

Le Rocher des Violettes Montlouis



For a young man from the north of France, Xavier Weiskopf has a remarkably precocious track record in the world of wine. He went to school in Chablis, where his passion for the vine took root and led him to the wine school in Beaune. After earning a degree in viticulture and enology, he went to work for the dynamic, hard-driving Louis Barruol at Château de Saint Cosme in Gigondas. He quickly became Louis' *chef du cave*, and made four vintages there. Louis told me in no uncertain terms that Xavier was the best he'd ever had.

In January 2005, Xavier bought 22 acres of vines in the Saint Martin le Beau sector of Montlouis and an enormous, raw 15th century stone cellar—originally a quarry dug deep into the Loire's chalk limestone bank in Amboise. Since that time he has increased his holdings to 32 acres of vines, split between AC Montlouis (22 acres) and AC Touraine (10 acres). The vines are scattered about in various parcels and were planted at different times, but the majority were put into the ground before WWII. There's Chenin, followed by small amounts of Cabernet Franc, Chardonnay, Grolleau for rosé, and Malbec (Cot).

Montlouis faces Vouvray across the broad Loire. These are Touraine's two great white wine appellations, and both have plateaus where most of the vineyards grow high above the river. Montlouis has somewhat more sand and less clay in its soils and its wines, very generally, can consequently be fresher and straighter, requiring more time in bottle to round out. Vouvray's advantage in clay favors botrytis, which can add any number of layers of fat to a wine.

The other thing about Montlouis is that it is roughly one-fifth the size of its illustrious neighbor, and until the AC laws created "Montlouis" in 1939 its wines were sold as Vouvray. Ever since, Montlouis has been overshadowed, but these days this underdog AC has become a hotbed for Touraine's leading young Turks (in part because of less expensive vineyards). Enter Xavier.

He's a quiet man who knows what he wants to do and how to go about it. He left the Rhône in favor of the Loire because of his love of Chenin. He converted to organic farming in 2009, and now plows his rows and doesn't use herbicides, pesticides or chemical fertilizers. He prunes his younger vines for low yields of 30-35 hectoliters per hectare (the old vines give about 25 hl/ha), and harvests by hand. He favors 500-liter demi-muid barrels over steel tanks for the exchange of oxygen the wood permits, which is particularly useful for Chenin because its wine is prone to reduction. He's careful to preserve fruit without letting oak intrude; he likes his wines to be fresh, mineral, and long and vertical rather than fat. He's very much of a young *vigneron* to watch.

In 2014 Xavier moved to new digs in Dierre, next to Saint Martin le Beau in the southwest sector of Montlouis, to be next to his vines. He put in a new cellar, burrowing into the chalk hillside to do so. He also revamped the house. Upon exposing a timber, he serendipitously discovered that a carpenter had written: *Constructed in 1864, a good year for bread and wine!*

<http://www.lerocherdesviolettes.com>

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