

August 2007

Wines from the Loire

This is a picturesque and historic region to tour around with some of most beautiful châteaux in France. The geographical extent often region means that the terroirs and consequently the wines themselves turn out very differently. The Continental climate of the Sancerre region has virtually nothing in common with the temperature of the Atlantic climate of Muscadet country near the Loire estuary except the river they share. For the same reason, climatic conditions are overall much more unstable from the more Southerly regions, and the variations between Vintages are much more pronounced than in the Rhône and Burgundy regions.

The Loire regions can be subdivided into five areas:

1. Muscadet and Gros Plants whose vineyard are mostly south of the Loire.
2. Anjou and Saumur, those of the Chenin Blanc.
3. Touraine, Bourgueil and Chinon the realm of Cabernet Franc and the Gamay.
4. Sancerre and Pouilly, the stronghold of Sauvignon Blanc.
5. Poitou, small wine industry in the middle of the Loire.

The top varieties are the highly versatile:

- Chenin Blanc, (also called Pineau de la Loire), Almost every conceivable variety of wine is made from it, ranging from light white wine to heavy dessert wines or even fortified liqueur. In France Chenin Blanc is not very common outside the Loire region, but it is intensively cultivated in South Africa. (Where it is called Steen). The Loire dessert wines made from Chenin Blanc are notable for their capacity to improve with age: Vouvray, Coteaux du Layon, Bonnezeaux, Montlouis, Quarts de Chaume.
- Cabernet Franc often mocked in the Bordelais regions as Cabernet Sauvignon “Little Brother”, provide single variety Loire red wines there are elegant and can keep up to 10 years.
- Sauvignon Blanc, which occupies a special position, particularly in the Sancerre and Pouilly area have enormous spirit and finesse and are reference for the Sauvignon producers around the world.
- Muscadet (also called Melon de Bourgogne) produces light fruity and tangy wines that go excellently with sea food.

The sur-lie speciality gives the other wines more complexity. The best are left to mature on the yeast (or lees) in the Tank or barrel until bottled; this gives them a discreet aroma of yeast and depth.

The sur-lie appellation can only be used for higher quality areas set up in 1995 after the re-classification of the Muscadet area; they are Coteaux de la Loire and Sèvre et Maine.

The Loire is one of the most important sparkling wine regions. Production developed particularly in the Saumur, Vouvray and Mont Louis regions, due the special caves which offer ideal conditions for fermentation in the bottle. For five wines growers, producing wine is an effective way of making good use of their grapes when bad weather occurred before ripening. In the Saumur area, the mousseux constitutes the major production volume of any type. Since 1975, there has been a crémant de Loire appellation, whose production methods are borrowed from those of Champagne.

My wine selection:

Sancerre Jadis, Cotes de Chavignol, Henri Bourgeois 2004 £11.95

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Pouilly Fumé Jonathan Pabiot 2006 £6.95

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Menetou-Salon »La Charnivolle »,Domaine Fournier 2005 £6.95

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Xavier Le-bellego

Forbury's restaurant

Next Issue will feature the Bordeaux Region.