

Le Rocher des Violettes

Montlouis



The Wines:

- *Montlouis Sec Cuvée La Touche Mitaine*: This wine comes from a four hectare parcel (10 acres) named Touch of the Mitten because it's cold up there during pruning season. This is Xavier's youngest parcel of Chenin (30+ years old) growing in limestone flint soil. Originally, depending on the year, one-third was raised in tank and two-thirds in three-year-old barrels, or it was raised entirely in older barrels (fatter years like '06 and '09 underwent the former, while '07 and '08 saw no steel during aging). Aging lasted six months with regular lees stirring, after which the wine was bottled to preserve fruit and elegance. By the 2010 vintage, Xavier had acquired enough barrels to put all of this cuvée into older wood for its short élevage, which helps ward off reduction, a common problem for Chenin.
- *Montlouis Cuvée La Négrette*: This is the pre-WWII old-vine cuvée, brought up in 600-liter demi-muid barrels for 18 to 20 months with regular *bâtonnage*. About 30% of those barrels are new, the rest old. The grapes come from two adjacent parcels—one of which is named Négrette—that grow in the same soil and total one and a half hectares (3.7 acres). The top soil is a mix of sand, clay and limestone, and runs about eighteen inches deep to rest on more than six feet of dense clay, which in turn rests on the tuffeau. The wine needs aeration in its youth to show its stuff and is best decanted. It is dry, richly layered and textured, and terrifically mineral.
- *Montlouis Cuvée Les Borderies*: This is Xavier's demi-sec from a one hectare (2.5 acres) parcel named Les Borderies where most of the vines date from 1922 (the average age is 80). The wine is raised for six months in older demi-muids barrels.
- *Montlouis Moelleux*: A late harvest wine coming from a 0.80 hectare parcel (2 acres) planted in the 1950s. The yields are especially low at around 20 hl/ha, and the ageing takes place in older barrels for roughly six months.
- *Pétillant Originel*: Some would call this *pétillant naturel méthode ancestrale*, which is loosely the same thing: a sparkling wine made with fermenting must that is put in the bottle with its native yeast and without any sugar additions (no chaptalization during initial fermentation, no sweet yeast liquor added for secondary in bottle, and no sweet dosage at disgorgement--the bottles are simply topped off with the same wine and corked). Indeed, *Originel* is made without any additions or modern interventions of any kind. It is absolutely natural, a requirement enshrined by its makers and, as of 2007, by law—for *Pétillant Originel* is now a legal class of wine in France (*pétillant naturel* and *méthode ancestrale* are not codified). Xavier joined three other Montlouis growers and took the legal dictates one step further by drawing up a quality charter mandating low yields, greater ripeness than normally attained for sparkling wine, and a minimum of nine months on the lees before disgorgement. Subsequently, one other grower joined their group, and currently they are the only five producers in Montlouis making *Originel*. Rocher des Violettes' is made from old-vine Chenin growing in AC Touraine, and it rests on its lees for 24 months before the first disgorgement. Normally thereafter a portion of the stock is disgorged every month until 36 months, thus a given vintage sees 12 disgorgements.

Xavier made no Pétillant in 2011 because the vintage offered inadequate acidity, and none was made in 2012 because the total volume of wine produced at the domaine was too low. He did make it in 2013, but the degree of alcohol was below the minimum decreed in the group charter, so he will label this simply as *Pétillant* rather than as *Pétillant Originel*.

- *Touraine Rouge Cabernet Franc*: Remember, Xavier made four vintages at Saint Cosme (2000-2004) and he knows how to make red wine! This comes from one hectare of vines that were planted in 1980 and is raised in older barrels for roughly 12 months.
- *Touraine Rouge Cot Vieilles Vignes*: This comes from two parcels of Malbec (locally called Cot, and the 't' is silent) totaling 1.40 hectares (3.5 acres). The vines are all very old, with the oldest section having been planted in 1891! The wine is made via whole-cluster fermentation and élevage goes for around six months in older barrels. This wine is deep dark and dense, yet surprisingly elegant and floral. Not for the shy of heart.
- *Touraine Gamay*: Xavier took his own grapes, supplemented them with grapes he bought from two other vineyards, and made just over 300 cases in 2012, the first vintage. The grapes were all de-stemmed for fermentation, and the wine was not filtered prior to bottling.

In addition, Xavier makes small amounts of Touraine Sauvignon Blanc, Touraine Rosé, and VdP Chardonnay.