steeper angles, until they stand vertically on their necks. With each turn and each increase of angle, the bottles are gently shaken to dislodge sediment and move it further into the neck. Each turn and each change of position is timed with the progress of fermentation and the process – now often mechanized – takes great skill if there is to be no trace of sediment in the finished wine.

After *remuage*, the sediment must be removed from the bottle. To do this, the neck of the bottle is frozen so that the sediment is encased in a plug of ice. The bottle is then opened and the pressurized wine shoots out the plug. Smaller producers still disgorge the sediment by hand, without freezing the necks of the bottle, a skill that requires a steady hand and split second timing if a minimum of wine is to be lost. The bottles are then topped up with finished wine and corked. The *Méthode Traditionnelle* is time and labor-intensive. There are less expensive ways to put bubbles into wine, but none result in as fine or as festive a product.

There are several styles within the category of *Fines Bulles*. The wines of *Vouvray* and *Montlouis sur Loire* are made exclusively from Chenin Blanc. Other appellations may blend in Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, or other grapes. But the most distinctive sparkling wines in the Loire Valley are made with grapes that characterize the region: Chenin Blanc and Cabernet Franc, and which make no attempt to duplicate the more famous wines of Champagne. The wines can be fully dry (*brut*) or *demi-sec* but all demonstrate the same balance between fruit and acidity that characterizes the best wines of the Loire Valley.

Although sparkling wines are traditional aperitifs, the fruitiness of these wines, far more pronounced than in most other sparkling wines, makes *Fines Bulles* especially well suited to drink with a meal.

## SAUMUR BRUT AND CREMANT DE LOIRE

*Saumur* is by far the largest of the AOCs that use the *fines bulles* designation. With an annual production of about 90,000 hectoliters, Saumur accounts for nearly as much wine as all the other sparkling appellations of the Loire Valley combined. *Crémant de Loire* (30,000 hectoliters) can be made in other parts of the Loire Valley, but its production is also centered in Saumur.

The sparkling wine industry in the Loire dates back to 1811, when Jean-Baptiste Ackermann, a Champagne producer, recognized the potential for sparkling wines in Saumur. In 1838 a tasting commission concluded that there was potential for the wines of Saumur to equal the more famous wines of Epernay and Reims. By 1859 there were six sparkling wine houses, by 1874 there were fifteen, and more than twenty by 1912. Had geography not made transportation of the wines from the Loire Valley to Paris and the Atlantic seaports more difficult than it was from Champagne, the wines might be equally famous. In fact, in the years before the introduction of *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée* legislation (the laws that govern exactly how particular wines must be made in order to qualify for a specific geographical name), many Champagne producers made wine in the Loire and sold it under their labels.

Unlike most sparkling wines, those of the Loire Valley have never tried to imitate Champagne and comparisons ignore the ways in which they differ from Champagne and which make them unique. In order to use the Saumur name, the wine must be made of the same grapes that make the best still wines of the region: Chenin Blanc, Cabernet Franc, or a combination of the two. Chardonnay, one of the primary grapes of Champagne, is also allowed in Saumur Brut but cannot make up more than twenty percent of the blend. Small amounts of Sauvignon Blanc are also permitted, but rarely used. The primary attribute of the wine – aside from the fine bubbles (*fines bulles*) that result from the *Méthode Traditionnelle* – is the fresh fruity aromas that characterize most Loire Valley wines.

Although the blend of grapes for *Crémant de Loire* is less restricted than for *Saumur*, Chenin Blanc is also dominant. All grapes must be harvested by hand, must be very gently pressed, and yields are strictly controlled (it takes 150 kg of grapes to obtain 100 litres of juice for *Crémant de Loire*). And whereas other Loire Valley sparkling wines may be released for sale after nine months of aging – although many producers choose to age them longer – *Crémant de Loire* must age for a minimum of a year prior to release.

Like all sparkling wines, the wines of Saumur recommend themselves for festive occasions. However, the fruity flavors and refreshing acidity of these wines make them ideally suited to drink with a meal. Try Saumur Brut with fresh oysters, smoked salmon, cold meats, fish in *beurre blanc*, the white wine and butter sauce characteristic of the lower Loire Valley (especially when made with Saumur Brut), or with fresh berries and the point will be made.

## SAUMUR-CHAMPIGNY

Red wine has a long tradition in Saumur. Medieval illustrations of harvest in Saumur show baskets full of red grapes, and generations of the families who own the great sweet wine properties often planted the edges of their vineyards with red grapes, to have good red wine, for their own use if nothing else. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, rosé had become dominant in the region but, beginning in the 1960s, a few determined producers started a movement to modernize red wine production and bring it up to the highest possible standards. Their efforts coincided with a growing movement among French chefs to create a lighter approach to cuisine and to emphasize freshness and quality of ingredients over the heavy sauces of traditional *haute cuisine*. By the 1970s, and with the emergence of *nouvelle cuisine*, Saumur-Champigny was becoming chic in the restaurants and wine bars of Paris, a trend that grew in the 80s and 90s.

As the name implies, Saumur-Champigny lies within the larger appellation of Saumur, around the village of Champigny. 1,400 hectares of vineyards are planted on chalk and tuffeau limestone soil that was formed millions of years ago as the Loire carved a wide, deep swath through the region around Saumur. The Saumur-Champigny appellation designates a band of vineyards that run along the top of the ridge to the east of the historic city of Saumur. A combination of soil, drainage, climate and exposure to sun makes this band of vineyards especially generous to Cabernet Franc, a grape that achieves its highest expression in the Loire Valley. The name Champigny is said to derive from the Latin *campus igni*, indicating that even in Roman times this area was recognized as a microclimate with warmer soil than in the surrounding region. Although a small percentage of Cabernet Sauvignon is allowed in Saumur-Champigny by law, it is rarely used. Annual production is 83,000 hectoliters

There are two distinct styles of Saumur-Champigny. The vineyards at the top of the steep river banks (often still the “marginal” red plantings around the sweet white wine vineyards) produce rich, tannic wines, capable of long aging. Although almost all Saumur-Champigny is fermented in stainless steel, some wines are aged in oak for greater complexity. However, the oak must be kept in balance and must not interfere with the characteristic aromas of red fruits. Vineyards on the slopes that face south, away from the river produce lighter, suppler wines (hardly ever oaked), that are refreshing and fruity, and which can be enjoyed slightly chilled. All Saumur-Champigny is full flavored but round, even in youth.

Saumur-Champigny pairs well with a wide range of foods, from traditional local specialties to more contemporary cuisine. The bigger, more robust wines go well with roast leg of lamb and the game dishes for which the Loire Valley is famous, and the lively, red fruit flavors make them good partners for duck with a fruit based sauce. The lighter wines are ideal for simple grilled foods (try them slightly chilled at a summer barbecue) or with goat cheese.

## THE WINES OF TOURAINE

The countryside around the city of Tours is what comes to mind when most people think of the Loire Valley. This is the “garden of France,” a verdant, fertile area where the aristocrats of the *Ancien Régime* built their great châteaux. And this is the area where some of the Loire Valley’s most distinguished and characteristic wines are grown.

The *Touraine* appellation yields red, white, rosé and sparkling wines. There are 5,481 hectares under cultivation, producing 343,812 hectoliters of wine a year. A variety of grapes can be used, and the blend is up to the individual producer. For white wines, Sauvignon Blanc is the preferred grape, but it may be blended with Chardonnay and Chenin Blanc. As in the rest of the Loire Valley, Chenin Blanc is the dominant grape in sparkling wines. For red wines, Cabernet Franc, Gamay and Côt (Malbec) dominate, but Pinot Noir is also used. Most rosé in Touraine is made from Pineau d’Aunis.

*Touraine Amboise* is a smaller appellation (12,605 hectoliters from 215 hectares) that produces still wines according to more restrictive guidelines. The whites are Chenin Blanc, the reds are Cabernet Franc and Côt, and the rosés are Gamay and Cabernet Franc. *Touraine Azay-le-Rideau* (made in the area surrounding one of the most beautiful châteaux in the Loire Valley) uses the same grapes with the addition of Grolleau to make rosé and white wines that were praised by the celebrated author Balzac. Annual production is 2,656 hectoliters from 59 hectares of vines. *Touraine Mesland* (6,170 hectoliters from 107 hectares) demonstrates its proximity to the Centre Loire by adding Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay to the grapes allowed for white wines, and *Touraine Noble Joué* (1,034 hectoliters from 19 hectares) likewise makes rosé from Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris and Pinot Meunier.

On the far eastern edge of Touraine, *Cheverny* (29,469 hectoliters from 488 hectares of vineyards) makes wines that are as likely to resemble those of the Centre Loire as those of its nearer neighbors. Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir are as much in evidence as Chenin Blanc and Cabernet Franc. The smaller appellation of *Cour-Cheverny* (a mere 51 hectares, producing 2,770 hectoliters of wine) makes only white wine, using the Romorantin grape. This grape, grown only in Touraine, makes floral, lively wines with a character uniquely their own. Romorantin is also an element in the fresh white wines of *Valençay*, which are generally based on Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay with the addition of the little known Arbois. The red wines of Valençay use the same grapes as are used throughout the region.

The region boasts several of the greatest appellations in the Loire Valley. No other appellation in France can boast greater variety under a single name than *Vouvray* and *Montlouis sur Loire*. From mineral-scented dry wines and fruity, off-dry “sec tendre,” to rich, honeyed dessert wines and some of the regions most delicious sparkling wine, these wines celebrate the versatility of the Chenin Blanc. Nearby, *Chinon*, *Bourgueil* and *St Nicolas de Bourgueil* make wines that set the international standards for Cabernet Franc.

## CHINON

The Vineyards of Chinon occupy 2,100 hectares along the banks of the river Vienne, a tributary of the Loire that joins the larger river from the south. Chinon was home to Henry II of England (who was also Duke of Anjou) and his wife, Eleonore of Aquitaine, whose lands included much of France south of the Loire, making the town one of the most important seats of power in 12<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Their son, King Richard the Lionheart died in Chinon in 1199. The town holds a place of honor in French history, as it was here in 1429 that Joan of Arc persuaded the Dauphin (soon to become King Charles VII) to accept the crown and defy the English, laying the foundations of the modern French nation. Rabelais, the famed epicurean writer and sybarite, was born near Chinon and wrote in praise of its wines, insuring that their fame would spread. Although the vineyards suffered a period of decline in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a result of phylloxera and changing fashion, modern winemaking techniques and rigorous standards have restored Chinon to its traditional place of honor among French wines. Annual production now stands at 118,884 hectoliters.

Although there is a small amount of white Chinon made from Chenin Blanc, and some rosé, the region is best known for its red wines. These are made entirely from Cabernet Franc, locally known as the Breton. This name has nothing to do with Chinon's Breton neighbors downstream, but because many Cabernet Franc vines were planted locally (on instructions from Cardinal de Richelieu, who recognized the suitability to the region of Cabernet Franc and encouraged its use) by a certain Abbé Breton.

The vineyards are planted on two different types of soil that do much to determine the style of the wine. The sand and gravel soils of the vineyards on the river's flood plains produce, light, elegant wines for early drinking. These are given a short maceration and are bottled not later than Easter following the harvest. The *tuffeau* limestone soil of the hillsides produces full-bodied wines capable of long aging. These wines, often from vineyards designated as "old vines," macerate for up to two weeks (with the must pumped over the "cap" to insure deep color and full fermentation) and age from four months to several years before bottling. Although aging usually takes place in barrels, little fresh oak is used, emphasizing the character of the grapes.

Chinon is a wine that shows itself to best advantage at the table. Lighter bodied Chinon is a perfect wine for summer drinking. It is refreshing and fruity and its acidity, the unifying characteristic of wines grown in cool climates, makes it especially appetizing when slightly chilled. It has sufficient character, however, to stand up to robust flavors and thus goes splendidly with a summer barbeque.

Older, richer Chinon has much in common with other fine red wines. Very tannic and closed in youth, it requires several years of bottle age before realizing its potential for richness and complexity. These are wines to drink with roast meats and other such fare that will show a fine red wine to its best advantage. Although the wines will start to show their best qualities after five years, they can age for decades, developing earthy aromas that, as one highly respected Chinon producer puts it, remind one of "the depths of a forest after a storm."

## **BOURGUEIL AND ST. NICOLAS DE BOURGUEIL**

This triangular region on the north bank of the Loire river lies between Saumur and Tours. The 2,350 hectares of the Bourgueil and St. Nicolas de Bourgueil appellations are planted mostly to Cabernet Franc, with a small amount of Cabernet Sauvignon.

Vines have been cultivated here since Roman times, but the founding of the Abbey of Bourgueil, in 990, marked the beginning of the development of viticulture and winemaking.

The vineyards are planted on two kinds of soil: lighter, warmer soils with high percentages of sand and gravel yield supple, fruity wines that can be drunk young; and vineyards on the south-facing hillsides where the soil contains more clay and limestone yield richer, earthier wines that take longer to reach their full potential. The vineyards benefit from being open over the Loire river, which carries the Atlantic's regulating influence inland. The slopes are south facing, with forests to protect vines from harsh north winds. All of which creates a gentle, moderate climate ideal for producing Cabernet Franc wines.

## VOUVRAY

Vouvray is the largest white wine appellation of the Anjou-Saumur-Touraine region and it produces splendid wines that vary from dry and refreshing to rich and sweet, as well as excellent sparkling wines. All Vouvray is made entirely from Chenin Blanc, which has been grown in the region since the 4<sup>th</sup> century. No other grapes are allowed in the appellation. On average, 40% of each vintage is made into still wine and 60% is made sparkling.

There are 4,695 acres of vineyards in Vouvray, on the right bank of the Loire, upstream from the city of Tours. Average annual production is 110,000 hectoliters. The *perruches* (siliceous-clay) and *aubuis* (limestone-clay) soils lie atop a subsoil of *tuffeau*, the limestone used to build the many *châteaux* of the surrounding countryside. The *perruches* produces rich, elegant and fruity wines, the *aubuis* makes for powerful, wines that are characterized by their minerality and spiciness.

The style of the vintage – how much wine is fermented dry and how much is left on the vines to make sweet wines – is determined by the weather, and varies from year to year. In cooler vintages, there are more dry and sparkling wines. In warmer years, sweeter wines predominate. The Vouvray vineyards are subject, in years when conditions are conducive, to *botrytis cinerea*, the mold responsible for most of the world's greatest sweet white wines. In these years, harvest is delayed until well into November (the latest harvest in France) and there may be several pickings in order to harvest the grapes at their moment of optimum ripeness.

Fermentation takes place in stainless steel or old oak casks, so that no extraneous flavors will interfere with the balance between fruit and acidity for which Vouvray is famous. The wines are bottled soon after fermentation and aged in the bottle and can continue to develop magnificently for decades.

When young, a dry Vouvray will display aromas of acacia, quince and almond. The wine will develop richness and depth over time but will never lose its fresh and fruity character. Dry and demi-sec Vouvray pair very well with shellfish – especially with those, such as scallops and lobster, that are slightly sweet – and with white meats.

The sweet wines, too, are distinguished by lively fruit aromas but the fruit is enriched with accents of ripe peaches and honey. These wines benefit from aging and have been known to last for over a century in peak condition. They can be enjoyed on their own, as an aperitif or paired with foie gras, blue cheeses or with desserts such as apple tart or crème brûlée.

Sparkling Vouvray shows all the qualities of the still wines but with an even more pronounced flavor of minerals. They are an excellent aperitif, but are also excellent sparkling wines to drink with a meal.

## THE WINES OF THE CENTRE LOIRE

The vineyards of the Centre Loire are located in the very heart of France. Grapes have been grown here for at least 2,000 years. King Dagobert gave land grants to local monasteries, in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, which included vineyards. As early as 1365, the Duc de Berry promulgated a charter that codified the wine trade in the region and set guidelines to maintain quality.

Today there are 3,800 hectares of vineyards in the Centre Loire, dominated by two grapes. All white wines are made from the Sauvignon Blanc and all red wines from the Pinot Noir (a small amount of rosé is also made from Gamay and Pinot Gris). Great variety, however, exists within the region as a result of numerous microclimates and the different types of soil on which the vineyards are planted. Growers in the Centre Loire balance traditional methods of winemaking with modern technology to achieve the fullest expression of each *terroir*. One has only to taste several of the wines side by side to experience the difference soil can make in wines made from the same grape.

*Sancerre*, the best-known wine of the region, is located right on the banks of the Loire. The white wines of Sancerre set international standards for Sauvignon Blanc, yet within the appellation (2,716 hectares with an annual production of 165,000 hectoliters) there is great variety of style depending on the individual vineyard, and consequently, the soil in which the grapes are grown.

Just across the river from *Sancerre* is *Pouilly Fumé* (1,212 hectares with an annual production of 74,000 hl) with its entire production devoted to Sauvignon Blanc. Higher levels of clay in the soils give Pouilly Fumé creamier, rounder notes than its neighbors.

The wines of *Reuilly* are grown on 180 hectares of ancient vineyards on the banks of the river Cher, which joins the Loire from the south. Average annual production is 9,000 hectoliters. The soil of Reuilly is chalky limestone with quite a bit of gravel and sand. The white wines are floral, slightly vegetal and round. The red wines are light bodied with good fruit, and the rosés are soft and delicate, with a pale color.

Situated on the left bank of the Cher, the vineyards of *Quincy* grow on plateaus of sand and silt. The vineyards are planted exclusively in Sauvignon Blanc, brought here from the Abbaye des Femmes de Beauvoir by Cistercian monks, who were the first to study which grapes grew best in particular climates and soils. In Quincy this grape produces wine entirely different from any other. *Quincy* is characterized by fresh, ripe citrus aromas, as well as those of acacia and white flowers. Suggestions of menthol and pepper are also noticeable. The appellation covers 214 hectares and produces 10,000 hectoliters a year. As in Reuilly, most of the wine is consumed in France.

Between Quincy and Sancerre, *Menetou-Salon* (450 hectares, producing 25,000 hectoliters) lies on chalky, kimmeridgean sediment. The white wines are spicy and perfumed. They combine citrus fruit and floral elements in perfect balance. The red wines are supple, fragrant and rich, with a long finish.

Finally, between Sancerre and the city of Orleans, *Coteaux du Giennois* (182 hectares making 9,000 hectoliters) and *Chateameillant* (90 hectares that produce 4,770 hectoliters of red wine and rosé) make ripe fruity wines that celebrate the gneiss and michaschist soil on which it is grown.

## SANCERRE

Sancerre, the most famous appellation of the Centre Loire, produces the best-known, and most imitated Sauvignon Blanc wines in the world. The vineyards are ideally situated on the left bank of the Loire. The steep hillsides provide optimal exposure to the sun, a very important advantage in a cool climate, and the chalk and silex soils provide an ideal growing medium for fresh, fruity Sauvignon Blanc and perfumed, elegant Pinot Noir.

Wine making has a long history in Sancerre. The origins of the vineyards are the stuff of legend, but Gregory of Tours wrote of vineyards here as early as the year 582, and local wines have enjoyed a good reputation since the twelfth century. For hundreds of years Sancerre was better known for its red wines, which were inexpensive, of dependable, if unexceptional quality, and easily transported to Paris through the Canal de Briere that links the Loire with the Seine. However, when the *phylloxera* epidemic of the late nineteenth century forced the replanting of the vineyards, and grape varieties were chosen to take best advantage of soil and topography, white wine came to dominate and the quality of both red and white wines saw great improvement. Of the 165,000 hectoliters of wine produced in 2005, 130,000 were Sauvignon Blanc, and 35,000 were Pinot Noir. On average, half of Sancerre's annual production is exported.

The vineyards of Sancerre cover 2,716 hectares. Four hundred growers and twenty-five *negociants* make wine in fourteen communes. The vineyards lie on a series of hillsides dominated by the "Piton" or peak of Sancerre. The geology of the soil is a fortunate coincidence of nature resulting in three kinds of *terroirs*, *Terres Blanches* ("white earth") is compact chalk on top of kimmeridgean marl and is characteristic of the western part of the region. *Les Caillottes* is gravel and limestone. Flinty silex-clay soil is found in the eastern vineyards. Each type of soil produces wines with different characteristics. *Les Caillottes* produces fragrant wines that are ready to drink soon after bottling. *Terres Blanches* wines are somewhat bigger and need a year or so to open. Wines grown in silex soil have a strong mineral component that can suggest smoke. Some producers like to blend wines from the three *terroirs* for balance, while others prefer to let the character of the *terroir* determine the character of the wine. Although it is far from common practice, some producers will age exceptional wines in wood. These wines develop an exceptionally rich flavor and a pungent floral bouquet after several years in the bottle.

White Sancerre is lively and fruity. Its aroma suggests both citrus fruits (especially grapefruit) and the mineral-rich soil in which it was grown. It pairs beautifully with shellfish, and is exceptionally well suited for delicate, white-fleshed fish such as red snapper or striped bass. Older Sancerre can stand up to *foie gras* or strong cheeses.

The aroma of red Sancerre suggests Morello cherries. The wines are light bodied and supple with a long finish. They are excellent partners for simply grilled or roasted meats that are not heavily seasoned or sauced. They, like the white wines, are ideally suited to the goat cheese for which the Centre Loire is also famous. A small amount of *Sancerre Rosé* is also produced from Pinot Noir. These wines are very pale pink in color, with notes of red currants and apricots. They are youthful and fresh, and are perfect with light summer fare.

## POUILLY FUME & POUILLY SUR LOIRE

Situated in the *Nivernais* country opposite Sancerre on the Eastern bank of the Loire, the vineyards of Pouilly cover 2 AOCs: Pouilly Fumé and Pouilly sur Loire. Two grapes are dominant: Sauvignon Blanc (sometimes called Blanc Fumé de Pouilly locally), used in the production of Pouilly Fumé, and Chasselas, used in the production of Pouilly sur Loire.

The first recorded mentions of the vineyards of Pouilly occur in the fifth century AD. Developed by the monks at the beginning of the twelfth century (there is a parcel still known as the *Loge aux Moines*), the vineyards saw the monastic influence increase after the lord of Pouilly made a charitable sale of the vineyards to the Benedictine monks. In 1642, the opening of the Briare canal made the transport of wines to Paris easy, and commerce with the capitol helped to develop the region.

From 1860 to 1890, the vineyards were planted with Chasselas, supplying Paris with table grapes. The fruit was shipped to Paris to the market of Les Halles with ease via railroad. After the phylloxera pandemic, the areas of production were more clearly defined, and the wines from Sauvignon Blanc in Pouilly Fumé and Chasselas in Pouilly sur Loire received AOC status in 1937.

The vineyards cover 1,212 hectares in Pouilly Fumé in six communes: Garchy, St. Laurent, Tracy sur Loire, Mesves sur Loire, St. Andelain, and St. Martin sur Nohain. Pouilly sur Loire covers 33 hectares on the right bank of the Loire. The terroir is varied, but limestone, flint, and clay are the dominant soil components. The presence of clay in the soil can give the wines a slightly rounder, creamier quality.

About 74,000 hectoliters are produced annual in Pouilly Fumé, and just over 2,100 hectoliters in Pouilly sur Loire. Pouilly Fumé often has aromas of chrysanthemums and grapefruit, and the flint in the soils can give the wines a distinctive gunpowder note. The wines are delightful in their youth, and certain cuvees have the potential for long aging. The wines of Pouilly sur Loire, which are not often seen in the United States, are unctuous and fresh. They are thirst-quenching wines, in the noblest sense of the term, and are light and accessible.

## TRAVEL IN THE LOIRE VALLEY

The Loire Valley is the most popular tourist destination in France after Paris. The ancient cities, famous châteaux and cathedrals, the unspoiled character of the Loire itself, the beauty of the surrounding countryside, and the fame of the vineyards attract large numbers of visitors all year.

Most of the major cities of the Loire Valley lie along major train routes. High-speed trains can take one from Paris to Angers or Nantes in less than three hours. There are several trains directly from Roissy – Charles de Gaulle Airport every day, including the high-speed TGV, and local trains provide convenient connections to smaller towns. Tickets can be easily booked in the United States at [www.raileurope.com](http://www.raileurope.com).

Visits to vineyards make pleasant outings by car and can be combined with visits to the châteaux and other nearby sights of historic and cultural interest. As a river valley, the region is also an ideal area for bicycle trips and camping, and each area of the Loire Valley offers different attractions in addition to the vineyards.

Nantes is a major port city, close to the beaches and sights of Brittany. It is a convenient base for trip to famous places such as Mont St. Michel and St Malo.

For those interested in horseback riding, Saumur is home to the National Riding Academy. The annual Carousel – an impressive equestrian demonstration by the legendary Cadre Noir – takes place in July and is underwritten by the sparkling wine producers of Saumur. The Sparkling wine houses maintain impressive visitor centers and offer tours of the labyrinthine underground caves where the wine is made.

Most of the most famous Châteaux of the Loire Valley (such as Azay le Rideau, Chenonceau, Chambord and Villandry) are within easy distance of Tours. In the Centre Loire, the historic city of Bourges boasts impressive cathedral, houses that date back to the Middle Ages and even scenic ruins from the Gallo-Roman period.

Many of the famous wine towns – Chinon, Vouvray, and Sancerre, for example – have excellent hotels and restaurants and can serve as tranquil and picturesque bases from which to explore. Visits to vineyards are easily arranged. Many European wine-lovers make weekend trips to buy wine in the Loire Valley, and many winemakers have beautifully designed tasting rooms to receive them. Appointments are rarely needed, although with some smaller winemakers, and in off-season (winter and early spring) it is advisable to call ahead to make sure someone will be home. Unlike in certain other regions, tastings are always free of charge.

For those who want to learn even more about wine, classes are available at the “Academie du Vin,” a wine school organized by Interloire, the wine council for Anjou, Saumur, Touraine and Nantes. The school provides classes for visitors at every level of wine expertise, from introductions to courses for professionals, upon request.

In Sancerre, the recently opened “La Maison des Sancerre,” welcomes visitors from April to November (and groups all year long with prior booking). Perched on top of the village, this beautiful building dates back to the XIV century. Various rooms: La Grande Cave, the Multi-Sensory Interactive Exhibition, the Jardin des Sancerre, the Terrace and Panorama, offer visitors a thorough, fun, and interactive understanding of the region, its terroirs, history, and its wines. For a virtual tour, please visit [www.maison-des-sancerre.com](http://www.maison-des-sancerre.com).