

# FRANCE – LOIRE

HISTORY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 13AD: Romans planted vineyards in Pays Nantais but viticulture seem to started later on.</li> <li>• 5<sup>th</sup>: written records of established winemaking on the upper Loire valley in Auvergne</li> <li>• 11<sup>th</sup>: <b>Loire wines exported to NL and UK thanks to great river &amp; port connections; Sancerre already reputed.</b> Also very popular in France thanks to the great links to Paris esp. St Pourcain.</li> <li>• 18-19<sup>th</sup>: better transport links to Bordeaux, Rhone &amp; S. France meant sales declined             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1709: terrible winter (down to -20C) destroyed most of the vineyards</li> <li>- 1789: French revolution had a disastrous effect on the vineyards esp. in Vendée.</li> <li>- 1870s: phylloxera outbreak wiped out huge proportion of the vineyards</li> </ul> </li> <li>• 1936: Muscadet, Quincy, Sancerre and Vouvray become ACs; followed by Anjou, Saumur and Touraine.</li> <li>• Post WWII: wine industry picking up again</li> </ul>		
CLIMATE & WEATHER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Northern limit of Atlantic France for vine cultivation with various climates:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Continental in Centre Loire</b> (Pouilly-Fumé/Sancerre)</li> <li>- <b>Maritime w Gulf stream warming effect from Orléans to Pays Nantais</b></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Generally cool – 19C avg temp in July; 750mm rainfall</li> <li>• Unstable climatic conditions -&gt; much more <b>pronounced vintage variation</b> (e.g. 2012: harvest -50% in Muscadet)</li> <li>• <b>Spring frost</b> is the main viticultural hazard.</li> </ul>		
SOILS & TOPOGRAPHY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centre Loire: kimmeridgian limestone soils (//Chablis soils)</li> <li>• Touraine: sand, clay, gravel, tuffeau</li> <li>• Anjou-Saumur: sandstone, tuffeau (limestone)</li> <li>• Pays Nantais: schist, granite, gneiss, sand</li> </ul>		
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VITICULTURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 50,000ha of vines (1/2 of Bordeaux; similar to Rhone)</li> <li>• Avg holdings 20ha with hi density planting at 4-5,000 plants/ha (up to 10,000plants/ha in Sancerre)</li> <li>• Biodynamic farming on the rise but spraying vs. fungal disease frequent</li> <li>• Mechanical harvesting common (excl. sweet wines of middle Loire)</li> </ul>		
WINEMAKING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditionally: no MLF, no new oak but wines in inert containers and bottled early with some lees contact (e.g. Muscadet). Reds usually lacked colour extraction.</li> <li>• Since 80s: experimentation with             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- barrel maturation and sometimes barrel fermentation for reds &amp; whites</li> <li>- MLF for whites; pre-fermentation maceration introduced for some Sauvignons</li> <li>- longer skin contact, temperature control and pumping over to facilitate colour &amp; tannins extraction for reds</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Chaptalisation common for both reds &amp; whites to a max of +2.5% alcoholic strength of the finished wine</li> <li>• <b>Sur lie</b> ageing consists in leaving the wine on its fine lees for min 4-5 mths over the winter in the tank or barrel where fermentation took place with only 1 racking allowed (to remove gross lees). Wine then bottled directly at specific dates: 1<sup>st</sup> March-&gt;30<sup>th</sup> June or 15<sup>th</sup> October -&gt;30<sup>th</sup> November. Controlled by AC rules. Some 'terroir' wines go beyond required time &amp; fall outside 'sur lie' labelling rules.</li> </ul>		

## 1. **Centre Loire**

- Eastern end of the Loire, on S-N axis, before river turns towards Atlantic; closest to the centre of France
- Continental climate with severe winters (spring frost) and hot summers (hail)
- Vines trained in Cordon or Guyot systems
- Key ACs:
  - A. Pouilly-fumé (W) – 1,000ha**
    - Eastern bank of Loire river; facing Sancerre; slightly flatter vs. Sancerre
    - Limestone soils -> flinty, mineral notes
    - Higher proportion of cask ageing makes for less herbaceous character & more rounded vs. Sancerre.
  - B. Sancerre (R/W/R) – 2,600ha**
    - 15 villages on low south-east or south-west facing slopes w 3 different terroirs:
      - i. Extreme west: clay soils & chalk marls -> strongest wines
      - ii. West of Sancerre: gravel and limestone
      - iii. Around Sancerre: flinty soils for flinty, mineral wines
    - Mostly fermented and aged in stainless steel; rarity and international success since 70s -> high prices
    - Pinot Noir grown on lesser vineyards for light reds & rosés
  - C. Menetou-Salon (R/WR)**
    - Just west of Sancerre with limestone & flatter landscape
    - Whites from Sauvignon blanc (60% of production) and Reds & Rosés from Pinot Noir.
    - Similar style to Sancerre & better prices -> fast growing area
  - D. Quincy (W) – 170ha**
    - South-West of Sancerre; Sauvignon blanc grown on sandy gravel soils for fruity, aromatic & soft whites
    - Slightly more rustic vs. Sancerre & better prices -> fast growing area
  - E. Reuilly (R/W/R)**
    - Produces fine austere whites from Sauvignon blanc; light reds from Pinot Noir and rosés from Pinot Gris
    - Gamay sold as VdP red.

## 2. **Touraine – 14,000ha**

- Around Tours, 200km from Atlantic coast; 'Garden of France', Chateau country & most important Loire area
- Continental climate with cold winters & warm summers (less extreme vs. centre Loire)
- Variety of soils from tuffeau to sand, clay and gravel.
  - Well draining limestone soils, rich in calcium & marine fossils around Vouvray
- Variety of less typical grapes also cultivated: Arbois, Pinot Gris & Chardonnay, Pineau d'Aunis & Grolleau
- Key ACs:
  - A. Touraine (R/W/R) – 5,300ha**
    - Large area stretching from Blois (east) to Chinon & Bourgueil (west)
    - Considerable climate variations w eastern vineyards continental & very cold winters; western vineyards more influenced by Atlantic (closer to Maritime climate)
    - Large array of grapes allowed:
      - Whites: Chenin blanc, Arbois, Sauvignon blanc & Chardonnay (max 20%)
      - Reds: Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauv, Pinot Noir, Cot (Malbec), Gamay, Grolleau & Pineau d'Aunis
      - Rosés: same as reds + Pinot Meunier.
    - 50% of the Touraine production; 50% whites (usually from east); 40% reds and 10% rosés
    - 4 sub-ACs: Touraine-Amboise, Touraine-Azay-le-Rideau, Touraine-Mesland & Touraine-Noblé-Joué.
  - B. Vouvray (W) – 2,000ha**
    - Named after town on Northern bank of the Loire; northeast of Tours
    - Mid-continental, mid-maritime climate -> considerable vintage variation
    - Unique feature: cool cellars carved in tuffeau allow for wine 2<sup>nd</sup> fermentation for sparkling.
    - Largest and most recognised Chenin blanc appellation; comes in dry, medium dry, sweet & sparkling
    - Appley, honeyed + hi acidity with more weight & intensity vs. Montlouis; 2-3 years to reach potential
    - Sparkling 40% of production; produced in larger quantities in leaner years. Still = 60%.
  - C. Montlouis (W) – 400ha**
    - Southern bank of the Loire; other side of Vouvray
    - Lighter, sandier soils for less defined and earlier maturing wines.
  - D. Chinon (R/W/R) – 2,100ha**
    - South of Loire river, on the Vienne river, South-west of Tours.
    - 25% Cabernet Sauvignon theoretically allowed but usually 100% Cabernet Franc; some use of new oak
    - 3 styles of red:
      - i. Light & fruity in the sand & gravel soils of the Vienne River Valley, west of Chinon
      - ii. Fuller bodied w firm tannins on the plateau north of Chinon
      - iii. Finest on hillside slopes
    - 2% of whites from Chenin Blanc
  - E. Bourgueil (R) -1,400ha**
    - South facing slopes on Loire's northern bank; sand & gravel w chalky substratum
    - Gentle climate w low rainfall
    - 25% Cabernet Sauvignon theoretically allowed but usually 100% Cabernet Franc
    - More powerful and tannic wines vs. Chinon
  - F. Saint-Nicolas de Bourgueil (R/R) – 1,000ha**
    - Most westerly red AC; northern bank of the Loire
    - Lighter soils for fruity reds and rosés best drunk young.

### 3. **Anjou-Saumur – 17,400ha**

- Heartland of the Loire valley, mostly around and south of Angers
- Steep slopes made from a mixture of volcanic, metamorphic, schist, limestone & carboniferous rock
- **Maritime climate but drier** (only 500mm rainfall) & **warmer vs. Pays Nantais**. Sheltered by Vendée woods
- Key ACs:
  - A. Anjou (R/W/R) – ha**
    - Very large AC stretching from the borders of Muscadet to the town of Saumur
    - Most of the production is rosé, whites represents 15% and reds continue to rise in quantity & quality
    - **Cabernet Franc = 1/3 of plantings**. Only appellation that allows Grolleau.
    - Key sub-ACs:
      - **Cabernet d'Anjou** (Rosé): medium-sweet from Cab Sauvignon & Cab Franc; hi acidity -> age-worthy
      - **Rosé d'Anjou** (Rosé): medium-dry from Grolleau, Cab Franc & Gamay blend; quality improving
      - **Rosé de Loire** (Rosé): dry, min 30% Cabernet grapes; can be produced in Touraine & Saumur too
      - **Anjou blanc** (W): most common & most successful when produced on schist & carboniferous rock close to the river. Min 80% Chenin blanc w Chardonnay & Sauvignon blanc increasingly used in the blend.
      - **Anjou-Coteaux de Loire** (W): 100% Chenin blanc; sometimes aged in 400l barriques with partial MLF
      - **Anjou-Villages** (R): most serious red wine AC; created in 1987. **Brissac** – best area with its own suffix AC
      - **Anjou-Gamay** (R) / **Anjou Rouge** (R): Gamay-based and catch all for lighter, crisp red wines.
  - B. Saumur (R/W/R)**
    - Directly south of the town of Saumur; western extension of Touraine with Tuffeau soils
    - **Saumur Blanc** from Chenin blanc w hi acidity & ageing potential; slightly lighter vs. Anjou due to chalky soils
    - **Saumur Rouge** can be made from Cab Franc, Cab Sauvignon or Pineau d'Aunis but usually 100% Cab Franc for refreshing, relatively light fruity wines.
    - Key sub ACs:
      - **Saumur-Champigny** (R/W) -1,300ha: named after Champigny village; on a tuffeau plateau (hi limestone content); rich, fresh wines with great concentration.
      - **Cabernet de Saumur** (Rosé): drier & less ambitious vs. Cabernet d'Anjou
      - **Coteaux de Saumur** (W): medium-sweet made in small quantities from Chenin blanc.
  - C. Coteaux du Layon (Sweet whites) – 1,400ha**
    - Fresh fruit character and acidity of sweet German wines but with more body & alcohol.
    - Key sub ACs:
      - **Quarts de Chaume** (W) / **Bonnezeaux** (W): top sites for some of the world's greatest sweet whites
      - **Chaume** (W): extremely top quality & long lasting sweet wines from Chenin blanc
  - D. Savennieres (W)**
    - North bank of the Loire; immediately South-west of Angers
    - Dry area with schist soils that slope to the river's edge; restrictive yields
    - Dry, minerally Chenin blanc that can be perceived as steely & tart young; requires 4-5 yrs to mellow
    - 2 sub-ACs:
      - **La Roche-aux-Moines** (W) / **Coulée de Serrant** (W): south facing schist slopes near Angers; intense, complex & age-worthy whites. CdSerrant monopoly of Nicolas Joly, leading champion of biodynamics

### 4. **Pays Nantais – 13,000ha**

- Region around Nantes, both sides of the Loire before it enters the Atlantic; 90km wide
- Maritime climate w high humidity, mild winters & summers
- Well drained soils of schist, granite, gneiss with some granite & sandy soils
- Key ACs:
  - A. Muscadet (W)**
    - Basic regional appellation. Only Melon de Bourgogne authorised. Chaptalisation up to 12%
    - Wines are dry, rather neutral with green apple, grassy aromas and crisp acidity
  - B. Muscadet Sevre et Maine (W)**
    - Directly South-east of Nantes; largest AC with 80% of production; monoculture area
    - Vineyards on rolling hills w some hi quality sites. Ambitious wines from clay soils of schist & granite slopes. Vallet and Saint Fiacre are suitable for ageing.
  - C. Muscadet-Coteaux de la Loire (W)**
    - On Northern bank of the Loire, northeast of Nantes; fuller bodied less acidic wines
  - D. Muscadet-Cotes de Grandlieu (W)**
    - On Southern bank of the Loire, Southwest of Nantes, close to the Atlantic; influence of Lac Grandlieu
  - E. Non-Muscadet ACs: Coteaux d'Ancenis (R) / Fiefs vendéens (R)**

### PRODUCTION & BUSINESS

- #3 wine production area with 4million hl; #1 producer of AC white wine; 87 ACs + 1 VdP
- 55% whites; 21% reds; 17% rosés; 7% sparkling. 13,000 family estates but growing consolidation of family holdings
- Examples of producers:
  - **Domaine Yannick Amirault – Bourgueil – 80,000btl**
    - 18ha of Cabernet Franc only; different cuvees, all w purity of fruit. Top wines: Les Malgagnes, La Petite Cave.
  - **Clos Rougeard – Anjou-Saumur – 20,000btl**
    - Owned by Foucault brothers; from old Cab Franc vines + low yields + oak barriques ageing -> concentrated Saumur-Champigny. Top wines: Les Poyeux, Le Bourg.
  - **Chateau La Roche-aux-Moines- Coulée de Serrant – Savennieres -14.5ha**
    - Acquired by ex-banker Nicolas Joly in the 70s; became the leading champion of biodynamic viticulture by applying Rudolf Steiner principles from 84 in his vineyards & publishing the results in 1997.
  - **Domaine de l'Écu - Muscadet – 120k btl**
    - Guy Bossard's biodynamic domain; full fragrant complex Muscadets that can be aged.
    - Top wines: regular Muscadet Sevre et Maine sur lie; cuvée 'terroir' wines e.g. Expression de Gneiss