

PET-NAT & CIE

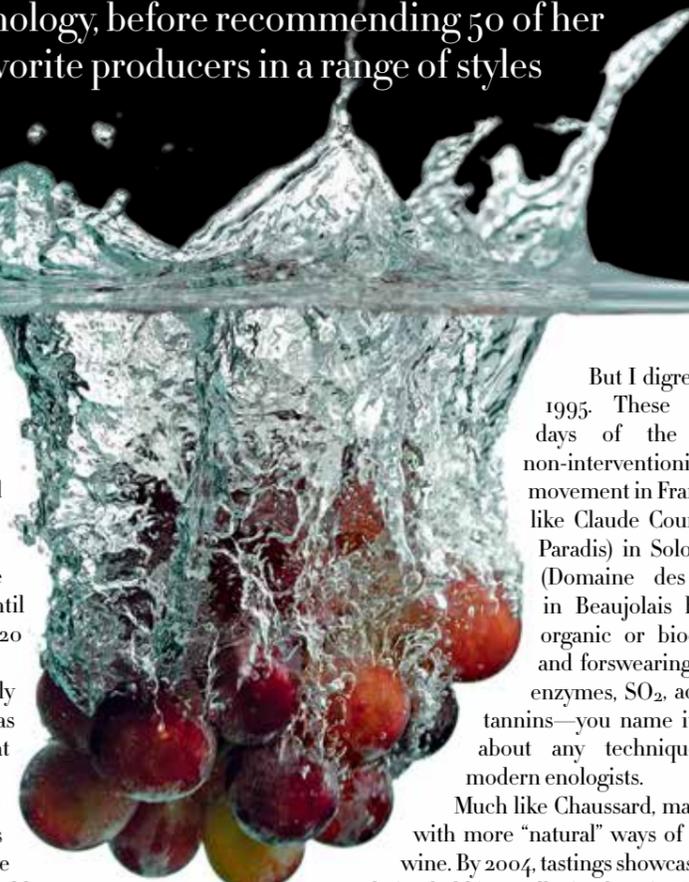
Over the past 20 years, the number and quality of back-to-the-future bubbly have risen spectacularly as producers have striven for more “natural” ways of making sparkling wine. Jacqueline Friedrich explains their many attractions, as well as their often confusing terminology, before recommending 50 of her favorite producers in a range of styles

One slate-gray Saturday in March 1995, the new generation of Vouvray winemakers was holding its annual tasting in the Cave de la Bonne Dame, a 15th-century troglodyte cave carved deep into the hillside and hollowed out successively until its consecutive caverns occupied 5,920 sq ft (550 sq m) of cool, dark space.

There was much to taste, mostly '93s and early-drinking '94s, as well as older vintages. By and by, I stopped at the stand of Domaine de la Saboterie, whose owner Christian Chaussard amused me because, despite his relative youth, he had adopted the folkloric spiel of a canny old-timer. And he always wore a *béret Basque*.

Chaussard was showing five organic wines. One was entirely new to his lineup. It was a '93 that, after filtration and with 17g of residual sugar, had refermented in bottle. He called it a *pétillant naturel*. Frankly, on first taste, it was only mildly interesting. I liked the fruit but was disturbed by a strong oxidative note. Subsequent versions were far better and Chaussard's *pétillant naturel* became something of a cult wine. Friends who lived near me in the Chinon-Bourgueil area would serve it at dinner parties, where it was drunk with great relish.

For a Vouvray to re-ferment was nothing new. Vouvray had always had a tendency to *pétiller* or *moustiller*—to sparkle as the weather warmed up. And the phenomenon was not unique to Vouvray. Wines bottled with this springtime fizz were often called *méthode ancestrale* or *rurale*, notably in regions like Limoux, where in 1531 the monks of the Benedictine Abbey of St-Hilaire made a white wine that bubbled up naturally after it had been bottled.



But I digress. Back to March 1995. These were the early days of the hyper-naturalist, non-interventionist winemaking movement in France, when outliers like Claude Courtois (Cailloux du Paradis) in Sologne and JJ Brun (Domaine des Terres Dorées) in Beaujolais began opting for organic or biodynamic farming and forswearing industrial yeasts, enzymes, SO₂, added sugar, added tannins—you name it—as well as just about any technique counseled by modern enologists.

Much like Chaussard, many began fiddling with more “natural” ways of making sparkling wine. By 2004, tastings showcasing such bubbly were being held in small wine bars in Paris. Usually called something along the lines of *Tout en Bulles*, they grouped a half-dozen or a dozen like-minded vigneron.

And a mere decade later, the making of new styles of sparkling wine had blossomed into a trend. Last summer a festival called *Bulles au Centre* was held in the provincial town of Montrichard in the Loire Valley. More than 50 winemakers—mostly from the Loire but also from Burgundy, Alsace, Gaillac, and Spain—poured their new-wave, back-to-the-future bubbly. Italy and California have joined the pet-nat movement in a big way. And when I was casting a wide net in France to sample as many as possible, I simply had to stop after several months—there were far too many.

White, rosé, even red, dry, half-sweet, or fully sweet—these wines are pure, often organic or biodynamic. Most are artisanal, hand-crafted. And over the past decade, the “crafting” has greatly improved. Few of the wines I sampled—and there were several hundred—were funky or flawed. Most were tasty and fun, and a good proportion were excellent by any standards.

Indeed, I found that wines from more prestigious terroirs—for example, those of Vincent Carême and Sebastien Brunet in Vouvray, Xavier Weisskopf (Rocher des Violettes) and Damien Delecheneau (Grange Tiphaine) in Montlouis, Domaine les Grandes Vignes in Bonnezeaux (Coteaux du Layon), and Christian Binner, whose vineyards include several of Alsace's grands crus—expressed the nobility of their origins. Some were racy and/or elegant, many were intriguingly nuanced, and some stood out by sheer force of character. Wines from inspired producers in less celebrated terroirs—like Domaine Plageoles in Gaillac and Domaine des Grottes in Beaujolais—can also be devastatingly delicious. Usually selling for less than €15 a bottle, they are better than many mass-produced Champagnes that sell for a lot more. And most Proseccos would not stand a chance in a taste-off.

Sometime before the turn of the century, the term pet-nat (or pet'nat, among several other variants) crept into the vocabulary. Some say Christian Chaussard coined it. In any case, it seemed perfectly normal, given the growing popularity of this style of wine, as well as the French penchant for shortening words, particularly nouns. (For example, you begin your day with *p'tit dej* instead of *petit déjeuner*; you wish a friend *bon anniv.*, omitting the *ersaire*, and later meet at a *resto*.) *Et voilà*: pet-nat.

But not all of these “natural” bubbly call themselves pet-nat or even *pétillant naturel*, *pétillant originel*, or *moustillant*. A growing number use the term *méthode ancestrale*; some use nothing at all, other than a whimsical invented name, often playing off the word *bulle* (bubble). Additionally, some fall within the legal guidelines of established French wine appellations, while others are Vin de Table (VdT) or Vin de France (VdF). Yet all are part of the ever-expanding pet-nat universe, an uncharted landscape. And given the potential for confusion, it's worth taking a closer look at the operative terminology.

What's in the names?

It makes sense to focus first on the words *pétillant* and *naturel*, then on the term *méthode ancestrale*. *Pétillant* would seem easy enough: *vitis.org* defines it as a lightly effervescent wine prepared according to the *méthode champenoise* (now more correctly referred to as the *méthode traditionnelle*). On the other hand, *dico-du-vin.com* defines it as a wine falling between a *vin perlant* (pressure between 0.5 and 1 atmosphere [atm]) and a *vin mousseux* (above 3 atm). All of the vintners and enologists I have consulted tell me that the force of the bubbles in a legal *pétillant* is no higher than 2 atm but that there is a gray area—in other words, a tolerance—for wines with up to 3.5 atm. One thing that is clear, however, is the mouthfeel of *pétillants*; they are so subtly bubbly that they seem creamy, and they flow over the palate gently yet persuasively.

And now the most controversial, disputed word in contemporary winedom: natural or *naturel*. There are no legal or binding definitions. Indeed, the Association des Vins Naturels has demanded that INAO weigh in on the question. For the time being, however, consumers must rely on the good faith of the winemaker. Happily, it seems that those who label their wines *pétillant naturel* generally merit our trust; they rely only on natural sugars and endogenous yeast. And all seem to practice organic or biodynamic farming, whether or not they've been certified.

To this category we can add Montlouis *Pétillant Originel*, an AOC created in 2007. Distinct from Montlouis's traditional *Pétillant*, it uses the principles of pet-nat as the basis for a thoroughly dry, mildly sparkling wine that is absolutely natural: a product of the grapes harvested and no more. It is illegal to add either sugar or yeast at any stage of the wine's production.

As Damien Delecheneau of Domaine Grange Tiphaine, which produces *Pétillant Originel*, explained: “It dawned on me that I don't add sugar or yeast to my still wines, so why do I add them to my *Pétillant*? This was in 2005. That's when a group of us started talking about *Pétillant Originel*, although we called it ‘Pet'Nat’ at the time.”

Delecheneau, along with Lise and Bertrand Jousset and Xavier Weisskopf (Rocher des Violettes), drew up a quality charter with exigent requirements. In addition to abolishing the addition of yeast and sugar, the charter mandates low yields, greater ripeness of the grapes than is anticipated for most sparkling wines, and aging for a minimum of nine months before disgorgement.

The goal was to make a pet-nat that was not only ultra-pure but also a full-fledged wine—ripe, vinous, consistent in quality, and fine enough to serve in Michelin-starred restaurants, but reasonably priced. (Most sell in France for \$10–15.) “It's very difficult and very risky,” Delecheneau says. “The danger is that the wine may stop fermenting.” Less consequential risks include off-flavors resembling beer or cider. Here are the guidelines.

- 1 Grape: Chenin Blanc
- 2 Maximum yield: 52hl/ha (less than the legal limit for Montlouis *Pétillant* and the same as the legal limit on Montlouis still wines)
- 3 Minimum potential alcohol: 11.5% ABV
- 4 Hand-harvesting into small crates
- 5 No destemming or crushing; gentle pressing
- 6 No added yeasts; no added sugar; no added enzymes
- 7 *Tirage* when the wine has about 14g/l residual sugar in order to reach a pressure inside the bottle of 3.5 atm or less
- 8 No *liqueur de tirage* and no *liqueur d'expédition*
- 9 Minimum aging: 9 months *sur lattes*, on the lees of the second fermentation

The rules are admirably clear and very strict—so much so, in fact, that the very producers who drew up the quality charter would now like a little wiggle room, a *tolérance*. For example, in the awful vintage that was 2013, Xavier Weisskopf's *pétillant* fell 0.5% short of the required 11.5% alcohol and was not eligible for the *Pétillant Originel* AOC. Similarly, in 2014, Delecheneau's *pétillant* exceeded the 3.5 atm limit by 0.1 or 0.2 and so had to be sold under the traditional Montlouis *Pétillant* label.

The gamble was more than worth a couple of snags now and then, however. These natural *pétillants* are excellent—urbane, polished, pure, and delicious. And the law has created a precedent that other regions might do well to follow—an opinion that the morass of confusion surrounding who may and who may not use the term *méthode ancestrale* and under what circumstances surely confirms.

Could there be a winemaking term more evocative than *méthode ancestrale*, an expression imbued with folklore, with dreams of an idyllic past? The new wine bubbles up of its own volition as winter turns to spring. A recipe so simple and natural, what could be clearer or purer?

It turns out that post-World War II technology complicated what had previously been so unaffected and precise. Further, the term *méthode ancestrale* is currently muscling its way on to a lot of labels, legally or not. We've come a long way from the days of spontaneous fermentation in bottle once the weather warmed up, for we now have new tools—from industrial yeasts, to temperature control and refrigerated tanks; from filtration, to alginate beads—that accelerate the descent of dead yeast cells and thus expedite the process of disgorging.

Let's start with four regions—Limoux, Gaillac, Bugey-Cerdon, and the Dioise (Clairette de Die)—where the use of the term *méthode ancestrale* delineates a specific INAO-consecrated appellation. While not identical, the laws are strikingly similar. Indeed, it seems that the only differences between the rules governing these *méthodes ancestrales* and those governing, say, *méthode traditionnelle* is that the *prise de mousse* in the former must be produced by the sugars from the grapes. Additionally, *dosage* or *liqueur d'expédition* seems to be prohibited. There is no interdiction, however, on the addition of yeasts. Both the must and the wine may be filtered—before fermentation, before bottling for the *prise de mousse*, and/or before disgorging. Indeed, for Cerdon, the final filtration is obligatory.

As Carole Fontanier, who is communications director of the Southwest Wines Interprofessional Organization-Gaillac, explained to me: “The *méthode ancestrale* (old-fashioned method), also called the *méthode gaillacoise* (Gaillac method), is an original technique used to make sparkling wine. It involves bottling the wine in advance, before the end of the alcoholic fermentation of the grape must. The fermentation is therefore completed in the bottle, forming bubbles naturally. The level of residual sugar while bottling will determine the type of sparkling wine: dry, off-dry, or sweet. Historically, this rural method was the only technique used to make sparkling wine before discovering the *méthode champenoise* (Champagne method). Today, the *méthode ancestrale* remains the main process used by Gaillac winemakers to make sparkling wines.” She added that producers may add yeasts and SO₂, and that filtration might occur in order to stop the initial fermentation. And, indeed, of the 18 samples I received from Gaillac, only three used natural yeasts throughout.

Cerdon's regulations differ slightly. By law, the must decants for 36 hours, after which it is poured into refrigerated tanks where the wine ferments at between 41 and 50°F (5–10°C) for about a month. When the wine reaches 6% to 7% ABV, fermentation is stopped by lowering the temperature to 28°F (–2°C). The wine then undergoes a first filtration and is bottled for the *prise de mousse*. The bottles are stored standing in a cellar warm enough to provoke the refermentation. After several months, the dead yeast cells are removed by emptying the bottles, filtering the wine, and refilling the (washed) bottles, which are then cork-finished. (It should be noted that there are other levels of Cerdon that allow for much more intervention but they may not use the term *méthode ancestrale*.)

Evidently, this was not anyone's great-great-grandfather's *méthode ancestrale*, the spontaneous and 100% natural fermentation that gave birth to pet-nat. Yet a number of producers in these regions do make *méthode ancestrale* wines that might rightly be considered pet-nats—the Plageoles in Gaillac, for example.

One reason producers who essentially make pet-nats might opt to use the term *méthode ancestrale*, however, is that it allows the finished wine to exceed 3.5 atm. Indeed, as Carole Fontannier points out, most *Méthode Ancestrale Gaillacoise* have between 4 and 6 atm and, in any event, must have more than 3.

So, perhaps it's not surprising that *méthodes ancestrales* have been popping up all over France. The question then becomes: Who can use the term and under what circumstances? There are those who claim that the term is limited to producers within existing AOCs, but that doesn't seem to prevent its use on labels of VdFs, VdTs, or wines whose labels make no mention of region or appellation. “The term is used a bit everywhere, for everything and nothing,” enologist Dominique Maisondieu told me. “It's ambiguous. For the moment, Fraudes [France's Répression des Fraudes] hasn't said or done anything about those [in the natural-wine movement] because it's small. And then there's Europe to complicate matters.”

Maisondieu works for the Services Viticoles des Sablonnières in Le-Puy-Notre Dame in the Saumur area. The group specializes in sparkling-wine production and advises and helps clients with every stage of production—from the clarification of the base wine, to the *prise de mousse*, to riddling and disgorging. They also have vast cellars in which clients can stock their sparkling wines *sur lattes* until they are ready to be disgorged. Such enterprises are hardly new. They exist throughout France, particularly in regions that are producing a fair amount of sparkling wine. In Gaillac, for example, La Coopérative Abbaye St-Michel intervenes at some point in the making of all but two of the region's *méthodes ancestrales*.

TASTING NOTES

To research this story, I tasted several hundred wines. Unless otherwise indicated, the tastings occurred from February 2015 through March 2016, though a handful were tasted from the late spring of 2014 through November of that year.

Of the wines I sampled, I've included here only those I would buy—at least to drink by the glass—from some 50 producers. And all the wines below were made without the addition of sugar or yeast. Most are organic or biodynamic.

An increasing proportion of the wines are finished with cork and muselet, though many are still crown-capped. In either case, but particularly with crown-capped pet-nats, it's a good idea to open them in the kitchen and to place a towel under the bottle. The spume can be ferocious.

One or two of the wines I sampled were cloudy (aeration, however, dispersed the haze); some had deposits or particles, most likely of dead yeast cells or anthocyanins—none of which affected the flavor of the wines.

Further to my comments on the mouthfeel of pet-nats above, I also found that sparkling wines with less than 4 atm were more “wine,” while *méthodes ancestrales* with increased pressure tended to be more about the bubbles. In either case, serve the wines very cold. Know that they are not only delightful apéritifs but can accompany many dishes. I've made some suggestions in the notes below.

Since so many of the samples came from the Loire Valley, I've organized the notes as follows: Loire/Touraine; Loire/Anjou-Saumur; Non-Loire, including Gaillac, Limoux, Cerdon, and the Massif Central.

Why, you may ask, is there such a preponderance of wines from the Loire Valley? Here's my theory: The Loire Valley was one of the hotbeds of the natural-wine movement. Additionally, the Loire Valley is second only to Champagne in the production of sparkling wine, so it is very much part of the local landscape. Many producers have always had *mousseux* or *crémants* as part of their lineup. And there are many sparkling-wine specialists in the region to assist in the various stages of production.

LOIRE/TOURAINÉ

Domaine Ansodelles (Bourgueil)

In 2012, Anne Rouxelin and Sophie Raimbault met while studying at the Lycée Viticole d'Amboise. By 2014 they had decided to create their own domaine and invested in a 4.6ha (11.4-acre) property in Bourgueil, which they dubbed Domaine d'Elles. Threatening legal letters from Hachette-Filipachi, the owners of *Elle* magazine, followed and the name was changed to Ansodelles (combining the first two letters of their given names). The word “elle” finds its way into much of what they do, as in Etincelles Rosé VdF Pétillant Naturel. It's an organic pet-nat with 12.5% ABV and surely made from Cabernet Franc, the grape variety that monopolizes their vines. Pure and mineral, with bright citrus flavors and a relatively long mineral finish, it might be a lovely option for eno-problematic foods like smoked salmon. I'd also like it with Iberian or Serrano ham.

Michel Autran (Vouvray)

A former medical doctor, Michel Autran, who worked for many years as François Pinon's right-hand man, obtained a bit less than 4ha (10 acres) of vines in the commune of Noizay, which he immediately set about converting to biodynamics. Along with his range of Vouvrays, he makes two pet-nats—a Chenin and a Gamay. The 2013 Chenin is pure, strong, and vibrant, with flavors of lemon pulp and zest. It's mineral, fresh, invigorating, and long a real wine. The off-dry 2014 Gamay had 10g/l residual sugar. It was sudsy and young, with flavors of hard candy. It still needed a wee bit of time.

Domaine du Beaumont/Matthieu Cosme (Vouvray)

Like Michel Autran, Matthieu Cosme belongs to *Les Affranchis de la Loire*. It's at their yearly tastings that I manage to follow his evolution, as well as that of his brother Thierry, both of whom are in the new generation of Vouvraillons. Thierry, to my great regret, never brings his pet-nat to the tastings. But Matthieu does. The 2013, a pure Chenin and a VdF, was bottled after three months with no SO₂. A vigorous wine with vibrant acidity (vintage *oblige*), it seemed to have a touch of residual sugar rounding out the Chenin fruit, and a satisfyingly long finish.

Pierre-Olivier Bonhomme (Touraine)

After working as an apprentice at Clos Tue-Boeuf with Thierry and Jean-Marie Puzelat, Bonhomme started a small négociant business with Thierry. The two bought grapes from organic growers in the environs, and the wines carried both their names on their labels. In 2014 Jean-Marie Puzelat retired. Thierry returned to Tue-Boeuf to work full time, leaving the négociant business to Bonhomme, whose name is now the only one on the labels. This was the case with a 2013 Pétillant Naturel Rosé “Vin Pétillant de France” made from Cabernet Franc. A pale salmon pink with a nicely fruity nose, the wine's

high acidity was no surprise given the vintage. What was a surprise—a very pleasant one—was the ripeness of the fruit, making for a clean, fresh, delicately flavored pet-nat.

Domaine de la Bonnelière/Marc Plouzeau (Chinon)

Marc Plouzeau took over the 20ha (50-acre) family domaine, converted from conventional to organic viticulture, and now produces several cuvées of Chinon, a Touraine Sauvignon, and two *pétillants naturels* VdF—Perle Sauvage Rosé, from Cabernet Franc, and Perle Sauvage Blanc, from Chenin. The wines are lightly filtered before bottling for the *prise de mousse*, and Plouzeau keeps some of the natural yeasts as insurance. The wines are stored *sur lattes* for a minimum of a year. He produces about 12,000 bottles of pet-nat a year. The 2014 Rosé was fleshy and nicely balanced, with amiable pale red fruit. A good all-purpose bubbly. The 2014 Blanc was as tart and tongue-smacking as fresh grapefruit at breakfast, with tangy glints of physalis and just-ripe mango.

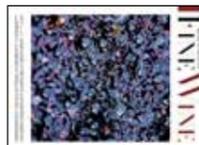
Domaine des Capriades

Pascal Potaire, who had previously worked for several wineries in Vouvray and the Cher Valley, created this domaine in 1997, having found a couple of hectares of vines he could buy. He supplemented his own production by buying the equivalent of 5–6ha (12.5–15 acres) of grapes from growers who farm organically. Potaire, who says he was influenced by Christian Chaussard, may be unique in that he produces only sparkling wine in the pet-nat style—no added sugar, yeasts, or SO₂. In 2011 Potaire was joined by Moses Gaduche and the domaine now produces 25,000 to 35,000 bottles of organic pet-nat a year, all disgorged by hand and finished with crown caps.

I last tasted their wines in April 2014 at Les Affranchis de la Loire's event in Paris where Gaduche presented four wines. First came two dry versions from 2013—one made from 100% Chenin Blanc and the second a blend of Chenin Blanc with 30% Cabernet Franc vinified as a white. Each was so reduced it was impossible to discern anything save a bit of lemon-accented acidity in the pure Chenin. Two vintages of their popular cuvée Piège à Filles (Girl Trap) were more, well, seductive. The blend changes with the vintage but the wine always has residual sugar which, they feel, makes women like it. The 2012, a rosé, that was 50% Gamay, the rest Cot, Cabernet Franc, and Pineau d'Aunis, had 30 to 40g/l of residual sugar. (Potaire feels residual sugar preserves the aromas of Gamay.) The wine was pure and mineral and sweet. The 2013, a white, was chiefly Chardonnay. Rather turbulent on the day of the tasting, it promised to be a fun wine-bar discovery once it settled down.

Domaine Vincent Carême (Vouvray)

A leading member of the new generation of Vouvray vigneron, Vincent Carême created his 17ha (42-acre) domaine in 1999 after studying at the Lycée Agricole d'Amboise. Viticulture is organic. Aside from producing the full range of non-bubbly Vouvrays, Carême makes 10,000 to 12,000 bottles a year of pet-nat, which spends about 20 months *sur lattes*, usually has 10–15g/l residual sugar, and which he calls alternately Vouvray Ancestrale or Pétillant Ancestrale, because the pressure is generally higher than 3.5 atm. The 2014—with 13% ABV, 4g/l of residual sugar, and 4 atm—was mineral and rather elegant, with lovely balance. I'd drink it at any time, for any reason.



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Ludovic Chanson (Montlouis Pétillant Originel)

Ludovic Chanson's 7.5ha (18.5-acre) domaine had been farmed organically under its previous owner since 2006. Now 45 years old, Chanson bought the property after leaving his job as a pharmaceutical researcher at Pfizer. He then studied viticulture and enology at the Lycée Agricole d'Amboise and worked with Damien Delecheneau at Grange Tiphaine. And he cites Vincent Carême as one of his models. Not surprising, then, that Chanson makes a lovely *pétillant originel*, which he calls Les Pions. I tasted the 2014 vintage twice over the past year. It's very good indeed, with a delightful sense of place, as well as flavors of apple and pear on a mineral core, with a delicate lemon backdrop. It's quite "wine"—with very, very nice bubbles.

Domaine de la Garrelière/François Plouzeau (Touraine)

At the southern borders of Touraine, 5 miles (8km) from the provincial town of Richelieu, la Garrelière's 20ha (50 acres) of vines have been farmed according to biodynamic methods for roughly 20 years. Plouzeau produces an impressive range of delectable wines—from Cendrillon (chiefly Sauvignon blended with Chardonnay and Chenin), to Gamay Sans Tra La La. He also makes an ambassadorial pet-nat (VdF), Milliard d'Étoiles, a blend of equal parts Chenin and Cabernet Franc. The 2014 had toothsome flavors of mango and citrus. Not only would it make an appetite-whetting apéritif, it would also go beautifully with a two-week-old *chèvre* from St-Maure de Touraine produced hardby Plouzeau's domaine.

Domaine Le Briseau/Nathalie Gaubicher (Coteaux du Loir, VdF)

Christian Chaussard's Domaine de la Saboterie in Vouvray went bankrupt sometime before the turn of the century. He had also left his job teaching at the Lycée Viticole d'Amboise. He wandered the world, met and married Nathalie Gaubicher, and in 2002 the pair created Domaine le Briseau in the Coteaux du Loir, about an hour north of Vouvray.

They converted their 11ha (27 acres) to organic and then to biodynamic farming, produced a range of wines with colorful labels and eccentric names (Patapon, You Are So Beautiful, You Are So Bubbly), and created a small négociant arm, Nana, Vins & Cie. Chaussard also served as the president of the La Mission de l'Association des Vins Naturels. In September 2012, Chaussard died in a tractor accident. Gaubicher has continued making wine at Le Briseau, sometimes with the assistance of Emile Heredia whose Domaine des Dimanches provides such Languedocian varieties as Cinsault and Terret.

The pet-nats from Gaubicher are crown-capped, so beware the spume! The 2013 Patapon Pétillant Naturel (Gaubicher and Chaussard) is pure Chenin, a litling wine with delicate varietal notes mixed with stone. Nice indeed. Bubbly, a rosé, is pure Cinsault. Nicely structured, it's a very appealing wine with subtle, downright delightful fruit. Peps!, a Gaubicher/Heredia collaboration, is pure Clairette, a demi-sec with very fine bubbles and light tropical-fruit notes that would be an enticing apéritif, as well as an attractive partner for a range of dishes from Waldorf salads, to Nems, to pungent cheeses like Gaperon. Also from Gaubicher and Heredia is So What!, made from Terret: a frisky, platinum-hued pet-nat, gingery, mineral, and saline, which goes down extremely easily.

Domaine de la Grange Tiphaine/Damien and Coralie Delecheneau (Montlouis)

Ebullient and perpetually youthful in appearance, Damien Delecheneau is the fourth generation to cultivate the family's 13ha (32 acres) of vines. He took over in 2002, after a stint at Clos Pegase in Napa. His wife Coralie worked at Cain Vineyards, having earned a degree in enology at the University of Bordeaux. They are active participants in the youth revolution and have gradually converted the domaine to a very strict form of organic viticulture, making their own *tisanes* of nettle and their own compost.

Like Xavier Weisskopf and the Joussets, the Delecheneaus were instrumental in creating the appellation Pétillant Originel. No surprise, then, that theirs is an ambassadorial example. The 2010, tasted in 2013, was very dry, very mineral, stony, and vinous. Supremely refreshing, I could have drunk buckets of it. The 2014 is labeled Montlouis-sur-Loire because, at 3.6/3.7 atm, it did not comply with the AOC limits of 3.5. Nevertheless, it was a beauty. Dry, tingly, and crisp, with mineral notes mixed with light pear, it was pure and superbly structured.

Domaine des Hauts-Baigneux (formerly Château de la Cour)/Nicolas Grosbois (Azay-le-Rideau)

This talented winemaker entered the pet-nat realm in 2015, with a rosé and a white. I tasted both wines in February 2016, several months before each was due to be disgorged. The rosé, a blend of Grolleau and Gamay, was tongue-smackingly good, very dry, with a long, mineral finish. The white, pure Chenin, was vibrantly tart and even more impressive, with flavors of lemon, mango, and physalis. (See also *WFW* 48, pp.138–39.)

Domaine Jousset (Montlouis)

Bertrand Jousset, who studied at the Lycée d'Amboise, and Lise, a former sommelier, created this domaine in 2004. It comprises 10.5ha (26 acres) of vines in both the Montlouis and Touraine appellations. Since 2010, the wines have been certified organic, and also since that time they have been producing Montlouis Pétillant Originel, the most recent vintage being the 2014 Bubulles. It is ripe, suave, and textured, with flavors that recall the Canada Grey apples that grow in my backyard. Lightly tart and subtly mineral, it has a long finish. Delicious. The Joussets also make a pet-nat rosé, Exilé, which would be fun to try in a wine bar. But don't miss Bubulles.

Maisons Brûlées/Paul and Corinne Gillet (Touraine, VdF)

The Gillets took over this 8ha (20-acre) domaine in 2013 after the previous owners, Michel and Beatrice Augé, retired. Michel, formerly the president of the Confrerie des Vignerons de Oisly et Thesée, converted viticulture to biodynamics and was a significant force in natural winemaking. His pet-nat Uccello ("Bird") was buoyantly fresh with exotic perfumes, such as incense and tropical fruit, and light fruit tannins. The Gillets now make four different pet-nats, all without SO₂, all crown-capped. The 2014 blanc was pure Sauvignon Blanc, dry, ripe, and fruity. The 2013 rosé, pure Gamay, was a refreshing quaff, with tingling acidity balanced by light red-fruit flavors. The 2013 Altérité, pure Cabernet Sauvignon, came across like a light red with a hint of residual sugar. A thirst-quenching bubbly, it had delicate berry notes. The Uccello was not available

at the time of press, but my overall impression of the three tasted was that the wines, with their freshness and gentle fizz, were like a sea breeze. Thoroughly enjoyable.

Domaine du Moulin/Hervé Villemade (Cheverny)

A reliably good producer of natural wine, Hervé Villemade makes easy-drinking but never anonymous reds and whites on his 25ha (62-acre) domaine. I particularly like his three pet-nats—two white blends and a rosé, all VdF. And my favorite among these three is his 2012 blend of Menu Pineau, Chenin, and Chardonnay, which had spent close to a year *sur lattes*. A pale, burnished gold, it was nicely structured, with delicate flavors of ginger and apple.

Domaine Nicolas Paget

Paget made his first pet-nat VdF in the difficult 2013 vintage—a rosé made from Grolleau called AB ORI Gène. Tasted twice over the past year, it's a lip-smacking wake-up call, with pastel red fruit, lemon zest, and an appetizing streak of salinity. A real palate-cleanser. (See also *WFW* 48, pp.139–40.)

Domaine François Pinon (Vouvray)

An excellent and deservedly popular producer, Pinon made his first pet-nat in 2015, a rosé made from a 50/50 blend of Grolleau and Cot, with 11.5% ABV and 3.5 atm. As yet he has no name for it, but his New York distributor can't wait to begin selling it—and rightly so; it's an energetic weave of citrus and apple, with delicate strawberry notes.

Jeremy Quastana (Touraine/VdF)

Young Jeremy Questana created his 2ha (5-acre) domaine in 2010 after working with Olivier Masson (Les Vins Contés) and, for his work-study requirement at the University of Bordeaux-Blancfort, with Marcel Lapierre. He is very much part of Touraine's natural-wine movement. Questana converted part of his parents' house into cellars and farms organically, though he has decided not to opt for certification. He makes three wines—among them, a tasty Cot (usually sold out) and a pet-nat Gamay called Buena Onda. The Buena Onda I tasted in April 2014 had 15g/l of residual sugar. The vinous equivalent of soda pop, it was kinda cute, and I could imagine club kids going nuts over it.

Domaine la Roche Bleue/Sebastien Cornille (Jasnières, Coteaux du Loir)

Originally from Sancerre, Sebastien Cornille created this 6.4ha (16-acre) domaine in 2007. He was no newcomer to Chenin, however, having been a technical consultant to winemakers on the Île de la Réunion who cultivated the grape. Since settling in the Sarthe, he has converted to biodynamic farming and limits yields to 30–35hl/ha. Along with Jasnières and both red and white Coteaux du Loir, Cornille makes a VdF called La Pétillante. The 2014 was 70% Pineau d'Aunis blended with 30% Chenin. Pulsating with acidity, it demanded attention and rewarded it with a long, citrus and red-fruit finish.

Domaine de la Roche Fleurie/Michel and Sebastien Brunet (Vouvray)

Since taking over the family's 15ha (37 acres) of vines in the Brenne Valley in 2006, Sebastien Brunet has become one of the

brightest stars of the current generation of Vouvray producers. Farming is organic, yields are low, and harvest is by hand. Brunet makes several types of sparkling wine, including Le Naturel Méthode Ancestrale NV Brut Pétillant—or in other words, a pet-nat. The 2012 had been disgorged a month and a half before I tasted it in May 2014 and still had slight notes of fermentation on the nose. On the palate, it was fruity and dryer than dry, with a long mineral finish. I could have drunk the entire bottle. *Coup de coeur*.

Rocher des Violettes/Xavier Weisskopf (Montlouis)

Born in Picardy in 1979, Xavier Weisskopf studied viticulture and enology in Chablis and Beaune, then worked for Louis Barroul (Chateau St Cosme) in Gigondas before creating his own winery in 2005 on 13ha (32 acres) of vines on slopes overlooking the River Cher. I've been tasting his Pétillants Originels every year since Weisskopf has been making them and they've always been among my favorites in the pet-nat universe. The grapes ferment in tronconique oak vats and the bottles are kept *sur lattes* for 12 months before disgorging. Weisskopf's most recent available vintage was the 2013. It was not a Pétillant Originel because the wine weighed in at a mere 11% ABV rather than the required 11.5% ABV. More honored in the breach than in the observance, the wine was gently bubbly, extremely mineral, and bursting with flavors of fresh citrus and lemon peel. I've tasted Weisskopf's first Pétillant Originel, the 2007, a few times, most recently in February 2010. It spent two years *sur lattes* and was appetizingly salty and mineral, with intriguing notes of apple, stone, ginger, and pineapple. Downright *gourmand*.

Cyrille Sevin (Cheverny)

Sevin has nearly 11ha (27 acres) of vines, farmed organically, in Mont Près Chambord. He makes a Cour-Cheverny and several bottlings of red Cheverny. Des Bulles en Goguette, a blend of two thirds Cabernet Franc and one third Pinot Noir, is Sevin's entry into the pet-nat realm. The bottle I tasted in May 2015 had no vintage date but had spent four years *sur lattes*. It was gingery and spritzzy; dry, lightly bitter, but lots of fun. Sevin then presented a 2010 that was labeled as Crémant, but he said that it was actually a pet-nat, even though he had followed the procedures for making Crémant Méthode Traditionelle. Go know. Composed of 70% Chardonnay, 15% Cabernet Franc, 10% Pinot Noir, and 5% Menu Pineau, there was a hint of residual sugar interwoven with lemon zest and an agreeable saline streak. A nice apéritif. Sevin also makes something he calls Petit de Sureau, a beverage with 1% ABV based on elder flowers macerated in water and sugar and lemon. It smells like elderberries and *bourgeon de cassis* and was inspired by the elderberry wine he loved to drink while in England.

Sot de l'Ange/Quentin Bourse

When I wrote about this wonderfully quirky yet very serious young winemaker last year, I described his pet-nat VdF Red is Dead, made from the rarely used Gamay de Chaudenay, as "extraterrestrial: a nuclear ginger ale with a squirt of lime." The 2014, with 10.5% ABV and around 3 atm, was much more mainstream—nicely balanced, flavorful, with pleasant citrus accents. (See also *WFW* 48, pp.142–43.)

Domaine Philippe Tessier (Cheverny/Cour-Cheverny)

An excellent producer of Cheverny and, particularly, Cour-Cheverny, Tessier has 23ha (57 acres) of vines that he farms organically. He also makes a savory pet-nat called Phil en Bulle, which is 80% Romorantin with 20% Menu Pineau. The wine spends a year *sur lattes* and is disgorged by hand. Now that he produces 6,000 to 7,000 bottles of pet-nat a year, however, Tessier intends to hire a specialist for that operation. In addition to being flavorful, the wine is full and rich, with light citric notes and a hint of oxidation (not unusual in Romorantin).

Domaine de Veilloux (Cheverny)

Michel Quenioux has 20ha (50 acres) of vines, organically farmed, and has just got a piece of land in the Cour-Cheverny appellation. Inspired by Christian Chaussard, Quenioux has made pet-nat since 2002, about 3,000 bottles a year. His 2013 Pétillant Naturel et Vie Danse is pure Orbois, (aka Menu Pineau) which ferments in barrique. The 2013, with 6 atm, was well made—quite vinous, with firm flavors of lemon peel.

ANJOU & NANTAIS

Domaine Hervé Bosse (Anjou/Layon)

After studying viticulture and enology at the Lycée Agricole de Briacé, Hervé Bosse created his small domaine in St-Georges-sur-Layon in 2014. Viticulture is organic. Bosse made his first pet-nat, a rosé, chiefly Grolleau with a bit of Cabernet Franc, in 2015. He brings the bottles to specialists in Parnay (the Saumurois) to be disgorged. It is called Désambulle-Moi, Le Vin Naturel Qui Fristouille, adding several words to our pet-nat vocabulary. A deep orange-pink, the wine still exhibited fermentation aromas—it had been disgorged a mere two weeks earlier—but there were also good, ripe fruit flavors. Dry but tender, it promises to be a toothsome pet-nat.

Ferme de Montbenault (Anjou/Layon)

Young Stéphane Rocher created his small domaine of 6ha (15 acres) in 2008 after moving back home from Paris and enrolling in adult courses in viticulture. Farming is organic and moving quickly in the direction of biodynamic. He seems to label all his wines VdF, including his pet-nat Grape de Bulles, a blend of Cabernet Franc and Gamay. Last February, I tasted the 2012, which had spent two years *sur lattes*. It was dry and vinous, with appetizing bitterness. Nice.

Domaine Filliatreau (Saumur-Champigny)

A leading producer of Saumur-Champigny, Domaine Filliatreau has more than 40ha (100 acres) of vines in the heart of the appellation from which it makes user-friendly wines in both red and (in the Saumur AOC) white. New to the lineup is Fillibule rosé, a sparkling VdT made from Cabernet Franc. The Filliatreus perform the *tirage* themselves but bring the bottles to a specialist who takes over the riddling and the disgorging, when the bottles are topped up without SO₂ or *dosage*. The 2014 is supple, saline, pure, and mineral. Solidly structured, with pale strawberry notes, it's a laid-back wine that goes down very easily.

Domaine les Grandes Vignes (Anjou/Bonnezeaux)

The Vaillant family produces a broad range of excellent biodynamic wines and is one of the best producers of

Bonnezeaux. I had always been impressed by the domaine's Crémant de Loire Musumé, which takes its name from its vineyard; since 2010, however, I'm in love with it. Musumé is now a pet-nat, though it is labeled Anjou Méthode Ancestrale. Pure Chenin grown on gray schist soils and hand-harvested, the grapes ferment in barrique until roughly 25g/l of sugar remain. The wine is bottled and stored in a warm area in order to provoke the *prise de mousse* and then remains *sur lattes* for five years before being disgorged. No yeasts or sugar are added and the wines are neither fined nor filtered.

I first tasted the 2010 in February 2015. It had been disgorged three months earlier, had 13.5% ABV, and less than 2g/l of residual sugar. Its emphatic sense of place knocked me out. It was long and fresh and textured. Superb. I couldn't stop drinking it and take every opportunity to repeat the experience. The Champenois should take note.

The Vaillants also make two simpler pet-nats—Bulle Nature Blanc and Bulle Nature Rosé. The latter is made from Groslot Gris and old-vines Gamay. I've not yet tasted it but will do so as soon as I get the chance. Bulle Nature Blanc is a blend of Grolleau Gris and Chenin Blanc. The grapes are transferred to tanks immediately after pressing and bottled for the *prise de mousse* at the beginning of December, before all of the sugar has been transformed into alcohol. After spending four to six months *sur lattes*, the wines are disgorged without having been fined or filtered. I tasted a 2014 that had been disgorged early for the Renaissance des Appellations salon in February 2015. Lighter than the Musumé, with under 12 degrees alcohol, it was breezy and lively, a lovely weave of pears, quince, and minerals. Delightful and refreshing.

Le Pas St-Martin (Saumur/Anjou)

Laurent Charrier's 16ha (40-acre) domaine is located in Doué la Fontaine where Anjou meets the Saumurois. Not surprisingly, he makes wines in both appellations—al organic—as well as a *méthode ancestrale* rosé, La Vie en Rose. The 2014, chiefly Grolleau Noir, was fun and juicy, with light strawberry and cherry flavors and a tangy kick of lemon peel.

Domaine Damien and Didier Richou (Anjou/Aubance)

The Richou brothers have never made a wine that was less than stellar. Their range is encyclopedic, as well as organic, and includes two cuvées of pet-nat. The 2013 Les D en Bulles Méthode Ancestrale VdF, with 13% ABV and 5 atm, is a blend of 60% Chardonnay, 25% Chenin, and 15% Cabernet Franc. To make the wine, Richou prepares 120 liters of *piéd de cuve* from his base wines in order to boost the yeast population. Thawed in March, the must is added to the wine, and as the temperature warms up, the fermentation recommences. The bottles are riddled for 18 months before being disgorged. The finished product was lightly tart and dry and had appealing accents of ginger.

Dom Nature, made only in good years, is a blend of 85% Chardonnay, 12% Chenin, and 3% Cabernet Franc. The Chardonnay vines are 35 to 40 years old. The grapes, picked very ripe, ferment in 400-liter barrels. After bottling, the wines remain *sur lattes* in troglodyte caves in the Saumurois until needed. The 2010, tasted in February 2015, was a beautiful weave of ginger, litchi, herbal tea, and lime, with a distinct thread

of salinity. It was labeled Crémant de Loire but Richou says he no longer asks for appellation status for these wines. He wants to experiment, to improve—and, since he's unsure how INAO will respond, he opts for VdF status.

Les Terres Blanches (Thouarsais)

Benoit Blet's 85ha (210 acres) of vines are in Oiron, in the Poitou-Charentes, on the southern border of Anjou-Saumur. His wines, all organic, take either the Anjou appellation or are sold as VdF, as is the case with his 2014 L'Ancestrale Blanc, a *vin mousseux de qualité*. Made from 100% Chenin, including a proportion of shriveled grapes, the wine had 2–3g/l of residual sugar. A truly lovely pet-nat, with notes of lemon zest. Excellent.

La Tour Grise/Philippe Gourdon (Saumur Puy-Notre-Dame)

And then there's pet-nat's Rube Goldberg, Philippe Gourdon, with his Méthode Originelle machine. Starting in 2004, Gourdon produced biodynamic, naturally sparkling wine by capturing the CO₂ from the fermentation tanks, transferring the gas to a special vat, and then adding it back to the wine at bottling. No added sugar. No added yeasts. The results are much improved over earlier versions, when the wines tasted like vinous bubblegum. In fact, I rather liked the two I tasted last February—Ze Bulle Chenin and Ze Bulle Cabernet Franc (rosé). The former was quite fruity and sweet and might have been a nice partner for an apple or an apricot tart. The rosé, less sweet (40g/l of residual sugar), was nicely balanced by lively acidity.

Before Gourdon reduced his area to 8ha (20 acres), his *méthode origénelle* had become such a success that he was producing 60,000 bottles a year. Chef Alain Senderens created recipes to pair with them. I have always thought they'd be popular with club kids. And with oldsters, Gourdon pointed out, adding that because women like them, men drink them, too. If you've ever lived in *la France profonde*, you know that to be true.

NON-LOIRE PET-NATS AND MÉTHODES ANCESTRALES

Domaine Christian Binner (Alsace)

They may not be for everyone, but I adore the wines from this hyper-naturalist domaine. Christian Binner's 11ha (27 acres) of vines are in the Colmar area and include plots in three grands crus. Farming is biodynamic, and the winemaking would fit anyone's definition of natural. In addition to a multiplicity of riveting still wines, Binner makes numerous sparkling wines. Whether they are Pet-Nat VdF or Crémant AOC, Binner never adds SO₂, nor does he filter or stabilize the wines.

Binner's Crémants d'Alsace AOC are, in every sense, pet-nats. They are made solely from the juice of the domaine's own grapes, without the addition of yeasts. They spend from two to five years *sur lattes* and are disgorged at the time of commercialization. All are *zéro dosage*.

The KB bottling is made from Auxerrois, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, and other grapes complanted on steep granitic slopes that are a prolongation of Grand Cru Schlossberg. The 2010, a solid, clear, straw gold, had a richly fragrant nose of mingled fruit. Gently effervescent and intensely flavored, it was tarter on the palate than the nose would suggest, its tang softened by flavors of yuzu, clementine, and kiwi. On day two, the pungency of the fruit subdued, minerality and salinity came to the fore. I could

pair KB with many dishes—from shellfish and mayo or shellfish in a light cream-based sauce, to gyoza or nems, to foie gras.

The Bidders also make several crown-capped pet-nats. (Open these over a towel.) Their Katzen Bulles Pétillants Naturels come in three flavors: Riesling, Pinot Gris, and Auxerrois. I tasted the 2014 Riesling Pétillant Naturel VdF, made from old vines grown on sun-drenched, granitic slopes. A deep straw gold, the wine was mineral, with concentrated ripe, sweet fruit suggestive of shriveled grapes. The finish was long and reprised all the above flavors, as well as adding a bitter tang recalling long-steeped herbal tea. This was not a suave or a polished wine. But what it lacked in worldliness, it more than made up for in character and flavor.

Finally, there's the stellar Le Pet'Nat de René Vin Pétillant sec. Taking its name from an old vigneron in the village who also farmed organically, it is an *assemblage* of Riesling and Pinot Noir with small amounts of Pinot Blanc and Gris and Auxerois. There were minuscule bits of rust-colored particles floating in the wine. Binner confirmed that they were either dead yeast cells or anthocyanins. No problem. The wine, a bit reduced at first, flowered into a lip-smacking mélange of gentle fruit flavors. Ripe, fresh, with lovely structure, fine balance, and the gentlest of bubbles—only a total Scrooge would not relish drinking it.

Domaine de Brousse (Gaillac)

A 10ha (25-acre) family vineyard on the windy south-facing slopes of the plateau of Cordes, Domaine de Brousse follows a recipe handed down from a great-grandfather for the making of the Gaillac Méthode Ancestrale. There are, however, practices allowed today and used in its production that may not have existed in great-granddad's day, such as filtration before bottling for the *prise de mousse*. The 2014 L'Authentique Mauzac is a fine example of the appellation. With 11% ABV and 13g/l of residual sugar, it is a tender wine with appealing flavors of lemon, apple, and pear mixed with mineral and stone. Very food friendly.

Domaine de Causse Marines/Patrice Lescarret (Gaillac, VdF)

A wonderfully wacky individualist, Patrice Lescarret created his domaine in 1993 with 8ha (20 acres). Today he has 15 (37 acres). Viticulture is biodynamic; and Lescarret, who refuses to cultivate clones, replants by a *sélection massale* of his pre-war vines, all indigenous grape varieties. Yields average 20hl/ha and Lescarret generally opts out of the AOC, labeling his wines VdF or VdT.

He makes two *méthode ancestrale*-style wines, some 10,000 bottles, accounting for about one fifth of his production. Both are crown-capped, and it would be wise to have a towel and a mop at hand when opening. There was some grit (dead yeast cells?) on the cap of his 2014 Présqu'ambulles, pure Mauzac, a very pleasant white bubbly with sweet fruit flavors in the apple family. It would make a nice apéritif or partner for fruit tarts or salads. Raides Bulles, a rosé, is a blend of Syrah, Duras, and Braucol plus a bit of Jurançon and Mauzac. Clean and fresh, it was decidedly sweet and solidly built, with flavors of strawberry, ginger, and banana. It would pair with any fruit tart imaginable and would be fun to swill at a picnic or BBQ.

Cave de Tain Hermitage (Hermitage etc)

When an important, emblematic Cave, with a clutch of prestigious appellations, covering 1,000ha (2,470 acres), starts

making *méthode ancestrale*, you know that a “trend” has become serious. The year is 2012. Enter the Cave de Tain with two fine examples, both made from Syrah, and both labeled Collines Rhodanniennes IGP. The grapes for Ynsolite, a blanc de noirs, are picked early to keep the freshness. Fermentation takes place with natural sugars and natural yeasts and is stopped by lowering the temperature. The wine is lightly filtered before bottling and disgorged by emptying the bottles into a pressurized tank, stabilizing the wine with cold for two weeks, refiltering it and then bottling it again, with 7.6g atm and 40.8g/l of residual sugar. The Cave produces 5,600 bottles of Ynsolite yearly and recommends serving it between 39 and 43°F (4–6°C).

Yrise, a rosé, is made much the same way. The final wine has 9.5% ABV, 6.4 atm, and 32g/l of residual sugar. The Cave produces 10,100 bottles a year and recommends serving it between 44 and 48°F (7–9°C). Given the relatively high pressure, it's not surprising that the bubbles are more aggressive here than in pet-nats. But each is nicely balanced and quite urbane, with subtle fruit flavors.

Domaine des 2 Anes/Magali and Dominique Terrier (Corbières)

The Terriers farm their 20ha (50 acres) of vines organically and raise a couple of donkeys, simply because they love the animals. They produce a half-dozen different versions of Corbières and a *pétillant naturel* VdT rosé Limod'ane from pure Carignan. Production is modest—roughly 1,000 bottles a year—and the wine is not disgorged. The 2015, with 11.5% ABV and no residual sugar, was somewhat leesy when tasted in February 2016. Dry and tart, with a lemon-peel finish, it promised to flesh out and develop pale red-fruit flavors.

Domaine des Dimanches/Emile Heredia (Languedoc)

For years Emile Heredia split his time between Domaine de Montrieux in the Coteaux du Vendomois and the 6ha (15-acre) Domaine des Dimanches in Aspiran in the Languedoc. After selling Montrieux in 2015, Heredia moved down to Aspiran. Viticulture is organic and winemaking would easily fit into most definitions of natural. Among his bottlings of pet-nat is Clair de Bulles, a VdT, made from Clairette. The 2010, with 13% ABV, was full, clean, and fresh. Essentially dry, it recalled a *sec-tendre*, with just a hint of sweetness, which was amplified by flavors of Canada Grey apples.

La Ferme du Vert/Jérôme Galaup (Gaillac, VdF)

Jérôme Galaup and his father run a full-fledged farm, raise a herd of cows, and have five guest bedrooms and 5ha (12 acres) of farms. The latter are cultivated biodynamically, though Galaup doesn't ask for certification. Neither does he use the applicable wine appellations, labeling all his wines VdF. While earning a degree in viticulture and enology, Galaup interned with the Plageoles and ended up working with them part time for 15 years. He's still there, teaching the current generation of Plageoles what he learned from their parents.

L'Angelou Blanc Bulle is his Mauzac Nature and is labeled Vin Mousseux Blanc de Qualité, which, he explained, was the required terminology for sparkling wines with more than 3 atm (his wine has 4 atm) and from 0 to 8g/l of residual sugar (his has 4g/l and 11% ABV). Galaup follows a recipe handed down

from his great-great-grandfather to his grandmother. He vinifies following phases of the moon, particularly when bottling for the *prise de mousse*, at which time he filters the wine lightly. He rents a machine in order to disgorge the wines, which are capped with cork and muselet. The 2014, made from old vines, is vinous, full, and quite fruity. Very good and perfectly balanced.

Domaine des Grottes (Beaujolais)

Thirty-nine-year-old Romain Des Grottes created his domaine in 2002. He runs it on biodynamic principles and has reduced the number of vines so as to plant cover grass and increase biodiversity. He also cultivates medicinal plants, grows wheat from which a local baker hand-crafts loaves baked in wood-fired ovens, raises bees, maintains a truck garden, and plans to add farm animals. His wines, should you be wondering, are delicious, starting with his Beaujolais and continuing with his pet-nat. The 2015 Pétillant Naturel, a VdF made from pure Gamay, was a mere 6% ABV, 4 atm, and a whopping 85g/l of residual sugar—“It's usually less,” he noted. He filtered the wine lightly before bottling for the *prise de mousse* and sealed it with a crown cap. Reader, I could not spit. Yes, the wine was sweet, but hardly cloying. It was well made and lots of fun. Delightful.

Domaine Gramenon/Michele Aubery (Côtes du Rhône)

One of my favorite Côtes du Rhône producers, Michele Aubery has 26ha (64 acres) of vines, farmed organically, from which she makes a range of irresistible, never-fail Rhônes. She also makes an extremely nice bubbly called Tout en Bulle de Gramenon, an *assemblage* of 80% Clairette and 20% Viognier. There's a light filtration before bottling for the *prise de mousse*. The wine is closed with a cork topped with a crown cap and is labeled VdF Effervescent Blanc. The slightly sweet 2014 had good bubbles and texture and appealing notes of ginger and apricot.

Château Marco/Marc Leseney (Limoux)

Marc Leseney's domaine consists of roughly 100ha (250 acres) at the base of the Pyrennees. Part of the land is given over to cattle; the rest, to organically farmed vineyards. Mauzac is the grape that dominates Leseney's clay-limestone slopes and, harvested at 30hl/ha, it makes, among other wines in his lineup, his Limoux Méthode Ancestrale. Leseney filters the partially fermented wine lightly and then waits to bottle it for the *prise de mousse* at “the traditional time”—to wit, *la vieille lune de mars*. It's not disgorged. The 2013, tasted last February, had somewhere between 8% and 10% ABV and 20–30 g/l of residual sugar. It was sudsy, sweet, clean, and pleasant. I'd happily pair it with a dessert based on yellow stone fruit such as apricot or a mirabelle pie.

Domaine Plageoles (Gaillac)

To call Domaine Plageoles an icon of the Gaillac appellation would be an understatement. Created in 1805 and now in its sixth generation, it has been credited with nothing less than the region's vinous rebirth. Currently, the Plageoles have 27/28ha (66/69 acres) of vines divided between two domaines, Très Cantous and Roucou-Cantemerle. Viticulture is organic and planted to indigenous grapes such as Mauzac, Duras, Braucol, and Prunelard. Further, since the 1970s, winemaking has been “natural”; the Plageoles use only wild yeasts for fermentation and refuse to use synthetic additives or correctives.

Their Mauzac Nature Méthode Gaillacoise is their signature wine. The hand-harvested grapes are pressed immediately then left to decant for 24 hours. No yeasts or sugar are added. The wine is bottled in January with between 25 and 30g/l of residual sugar. The first time I tasted their Mauzac Nature was in the late '90s—in a wine bar called Le Mauzac. It had just been put on the market, and its exhilarating freshness made me laugh out loud with pleasure. Most recently I drank the 2014 Mauzac Nature ...Quand Meme!!! A blend of strong citrus flavors mixed with ginger, apple, and light minerality, it was structured and fresh and vigorous. Pure pleasure. There is only one thing to say to the Plageoles: Thank you.

Domaine des Pothiers/Romain Paire (Côte Roannaise)

The Pothier family has tended the vines on the granitic soils of this domaine for centuries. In 2005, Romain joined his parents, modernized the domaine, and converted its vineyards to organic and biodynamic viticulture. Among the delectable bottlings of Gamay, there's Bulles, a *méthode ancestrale* that Paire sends to a producer in Clairette de Die to be disgorged. The 2014, with 8.5% ABV and 17g/l of residual sugar, had refreshing flavors of strawberry and lemon peel. It would make an excellent apéritif or an accompaniment to a summer fruit salad. Ditto for the 2015.

Domaine du Possible/Loic Roure (Côtes du Roussillon)

Young Loic Roure, who created his domaine in 2003 with less than 3ha (7.5 acres) now has 10.5ha (26 acres) of vines spread out over the backlands of the Roussillon, in the Agly Valley and the Fenouillèdes. Viticulture is organic, yields are kept extremely low, and harvest is by hand. All Roure's wines are certified for the Côtes du Roussillon AOC save his pet-nat L'Herbe Tendre, which is a VdF. Finished with a crown cap, the latest version came with no vintage statement. A blend of Carignan and Syrah, 11% ABV, it was a pale salmon pink with delicate aromas of pale red fruit. Pleasant and pure.

Domaine Renardat-Fache (Cerdon)

The Renardat-Fache family, which has been making wine for eight generations, has 12.5ha (31 acres) of vines in the Bugey-Cerdon appellation on the foothills of the Massif Jurassien. Viticulture is biodynamic, and the family also maintains orchards of fruit trees such as apple, cherry, and walnut. It was after World War II that the family, aided by neighboring winemakers, began to make a *pétillant naturel* that they called Méthode Ancestrale, a style of wine that obtained the VDQS appellation in 1958 and was promoted to AOC in 2009.

The recipe for the vinification of the domaine's Cerdon has changed little over time. The wine is a blend of roughly 70% Gamay and 30% Pousard. The grapes ferment at low temperatures until the wine reaches about 6% ABV, when it's lightly filtered and immediately bottled. After about two months, fermentation stops naturally at 5–6 atm with 7.5% ABV and 50–60g/l of residual sugar. The bottles are later emptied into a buffer tank where the wine is filtered. The bottles are washed and refilled. The 2014 Cerdon Méthode Ancestrale AOC Bugey was truly delicious, with sweet red fruit, lively acidity, and real vinosity. It's often served as an apéritif.

I prefer it after a meal and either instead of or ahead of the Armagnac or single malt.

Château de Rhodes (Gaillac)

The domaine's 20ha (50 acres) are farmed organically. Less than one hectare (2.47 acres)—on a south-southwest-facing slope with clay and limestone soils—is devoted to the production of its Méthode Ancestrale Gaillac. Yields are kept very low—25hl/ha—and the grapes are harvested by hand. Fermentation (with natural yeasts and sugar) is slowed by an initial filtration. The finished wine has 9.5% ABV with 24.6g/l of residual sugar. When I started to remove the muselet wiring from the 2014 in February 2015, the cork flew out of the bottle with impressive violence. Nothing fierce about the flavor, however: The wine was truly delightful, its sweetness offset by bright acidity and attractive flavors of citrus, apple, and pear.

Château Sulauze/Guillaume Lefèvre (Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence)

Lefèvre created this multitasking domaine in 2004. On 500ha (1,235 acres) of land, he applies the principles of biodiversity with great commitment. In addition to 30ha (75 acres) of biodynamically farmed vines, he cultivates cereal crops; raises hens, pigs, and horses; grows olive trees; houses a brasserie that produces superb craft beers; and rents out holiday homes, as well as meeting halls.

Where wine is concerned, Lefèvre produces contemporary Provençal blends such as Syrah/Cabernet/Mourvedre, as well as quirky cuvées such as the adorable light red Cochon, a blend of 30 different varieties (“*Tout est bon dans le cochon*”), and the Port-like Amaury, a late-harvest Marselan. He makes between 10,000 and 15,000 bottles of pet-nat Modeste, a blend of Ugni Blanc and Vermentino. The 2014 was a vigorous wine with vibrant citrus fruit.

Domaine des Terres Dorées/Jean-Paul Brun (Beaujolais)

An iconic figure in the natural-wine movement, Jean-Paul Brun has some 44ha (109 acres) of vines spread out over numerous regions in the Beaujolais, making everything from simple Beaujolais blanc to Morgon. Brun also produces a Roussanne, a Pinot Noir, and a low-alcohol (7.5% ABV) Cerdon-like pet-nat called FRV100 from a selection of his best Gamay vines on a 300m (1,000ft) slope with clay-limestone soils. Winsomely fruity, it's undeniably sweet but remains appetizing. Serve icy cold with fresh strawberries and mascarpone cream, or with fruit tarts and cobblers.

Domaine Verdier-Logel/Odile and Jacky Logel and Maxime Gillier (Côtes du Forez)

Part of a new wave of producers in the Loire's southernmost appellation, the Verdier-Logels farm their 17ha (42 acres) organically. Most is planted to Gamay, from which they make their Ribambulles, a VdF *pétillant naturel*. After the initial fermentation, the wine is lightly filtered, bottled for the *prise de mousse*, and later sent to a producer in Clairette de Die to disgorge. The 2015 was sudsy and quite sweet—very much like a Cerdon—with a citric note on the finish. I'd have paired it with an old Crottin or other sharp cheeses, maybe a Gaperon. And maybe a bibimbap. ■