

Decanter EXPERT'S CHOICE

Sancerre alternatives

Pouilly-Fumé and Menetou-Salon are almost indistinguishable from Sancerre in youth, says Christelle Guibert; only with time do terroir differences show



IT'S NOT SURPRISING to hear that Sauvignon Blanc makes up 75% of wine from the Central Loire. Two names are synonymous with it: Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé. But now the smaller appellations, which have been living in the shadow of the two big boys, are starting to see the light.

Sancerre was the front-runner in selling wines to the on-trade in France. Whether this was this because it was the largest appellation, or because of the quality of the wines, or the association with the beautiful medieval hilltop village, or simply because its producers were more active in promoting their wines, is not clear. Probably it was all of the above. Pouilly-Fumé, the second largest appellation, was not far behind and became very popular in the early 1980s.

The main soils of both appellations are limestone, flint and Kimmeridgian marl. The first produces wines that are more approachable when young, while wines from flint and Kimmeridgian marl require more time to express the terroir. I was lucky enough to taste a 10-year-old Pouilly-Fumé from Domaine Jean Pabiot & Fils during my last visit, and the wine still tasted fresh, with aromas of truffle oil. Some producers like to blend the three terroirs while others bottle them individually. Menetou-Salon, Sancerre's neighbour to the east, is gaining popularity and can rival the more established names. The soils are more homogenous; there is only limestone, dating back to the Jurassic period.

The three appellations are similar and when the wines are put side by side and tasted blind, it would be almost impossible to differentiate them, especially when young.

'It's still early days for Reuilly and Quincy: it's only in the last 20 years that attention has shifted from apples to vines'

With time the terroir becomes more predominant as well as the signature of the producer.

Quincy, Reuilly and Coteaux du Giennois are still very young appellations. In the 1970s, apples were the main crop in Reuilly and Quincy and it's only in the past 20 years that vineyards became dominant, with work to identify the best terroir. It's still early days for both appellations and this might explain why the wines express the fruit rather than a sense of place. Overall, they are lighter in style and haven't yet got the complexity of the three leaders.

Coteaux du Giennois is definitely the dark horse of the Loire; it was renowned for red wines until recently, but a new generation of producers have started crafting some pretty good examples. With time, these wines will easily rival those from the main three appellations.

The Central Loire isn't resting on its laurels. In 1994, Sicavac, a private wine laboratory, was established by producers. As well as analysing 40 million bottles a year, it provides bespoke advice in the vineyards and wineries. This is unique to this region and, especially in the past 10 years, this laboratory has played a key part in improving wine quality. 'Since the creation of Sicavac, the use of chemicals by the cooperative has been reduced by 50%,' commented Bernard Daulny, the lab's founder.

Christelle Guibert is Decanter's tastings director

These wines were a selection of UK-available wines tasted blind during a visit to Central Loire in June 2012.



**Domaine Roger Champault,
Le Clos de la Cure 2011** 17.75 (92)

£15.99-£16.99 *Butlers Wine Cellar, Domaine Direct, Richard KIM*

Forward aromas of passionfruit and citrus. There's a nice touch of honey on the palate, and it's fine and textural with nice weight and vibrant, ripe fruit notes. **Drink** 2013-2014 **Alc** 13%



La Tour St-Martin, Morogues 2011 17.5 (91)

£14.50 *The Wine Reserve*
From Kimmeridgian marl soil, plenty of floral notes with some almond/marzipan hints and classic gooseberry aromas. Well-developed on the palate with vibrant, ripe yet fresh fruit characters. **Drink** 2013-2014 **Alc** 13.1%



Domaine de Chatenoy 2011 17.5 (91)

£13 *Great Western Wines*
Expressive and fruit-driven. Fresh on the palate with citrus and grassy characters, and wrapped with crisp acidity and nice layers of richness and complexity. **Drink** 2013-2014 **Alc** 13%



**Cave Gilbon, Clos des Petites Croix,
Domaine de Beaurepaire 2011** 17 (90)

£11 *Hedonist*
Lots of delicate fruit with notes of grapefruit and citrus. Nice weight on palate with vibrant fruit characters and a nice minerality on the finish. **Drink** 2013-2014 **Alc** 13%



Christian Millet 2011 16 (86)

£14.75 *Berry Bros & Rudd*
Very fresh fruit with notes of apple and citrus and a hint of herbaceousness. Quite fleshy on the palate, with plenty of vibrant, ripe white-fruits character and crisp acidity. **Drink** 2013 **Alc** 13%

Reuilly



**Domaine Alain et Matthieu
Mabilot 2011** 16 (86)

£10.60 *Goedhuis*
Good expression of fruit with notes of gooseberries and white flowers. Fine palate with direct acidity, supported by a herbaceous character. **Drink** 2013 **Alc** 13%



**Domaine de Reuilly,
Les Coignons 2011** 15.5 (85)

£14.25 *Berry Bros & Rudd*
Fruity nose with rich apple and elderflower aromas. Full-flavoured palate with elegance and

Coteaux du Giennois



Domaine de Villargeau 2010 18 (93)

£7.95-£9.99 *Majestic, The Wine Society*
Classic gooseberry and candied almond, hint of smokiness. Clean and crisp palate, ripe fruit,



**Domaine Poupat et Fils,
Rivotte 2011** 16 (86)

£14.50 *Peter Watts*
Some savoury notes, herbaceous with green-pea aromas allied with minerals. Elegant and