

Le Rocher des Violettes

Montlouis



The Wines:

- *Montlouis Sec Cuvée La Touche Mitaine*: From a seven-and-a-half acre parcel of Chenin named 'Touch of the Mitten' because it's cold up there during pruning season. Planted primarily in 1979, this is Xavier's youngest parcel of Chenin, growing in limestone flint soil. This is normally raised entirely in older barrels, although the very productive year of 2015 outpaced his supply of barrels so a third was raised in steel. The *élevage* goes for six months with regular lees stirring, after which the wine is bottled to preserve fruit and elegance. Production averages 1,875 cases.
- *Montlouis Cuvée La Négrette*: This is the pre-WWII old-vine Chenin cuvée, brought up in demi-muid barrels for 18 to 20 months with regular *bâtonnage*. About 30% of those barrels are new. The grapes come from two adjacent parcels, one of which is named Négrette (nothing to do with the grape in the Southwest), that total 3.7 acres. The topsoil 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. Production averages 450 cases.
- *Montlouis Cuvée Les Borderies*: This is a common vineyard name, referring to--you guessed it--borders. In this case, the parcel is up against the Forest of Amboise, along the northern edge of this sector of the Montlouis appellation. Xavier has three contiguous parcels of Chenin here, one planted in 1992, another in 1965, and the third pre-World War II. The wine is raised for six months in older demi-muid barrels. The range for residual sugar for demi-sec is 8-30 g/l; Les Borderies stays around 10 g/l, hence the *tendre* designation, which is the informal class between sec and demi-sec. 1,000 cases annually.
- *Montlouis Le Grand Poirier Moelleux*: Xavier makes this late harvest wine only in good years. Grand Poirier is the name of a parcel located on sandy top soils sitting on top of clay. He has four plantations here, and the vines are between 40 and 70 years old. The wine is raised in 500 and 600-liter barrels. In 2015 the residual sugar level was 62 g/l but SO₂ additions were relatively low, thanks in part to a relatively early bottling (May 2017). This wine was not made in 2016 or in 2017.
- *Touraine Rosé*: Pinot Noir with 25% Cot and 25% Grolleaux: These grapes all come from Xavier's own vines. He raises the wine in steel tanks and makes around 200 cases each year.
- *Vin de France Cabernet Franc*: After vintage 2016, any 100% Cabernet Franc wine made outside of the appellations of Bourgueil, St-Nicolas de Bourgueil, Chinon, and Saumur must be classified *vin de France* rather than AOP Touraine. Cabernet under the appellation of Touraine has to now be blended with Cot and/or Gamay, and Xavier wants a pure cab franc. He has always made a 100% cab franc from a 2.5-acre parcel planted in 1980 and beginning with vintage 2017 he is blending this with 2.5 acres' worth of old vine cab franc that he buys in Chinon from a walled parcel in the commune of Ligré. This is raised in older barrels and production averages 650 cases.

- *Touraine rouge Côt Vieilles Vignes*: Cot, with a silent "t," is the local name for Malbec. How it came to be grown in Touraine is a mystery, but it's been there for some time. François 1er, France's first king during the first half of the 1500s, is said to have favored Cot above all other wine. Xavier's wine comes from five acres divided into seven parcels, the youngest of which is more than 70 years old and the oldest of which was planted in 1891. He makes the wine with whole clusters and raises it for roughly six months in older barrels. It is deep, dark, and dense, yet surprisingly elegant and floral. Production averages 450 cases.
- *Touraine rouge Pinot Noir*: Xavier planted these vines in 2011 from *sélection massale* cuttings taken from Comte Armand's Clos Epenots. Beginning in 2017, Xavier began to work with up to a third of whole clusters during the fermentation of this wine to gain body and texture. Vineyard surface is three-quarters of an acre. 100 cases annually.
- *Pétillant Originel*: Some would call this *pétillant naturel* or *méthode ancestrale*, which is loosely the same thing: a sparkling wine made with fermenting must that is put in bottle with its native yeast and without any sugar additions (no chaptalization at 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, 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*. Xavier's is made from old-vine Chenin growing in AC Touraine, and it rests on its lees for 24 months before the first disgorgement. Thereafter a portion of the stock is disgorged every two months until 36 months, thus a given vintage sees six disgorgements.
- *Vin de France Chenin Blanc*: One hand giveth, another taketh away. In 2016 frost decimated the crop in Montlouis, so much so that the INAO granted special dispensation to the appellation's growers that allowed them to buy grapes or must that year without the normal *négociant* license. These farmers needed something to sell, after all, in order to eat. To his relief, Xavier managed to buy must from a grower in Vouvray. To his disbelief, he then learned that he couldn't label it as such because the syndicate in Vouvray had passed an ordinance forbidding any use of the appellation name for a wine that is not made...within the appellation. Vouvray decided recently to jealously guard its turf, and to hell with the fact that wine made across the river in Montlouis used to be called Vouvray before the appellations came into being. Thus here we have a lowly Vin de France wine, a one-off, made in a year of frost from grapes grown organically in a patch of ground in Vouvray. But tell no one.