

# WINE News

*Loire Valley's Best, from Value Champs to Ageable All-Stars*



## JUNE 13, 2022 FEATURES

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## The Lively, Lovely Wines of the Loire Valley

By Keith Mabry, Loire Valley Buyer



Whenever I think of the Loire River, France's longest waterway, I get a sense of peace and calm as I envision it emerging from the mountainous Massif Central in central France and winding its way some 600 miles to the Atlantic. It flows through its namesake, the Loire Valley, where many of my favorite wine regions are situated.

The Loire is home to both the world's best wine values as well as some of France's most

famous benchmark wines. You'll find the best expressions of Cabernet Franc, Sauvignon Blanc, and Chenin Blanc grown in vineyards along its riverbanks—most notably in Chinon, Sancerre, and Vouvray.

In addition to the fame and glory, this influential river is home to some of France's most interesting workhorse and heirloom grape varieties, including Gamay, Malbec (known regionally as Côt), Melon de Bourgogne, Grolleau, and Pineau d'Aunis. Some are blending varieties, some make rosé—all are enjoying a renaissance. The grapes of the Loire are food-friendly, full of bright acidity, and, very often, grown organically. Whatever your pleasure, there are numerous delights to be discovered here. Follow us through these pages as our team of Loire experts shares their summertime favorites from Montlouis-sur-Loire to Sancerre. We'll take a look at the exquisite expressions of Loire Cabernet Franc, and we'll wrap with a romp through some of the best values ever to come out of France. But at the top of the list—a few of my favorite wines to drink right now!



**Domaine de la Chaboissière "Hallereau" Methode Traditionnelle Brut (Disgorged 2021) \$19.99** Christophe Hallereau creates a beautiful, sinewy Muscadet that is a perennial K&L favorite. The crisp backbone from

the Folle Blanche grapes provides an elegant acid structure to lift the Melon de Bourgogne grapes, which add complexity and weight. The sumptuous Champagne-like texture and complexity this wine delivers—after resting for at least three years on its lees—is simply amazing. Fabulous fair weather fizz for all—at under \$20!



**2015 Château du Petit Thouars "Cuvée L'Amiral" Touraine Rouge \$29.99 94VN** This gorgeous bottle ranks in my top five bottles of Cabernet Franc this year. It hails from Chinon, where the limestone soil provides

vibrancy and structure to the wine. This 2015 vintage is considered a benchmark in its fruit-to-structure balance. Put these factors all together, and you have an extraordinary Cabernet Franc that is just evolving out of its baby fat stage with rose, black cherry, tarragon, and olive tapenade as just a few of its emerging flavors.



**2020 Franck Millet Sancerre Rouge \$19.99** While Franck Millet's Sancerre "Insolite" ranks as one of our bestselling whites year after year, Millet also produces a marvelous red that is a fan favorite in our Pinot Noir category.

Sancerre Rouge is a go-to red for admirers of classic medium-bodied, cool-climate Pinots, and it's ideal for summertime. Millet's 2020 Rouge erupts with raspberry and tea aromas that pull you in, and the streak of mid-palate fruit and acidity will keep you coming back to the glass for more. A true friend to a plate of food if ever there was one!

## Chenin Blanc by the Master

By Dejah Overby, Loire Valley Specialist



**On the left bank of the Loire River, the appellation Montlouis-sur-Loire is known as the land of Chenin Blanc.** When the French AOC system was introduced in 1937, it deemed Montlouis to be a place of exceptional Chenin Blanc from soils of gravel, Tuffeau, clay-silex, and flint. Some vineyard sites in Montlouis are rich and

fertile, producing high yields without sacrificing quality or muting expressions of the fruit. Other vineyards, like the ones farmed by Jacky Blot, have poorer soils with lower yields that produce Chenin with the power, precision, and finesse of age-worthy wines.

Pioneering winemaker Jacky Blot purchased land in Montlouis in the late 1980s when it was inexpensive and relatively unknown to global oenophiles. Through hard work and groundbreaking innovation, he firmly planted Montlouis on the map. His *Domaine de la Taille Aux Loups* is located on the banks of the Loire and one of its tributaries, the Cher, with south-facing vineyards of chalk, clay, flint, and limestone soils. Wines from this location reveal a wonderful diversity of expressions, and I find the following two site-specific releases exceptional.



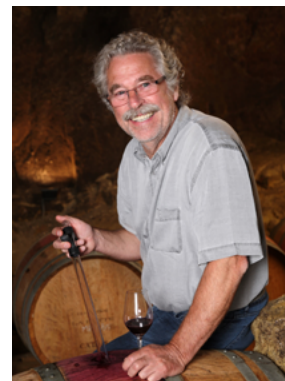
The first is the **2019 Domaine de la Taille Aux Loups “Clos de Mosny” Montlouis-sur-Loire \$34.99 95DC 92VN**, a basket of orchard fruit with hints of honey and lightly toasted almonds. There is a lovely lift of brine and

lemon oil that lingers on the finish. With layers and length, it can go from the beginning of a multiple-course dinner and glide into the cheese course without a hitch. Like all of Blot’s wines, this is a true terroir-driven gem—fermented with ambient yeasts and made without malolactic fermentation or *bâtonnage*. It comes from the 12-hectare parcel *Clos de Mosny*, which is the largest site located in a prime geological area of south-facing surfaces of sandy clay and flint with a limestone underbelly. This certified-organic, walled vineyard is more than 50 years old.



The **2019 Domaine de la Taille Aux Loups “Les Hauts de Husseau” Montlouis-sur-Loire \$34.99 95DC 94VN** comes from a site half the size of *Clos de Mosny*, a 6-hectare parcel that was chosen specifically for its geological position. Located at the highest point of the appellation, closest to the village, it is primarily composed of very thin layers of flint covered by a bed of limestone and clay topsoil. The wine is noticeably bright with notes of lemon tart and specks of flashy flint. This is summer in a glass. *Les Hauts de Husseau* is for the freshest scallops plucked from the ocean and prepared into a crudo, dressed with the simplest finishing ingredients of lemon, olive oil, and the flakiest fleur de sel.

If you yearn for a stunning wine to enjoy with sashimi, fresh summer salads, or specialty cheeses, these are the way to go and a great change of pace from the norm.



## A Soft Spot for Sancerre

By Alex Leonardi, Loire Valley Specialist

**Sancerre has deservedly positioned itself as the benchmark for world-class Sauvignon Blanc, and—perhaps more importantly to all of us as summer temperatures rise—one of the best choices for crisp, clean summer whites.** We have a great selection on our shelves, and these are a few of my favorites.



*Two of the four generations behind Domaine Cherrier with Clyde and Trey Beffa, who visited them in June of 2021.*

**2020 Domaine Cherrier Père & Fils Sancerre \$18.99** *Domaine Cherrier’s* 2020 Sancerre is perhaps one of their most approachable bottlings yet, thanks in part to 2020’s hot summer temperatures in the Loire. Tropical aromas of freshly peeled mango, juicy pineapple, and passionfruit abound from the glass while subtler scents of lemongrass and hay soften and smooth the landing. The palate is

weighty and full, with well-tamed acidity drawing the wine to a crisp, crowd-pleasing finish. If there’s one wine to bring to your summer get-together, it should be this.

**2020 Domaine la Clef du Récit (Anthony Girard) Sancerre \$24.99 90WE** Anthony Girard’s Sancerre is similarly vibrant thanks again to the warm 2020 vintage. The wine is densely textured and a touch exotic. Fresh mango and guava meld with aromas of dragon fruit and Japanese white peach to create a kaleidoscope of flavor grounded by the refreshing, mineral-driven acidity from the limestone-rich soils. Rounded and fresh, this is a wine that pairs just as well with oceanside afternoons and a paper cup as it does with long outdoor dinners on warm summer evenings with oenophile friends.

**2019 Dominique & Janine Crochet “Le Chêne Marchand” Sancerre \$34.99 94VN** Elegant and textural, *Le Chêne Marchand* challenges and overcomes my strongly held bias that Sauvignon Blanc and oak are mortal enemies. The wine is aged on its lees in large neutral oak barrels, which lends rich, creamy texture and flavors of biscuit and pastry underlying more typical Sauvignon Blanc flavors of white peach, grapefruit zest, and honeysuckle. Flinty mineral notes crackle through the wine’s core while ample, persistent acidity carries the wine’s complex flavor palette through a long, mouthwatering finish. Refreshing enough for a poolside afternoon; serious enough to headline a meal of white fish or roast chicken; and thought-provoking enough to distract you while reading your current favorite book, the wine is a triumph on all levels.





# An Ode to Cabernet Franc

By Keith Mabry, Loire Buyer

One of the great, often-overlooked varieties is Cabernet Franc, and that is why I so regularly sing its praises in these pages. These grapes can make incredible wines—complex and ageworthy while also representing some of the best values in red wine drinking. Along the Loire River there lie a multitude of appellations producing a variety of styles. All are influenced by the varied terroirs of the Loire.

The juncture of the Vienne and Loire Rivers is one such terroir where alluvial soils of gravel, clay, sand, and silt have built up over the limestone subsoil. This alluvium influences the profiles of three major regions: Chinon, Bourgueil, and St-Nicolas-de-Bourgueil. In many cases there can be 30 feet of gravels, sands, and clays piled up over the deep limestone bedrock. Usually the more topsoil, the more generous the wines. The closer you get to limestone, the more powerful the wines become. Here are some of the best we have found in this region showing a range of flavor profiles, food compability, and, of course, value!



We began working with the wines of Joël Taluau from St-Nicolas-de-Bourgueil about 15 years ago. Taluau passed away many years ago after a lifetime of making beautifully structured wines that age phenomenally well. His daughter, Veronique, and son-in-law, Thierry, now run the estate, keeping his legacy alive. Their soils are primarily calcareous clays giving structure and sandy top soils adding fruitiness to their wines. For

shear exuberance, it is hard to compete with their **2019 Joël Taluau “Expression” St-Nicolas-de-Bourgueil \$13.99**. This wine bursts forward with aromas of rose petals, sage, and plump raspberries. It is a delightfully fresh style that welcomes a platter of charcuterie and pâté.

For classic Bourgueil, look to the **2019 Yannick Amirault “Cote 50” Bourgueil \$19.99 91WA**. This comes from vines planted on the typical sand, clays, and gravels of the region, and the wine shows the most traditional profile of



The noble Cabernet Franc grape is a parent grape of Cabernet Sauvignon. Often used as a blending grape, it finds its best expression in the Loire Valley.



Domaine les Pins in Bourgueil has been a solid producer for us and in the region for years. In fact, the family has five generations' worth of experience exclusively with Cabernet Franc.

all my selections in these pages, with flavors of black olive, rosemary, currants, and graphite. This wants a pairing with some grass-fed beef. I recommend a hangar or a pichaña-style cut. The meatiness in both the wine and the beef are a match made in heaven.

Another classic Bourgueil producer is Domaine les Pins, run by a father-son duo who continually bring us some of our favorite values. Every year, their Les Rochette bottling is one of our go-to everyday wines, and the **2019 Domaine les Pins “Les Rochettes” Bourgueil \$13.99 91WE** is no exception. This savory Cabernet Franc is filled with notes of black cherry that underscore the savory herbal tones. It works harmoniously to satisfy my Cab Franc itch, and is especially good with simple things like an herb roasted chicken. Even more impressive is the **2018 Domaine les Pins “Nos Pere Hiers” Bourgueil \$29.99**. This powerful and age-worthy Cab Franc comes from a small parcel on one of the best sites in all of Bourgueil, Les Perrieres. The name is a bit of a pun playing on the sound of the vineyard's name but harkening back to “our fathers past.” Very little topsoil means more limestone influence and more power in the wine. This is a truly cellarable red with a long future ahead of it.



Finally, we have to talk about Chinon, the most famous region with that alluvial soil structure. Winemaker Eric Santier studied under Bernard Baudry, one of Chinon's modern greats. He acquired Domaine Dozon on the left bank of the Vienne in 2013. His **2020 Domaine Dozon “Clos du Saut au Loup” Chinon \$19.99** is a monopole site planted on silt and clay soils. The vines range between 40 to 60 years of age. This is perfumed but powerful. It beautifully straddles that distance between fruitiness and structure. This savory red would find its happy place with some seared duck breast or maybe a beautifully marbled Berkshire pork chop. If you have the patience, put this away for a few years, and you'll be handsomely rewarded.



# Recession Proof: the Loire Keeps It Cheap and Cheerful

By Keith Mabry, Loire Buyer

The greatest value wines come from the banks of the Loire River as it flows through the picturesque Loire Valley. This area is so cherished that it became a UNESCO World Heritage Site under the Living Cultural Landscapes heading in 2000. In this lush, green, garden of France, classic grape varieties intermingle with heirloom grapes that are gaining popularity, grown from a mix of soil types. A recipe for an environment of ingenuity and creative winemaking! When you visit the Loire, the uniqueness of the region and its soils can be savored through its local grapes. In times of economic uncertainty, the Loire is a steadfast and affordable source for the friendliest of reds and crunchiest of whites. These summertime selections showcase an awesome quality-price-ratio that can only be found in the Loire.



Don't let the humble price fool you: in the **2020 Nicolas Idiart Sauvignon Blanc Val de Loire \$9.99**, winemaker Nicolas Idiart delivers nothing but quality, rendering optimal flavor from even his entry-level cuvée. This drinks like a classic Sancerre with beautiful citrus tones, crunchy minerality, and fresh cut grass. Yes, you can indeed swirl and sip summer in a glass for a mere \$9.99.



*Michel and his daughter Fleurie from Domaine Bedouet, an estate that dates back to the 1890s. It's been farmed organically for the last 10 years.*

Bedouet is one of our direct import producers from Muscadet, located in the recently elevated cru village of Pallet, where they are one of the few family operations to work organically and bottle their own wines. The **2020 Bedouet "Clos des Grands Primos" Muscadet Sèvre et Maine Sur Lie \$12.99 90WE** is filled with notes of crisp apple, a touch of salinity, and that classic Muscadet stony finish. This makes a great aperitif and a partner for salads, creamy cheeses, and that platter of oysters you've been craving!

Another organic producer we love is J. Mourat. This winery, which you might recognize from their distinctive bottle shapes and the whimsical owl logo, is turning out terrific blends of heirloom grape varieties from the surrounding regions. The **2021 J. Mourat "Collection" Val de Loire Rosé \$14.99** is Pinot Noir, Cabernet Franc, Négrette, and Gamay. It is fresh and fruit-filled but not overly fruity. Notes of strawberry, citrus, and a whisper of spice add to a tense and complex palate. It'll be hard to believe you're drinking rosé this good for a price so low. Spread some creamy goat cheese on a crostini, adorn with some ripe strawberries, a chiffonade of mint or basil, a drizzle of olive oil, and serve the Mourat alongside at your next summer gathering. Your guests will marvel at your brilliant wine sense and culinary expertise.



Vigneron Jean-Noël Millon makes some of my favorite reds in Saumur, but it was his white wine that made me decide we absolutely had to work with him. I was blown away at first sip! That was several years ago, and the **2018 La Source du Ruault "La Coulee d'Aunis" Saumur Blanc \$19.99** continues to amaze.



Transcending its price point by double at least, this complex Chenin Blanc possesses weight, tension, and depth of fruit. Grilled scallops skewered with rosemary, served over a celery root puree, and maybe a drizzle of some brown butter would be the perfect dish.



Malbec (known as Côt in the Loire) is just starting to get some recognition here. Most of its production is in Touraine, and our direct import producer Vieil Orme makes a fantastic one. The **2020 Domaine du Vieil Orme Côt Touraine Rouge \$14.99** is a beautiful medium- to full-bodied rendition. This is a more food-friendly, fruit-filled version with flavors of raspberry, blackberry, and spice. It pairs well with the classic duck and pork dishes of the region such as rillettes and rillons. Try it with a lovely rosy hangar steak with some chimichurri, and I have no doubt you'll convert many a follower of Argentine Malbec.

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