

Domaine Merlin-Cherrier

Sancerre



The Wines

- *Sancerre blanc*: The *classique* wine from this producer reflects Bué's chalky terroir beautifully with its paradoxical generous precision (concentrated elegance might be a better way of saying this). This is a blend of parcels from both soil types totaling 11.16 hectares (27.5 acres).
- *Sancerre rouge*: This comes from five acres of Pinot Noir that Thierry planted back in the 1970s and '80s down slope on one of Bué's hillsides. Specifically, on the northwest side of the village, north of and below the mound known as Chêne Marchand. The soil here has more nourishing clay than Chêne Marchand, which Pinot Noir likes. In good years, this wine is raised entirely in tank; in lighter years it may see some aging in older barrels.
- *Sancerre Chêne Marchand*: Chêne Marchand is one of the crown jewel vineyards of Sancerre and is the appellation's outstanding example of *Caillottes* terroir. If ever Sancerre were to classify its vineyards, Chêne is a certain candidate for grand cru status. The vineyard grows on the western plateau above Bué where the sun always shines if it is shining anywhere in the neighborhood, and this plateau has supported vines for many a century—possibly as far back as the Roman Occupation. There are higher hills immediately to the north in Bué where the *terres blanches* are; the mound-like Chêne Marchand comes off of them.

The name translates as *wood merchant* and one story has it that wine merchants conducted their business with growers under an oak tree that grew in the vineyard in the Middle Ages. Much more likely, it's a variation on *Choix du Marchand*, or choice of merchant, coming from the 18th and 19th centuries when the wine of Chêne Marchand was usually the top pick of the wines of Bué by that era's professionals. Chêne, by this account, refers to a path or route, a path that led discerning merchants to wine coming from Bué's most famous vineyard.

Thierry has two parcels in Chêne Marchand that total 0.84 hectares, or two acres (the surface of Chêne adds up to 30 hectares and makes up 10% of Bué's total surface of vines). The smaller parcel belonged to his grandfather, and was worn out by the time Thierry inherited it. He ripped up the diseased vines and planted various grasses and grains to replenish and aerate the soil, and he did this every year for an astonishing ten years. Today this parcel grows his best vines. Production averages 550 cases per year.

The wine from his two parcels is made in vat and normally with native yeast, resting on its fine lees for 12 to 14 months. It is bottled without a cold stabilization (the wine can throw tartaric crystals—and would that more wine did as this is a sign of quality) and with a light filtration. It's an immensely elegant, long, and mineral Sancerre. In riper years, the wine can be exotic with notes of white flowers, hazelnuts, and honey; in leaner years the minerality and length carry the day.