
Chapter 18

The Loire Valley



Overview

Four main areas; **Central Vineyards, Touraine, Anjou-Saumur, Nantais**

No regional generic appellation - there is an IGP - **Val de Loire** - covers whole region

Rosé de Loire (Anjou)/ **Crémant de Loire** (Saumur)

Climate and Grape Growing

Climate: Overall **cool climate** but varies depending on the area:

- Central vineyards (inland) - **continental climate**
- Nantais (coastal) - **maritime climate**
- Anjou - slightly warmer and drier than expected - protected by the **Mauges Hills** - warm stony soils
- Touraine - further in - cooler/wetter/clay soils

Varying weather - vintages differ

Risks: **fungal disease** (due to rain)

Best sites: mid-slope/S-facing/sunny/dry

White Grape Varieties and Wine Styles

Sauvignon Blanc

- **Sancerre/Pouilly-Fumé** (central vineyards)
 - Chalky, well-drained soils
 - Wine = dry/high acid/green apple/wet stone/smoke (fumé)
 - Individual villages - **Chavignol/ Les Monts Damnés** = high reputation
 - Some can evolve - no ageing in most cases
 - Wine making techniques vary:
 - Fresh + fruity = pneumatic press (gentle) + stainless steel (temp controlled)
 - Some fermentation + maturation in old oak + lees = broader texture (few use new oak)
 - MLF in cooler vintages - to lower acidity
- **Menetou-Salon** (W of Sancerre/near Loire tributaries)

- Moderately priced, same style as San/PF
- **Touraine** (generic appellation)
 - SB - White Touraine - varietal label 'Sauvignon de Touraine' - less concentrated /simple /fruity

Chenin Blanc

- High acid, non-aromatic
- Grapes reach different ripeness levels throughout the season
 - Green, herbaceous = if unripe
 - Several harvesting sessions
 - Ripeness relates to style (ie, barely ripe = sparkling/ sweet = passileraige/noble rot)
 - Styles vary - even dry wines made with ripe grapes = high alcohol + some residual sugar
- (Dry) Fresh apple → tropical fruit/ steely and smoky.
- (Sweet) Apricot/citrus → honey, toast, hay with age.
- **Vouvray** (E of Tours)
 - Still → sparkling/ dry → sweet depending on the vintage
 - Cool climate/clay soil = light-med body/fresh, fruity and floral.
 - Rarely fermented/matured in oak
- **Saumur/Anjou**
 - Similar climate/soil to Vouvray
 - Saumur - traditional method sparkling
 - Anjou - dry wines, matured in oak
- **Savennières**
 - Full-body Chenin (dry)
 - Well-circulated vineyard, prevents Noble Rot - allows for ripe grapes
 - Can evolve in bottle
- **Coteaux du Layon**
 - Sweet wines
 - In the sheltered valley of **River Layon** (S of Loire) - Noble Rot develops well
 - **Quarts de Chaume/ Bonnezeaux** - own appellations - high rep sweet wines

Melon Blanc ('Muscadet' / 'Melon de Bourgogne')

- **Ripens early + frost resistant** (good for cool climate)
- Grown in Nantes - S. of Loire, near Atlantic
- Muscadet appellation (largest area)
- **Muscadet Sèvre et Maine**
 - Dry, medium alcohol (12% max)
 - Fermented in stainless steel (traditionally old oak)
 - High acid/light body/green fruits (drink young)
 - **Muscadet Sèvre et Maine Sur Lie** (speciality wine)
 - Bottled spring following vintage, winter on its lees (richer texture)
 - Handled carefully - retain delicacy/freshness

Red Grape Varieties and Wine Styles

Cabernet Franc

- **Flowers and ripens early**
- Grown in **Chinon, Bourgeuil and Saint-Nicolas-de-Bourgeuil**
 - Light, sandy soils = light, fruity wines (drink young)

- S. facing slopes + limestone, clay soil = fuller-bodied, more tannic wines
- Some oak maturation - can evolve in bottle
- **Saumur + Saumur-Champigny**
 - Lighter-body/tannin/juicy berry/floral - drink young/serve chilled
 - Some producers making fuller-bodied for ageing

Other black grape varieties

- Mainly produced Anjou-Saumur, Touraine, Sancerre
- **Anjou-Saumur**
 - **Rosé de Loire** (also from Touraine)
 - Dry, min 30% Cab Franc or Cab Sauv in blend
 - **Cabernet d'Anjou**
 - Medium-sweet, blend of Cab Franc + Cab Sauv
 - **Rosé d'Anjou**
 - Less sweet, made from **Grolleau** (local, high yielding black grape), Cab Franc, other varieties
- **Touraine**
 - A wide array of varieties
 - Dry, fresh, fruity
- **Sancerre**
 - Rosé must be from Pinot Noir
 - Pale, light-body, delicate fruit
 - Wine making; either direct press or short maceration / stainless steel, temp controlled (to retain fruit flavours)

Multiple Choice Practice Questions

1) Which grape variety is most commonly associated with the Sancerre in the Loire Valley?

- a) Sauvignon Blanc
- b) Chardonnay
- c) Chenin Blanc
- d) Pinot Noir

2) Which sub-region of the Loire Valley is renowned for its production of sparkling wines made predominantly from Chenin Blanc grapes?

- a) Anjou-Saumur
- b) Touraine
- c) Pays Nantais
- d) Vouvray

3) The Muscadet region in the Loire Valley is primarily known for the production of wines made from which grape variety?

- a) Sauvignon Blanc
- b) Chenin Blanc

- c) Melon de Bourgogne
- d) Gamay

4) What is the principal red grape variety used in the production of red wines in the Anjou-Saumur sub-region of the Loire Valley?

- a) Cabernet Franc
- b) Cabernet Sauvignon
- c) Merlot
- d) Malbec

5) Which Loire Valley appellation is famous for its production of sweet white wines made from botrytized Chenin Blanc grapes?

- a) Sancerre
- b) Pouilly-Fumé
- c) Quarts de Chaume
- d) Chinon

Answers

1. a) Sauvignon Blanc

2. d) Vouvray

3. c) Melon de Bourgogne

4. a) Cabernet Franc

5. c) Quarts de Chaume