



May 2018



Thank you for being a part of the May wine club. Your support helps sustain the work of small producers using traditional methods and following natural practices.

The recent weeks of greener, warmer spring weather is as welcome as our small allocations of the included wines. As always, the wine club includes exclusive offerings. This month is particularly laden with delicious, limited wines. They are not included just for the sake of exclusivity, but because they are consistently some of our absolute favorite wines.

By nature and nurture the Loire Valley is a beautiful place. Over 300 castles and chateaux, plus gardens, vineyards and broad expanses of cropland flank the river as it flows from Cévennes near the foot of Ont Gerbier de Jonc to the Atlantic coast. It is because of the exquisitely pastoral yet cultured landscape that the region is known as “Le Jardin de la France” – France’s garden. There is an inherent equilibrium of structure and grace throughout the region. This becomes particularly true in Cheverny, a middle Loire appellation with an emphasis on marrying regional grape varieties.

The vineyards in this area represent some of the most diverse plantings in the Loire. In the Cheverny appellation, wine law mandates the percentages of each grape variety

planted, not the percentages of those grapes going into the bottle. For example, in the crafting of white Cheverny, 60 – 84% of the vineyards must be Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Gris with Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc and Arbois/Menu Pineau making up the balance. Again, these figures do not represent the grapes in the blend, but rather, what is in the ground. Likewise, in the crafting of red Cheverny, 60 – 84% of the vineyards must be planted to Pinot Noir. Hamay can comprise 16 – 40% of the plantings with Cabernet Franc and Malbec/Cot representing less than 10% of the area under vine.

This reflects a more agriculturally-oriented view of wine production. As bucolic as it is, the Loire can get technical and political quickly. For instance, the encouragement by the appellation and the continental marketplace to grow Sauvignon Blanc pushed the native variety Romarantin to the brink of extinction. The winemakers represented here take a holistic view of farming and winemaking, and have both conformed to and challenged the appellation mandates.

Ultimately, these are delicious wines for early summer enjoyment from wonderful, small scale wineries.



Hervé Villemade, Cheverny blanc, 2016

Hervé Villemade has family roots in Cellettes, a small town in the Loire Valley of France, going back multiple generations. Since taking over in 1995, he has grown his estate to include the original 8.5ha owned by his parents, an additional 8ha that he has purchased over the years, and the difference being comprised of parcels that he rents. At the beginning, the vines were farmed conventionally (as that is the way his parents farmed) using herbicides and fungicides, and the wines were made the same way with lab yeasts and additives.

It wasn't until a few years later that he tasted wines made by Marcel Lapierre in Beaujolais and Thierry Puzelat at Clos du Tue-Bouef in nearby Les Montils, both of whom he cites as his key influences to start doing things the natural way, that his eyes were opened. Herve immediately began experimenting with zero-sulfur winemaking, but quickly realized that in order to do this, he would need higher quality fruit. This realization led him to begin the arduous task of converting the entire estate to organic farming starting in 2000 and ultimately shaping the domaine as we know it today.

All of Herve's vines fall within the Cheverny and Cour-Cheverny AOCs and are planted in a mix of clay and sandy soils with silex (flint) stones in many of the parcels and a limestone base. As mentioned, he farms organically (certified) and Herve does most of the vineyard work on his own. In the cellar Herve works with native yeasts for all fermentations in élevage is done in a range of different vessels: concrete tank, foudre, tronconic vats, neutral barrique, and even amphora. Very little SO₂ is used, if any, depending on the cuvée. Herve makes a wide range of different cuvées, all of which are stunning examples of classic, natural wines of the region. To us, they would be the closest to what these wines would have tasted like if they were made here 50 years ago.

Cheverny Blanc is a blend of Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc (the blend required by AOC law). Aged in foudre, it yields a crisp, grassy wine that is quite complex. 2016 was a very challenging year in the Loire, thanks to terrible frosts in April, and Hervé Villemade was not spared, so much so that he was forced to buy more additional grapes than usual to supplement his own harvest. While the quantity was low, like many growers, he is very satisfied with the quality, particularly with the very good acidity, which has made the wines very balanced.

A blend of 70% Sauvignon Blanc and 30% Chardonnay this wine is only produced in small quantities from vines that are between 18 and 24 years old. In 2016 some of the wine (25%) was matured in the foudre normally used for the more expensive La Bodice. The rest was matured in steel and fibreglass tanks. The result of the old wood treatment has made this a much more rounded, mellow wine than usual. In fact it is the best vintage of this wine we have ever received.

It is a fresh, lively wine with lovely fruit and a nice balancing acidity. The wine is matured on lees to provide additional complexity. The wine is unfiltered.

p.s.: Hervé also makes a Cour-Cheverny and maintains his Romarantin vines with the same aplomb as the Sauvignon blanc. ☺



Philippe Tessier, Cheverny rouge, 2017

Domaine Tessier was founded in 1961 by Roger Tessier, with his son Philippe taking the reins 20 years later in 1981. They are located in the heart of the Cheverny and Cour Cheverny AOC's and currently have 23ha of vines. They currently produce 2 different

AOC wines: Cour-Cheverny from the local grape Romorantin, white, red and rose Cheverny, all of which are blends.

The vineyard exists in a microclimate that keeps the vineyards cool, situated between the Lore River and the forest of Cheverny, Chambord and Solonge and has been Ecocert certified since 1998.

Philippe believes that a wine should be the expression of the place from which it comes and should reflect the climatic conditions of the year as well as the vigneron that produces it, while also respecting the life of the soil and the environment. He believes that it should give pleasure but must also be sound and healthy, alive and digestible and above all, it should be a natural wine.

The Cheverny rouge comes from clay and limestone soils. It is composed of 60% Gamay, 30% Pinot Noir and 10% Cot. After hand harvest, each variety is fermented separately in tank, with thoughtful technique applied to each. The gamay gets 15 days of carbonic maceration; the Pinot noir uses a third destemmed fruit, with the Cot all destemmed. This is consistently one of our favorite wines for its balance, lightness and spirited red fruit.



Clos du Tue-Boeuf, *Rouillon*, Cheverny rouge, 2016

Run by vigneron brothers Thierry and Jean-Marie Puzelat, the Clos du Tue-Boeuf is an isolated 35-hectare property of rolling hills, forests, fields and vineyards in Cheverny at the eastern edge of the Touraine region of the Loire. This *lieu-dit*'s history goes back

centuries: its name pops up in records from the Middle Ages and it is noted for the favored status of its wines under Renaissance ruler King Francis I in the early 16th century (he was a local *chateau* inhabitant). The Puzelat family's roots also run deep here in the valley of Cher, back to at least the 15th century in their home village of Les Montils. In the modern era, the Puzelat brothers have put Tue-Boeuf on the wine world map through their commitment to wines made as naturally as possible from their organically farmed, hand-harvested fruit (most of which comes from the Clos but is also in some cases sourced from friends of similar philosophy and practice).

Jean-Marie and Thierry went their separate ways early on in their pursuit of classical training in other wine regions, returning to their family estate in 1990 and 1994 respectively. They agreed from the start on cutting out all additives in the vineyard and the wines, converting fully to organics by 1996 and eliminating the use of cultured yeasts as well as sulfur almost completely. The Tue-Boeuf terroir is clay-based soil, rich in flint, limestone, iron and rocks, depending on the particular parcel, at various elevations and exposures, many of them quite cool and thus challenging for ripening. They grow a lot of Sauvignon Blanc (including some old clones like Fié Gris and Sauvignon Rose), Gamay and Pinot Noir, with smaller amounts of Menu Pineau, Chardonnay and Côt; they source a little Pineau d'Aunis and Chenin Blanc (as well as additional Sauvignon Blanc and Gamay for their true *vin de soif* bottlings, Le P'tit Blanc and Vin Rouge). Many of their vines are quite old and gradually being replanted as over time, entirely with *massale* selections from friends like Villemade, Prieuré-Roch and Philippe Tessier among others, to promote clonal diversity.

Tue-Boeuf grows 10 hectares within the Cheverny AOC in their home Clos in Les Montils and 4 more within the Touraine AOC in nearby Monthou-Sur-Bièvre, but the wines often do not qualify for either, due to the Puzelat's choices in grape varieties and winemaking techniques. In any given vintage, there may be up to two dozen different bottlings, most quite small, some highly experimental (like the very limited *quevri-* or amphora-aged wines), but mainly quite classic at their core, featuring single parcels almost exclusively, as one would expect more from a small, site-focused Burgundy grower. Within their natural-wine, Loire-rooted framework, Thierry and Jean-Marie honor the traditions of Burgundy for their whites and *cru* Beaujolais for the reds. The whites are barrel-aged on their lees with *bâtonnage* (with the exception of tank-only P'tit Blanc); the reds go through open-top, whole-cluster, semi-carbonic fermentation, followed by barrel-aging. While size and shape and type of and time in wood varies, what does not vary is the regimen of no added yeast, minimal-to-no added sulfur, and no filtration (except for gentle one on P'tit Blanc).

Over the last twenty-plus years, Tue-Boeuf has evolved from maverick to mature, into one of the standard-bearers for natural wine in the Touraine and all of France, without losing their renegade spirit (or their tongue-in-cheek humor which shows up on labels as well as in person). That Puzelat passion for their home *terroir*--all things local and Loire—is evident in the purity and personality of the wines in the bottle.

50% Pinot Noir/50% Gamay. Named for the site (which translates as "rusty" for the red tinge of the clay soils), Rouillon is a single 1.9-hectare estate plot of 20-year-old Gamay and Pinot Noir vines on flinty, limestone-rich clay soils, organically farmed and harvested by hand. Like all of the Tue-Boeuf reds, the wine goes through whole-cluster, open-top, semi-carbonic fermentation in vat; Rouillon is then pressed, aged for 6 months in *demi-muids* and bottled unfiltered with minimal sulfur. It is the only blended red in the Tue-Boeuf line-up and shows the typical Touraine earthy-smoky Gamay quality along with a pretty, floral yet more structured Pinot Noir aspect. Because Rouillon lies within the original Clos, the home estate of Tue-Boeuf in Cheverny, the full estate name features prominently at the top of the label; the wine is classified as Cheverny AOC.