



ANJOU'S PERMANENT WINE REVOLUTION

For the past 30 years, Anjou has been one of France's most dynamic wine regions, with Chenin Blanc—sweet and dry—the ever-evolving focus. **Jacqueline Friedrich** sets the exciting scene in the Loire, and profiles four of her favorite producers

Photography by Jean-Yves Bardin

Anjou is one of France's most idiosyncratic wine regions. An ancient Roman province, Anjou essentially corresponds to the Maine-et-Loire department, though it briefly extends into the Deux-Sèvres and the Vienne departments as well. Located at the northern limits of French viticulture, the Maine-et-Loire is where the metamorphic soils of the Massif Armorican meet the sedimentary soils of the Paris Basin. The difference is visible everywhere: Homes, castles, and churches in and around Angers and as far west as the Nantais are built from rough-hewn, mottled brown and black schist, hard sandstone, and quartz; cross into the provincial town of Gennez, just north of Saumur, and all is smooth cream and white tuffeau—whence the monikers Anjou Noir, where Angers is the point of reference, and Anjou Blanc for the southeast stretch whose point of reference is Saumur. It's not surprising, then, that when most people say "Anjou," they mean Anjou Noir, and when they say "Saumurois," they are referring to "Anjou Blanc," which has more in common with its eastern neighbor Chinon than it does with Angers.

Given the radically different geology, it's remarkable that both Anjou and the Saumurois favor the same grape varieties—Chenin Blanc and Cabernet Franc—though the wines made from these grapes do differ, often dramatically. And where the Saumurois seem content to have four appellations (not including sparkling wines), the Angevins have 15 (not counting sparkling wines), as well as IGPs and Vins de France. There are appellations named for major Loire tributaries—the Layon, the Aubance—as well as numerous villages—Savennières, Brissac, Chaume—and privileged slopes—Bonnezeaux, Quarts de Chaume, Coulée de Serrant. There's more on this below, but first some Anjou wine history. And by "Anjou," I mean Anjou Noir.

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Historic highs and lows

In the 6th century, Apollonius sang of an Angers that “Bacchus had showered with his gifts.” The Plantagenet dynasty (1154–1485) popularized Anjou’s crus among the English nobility. And the great agricultural expert Olivier de Serres (1539–1619) declared that Anjou was so “well endowed with fine white wines and claires that it seemed good father Noah had chosen it as the land in which to make his masterpieces and to teach his science to its inhabitants.”

Curnonsky, Prince of Gastronomes and Angevin by birth, extolled the local wines thus: “Our Angevin wines are among the noblest in the world; they are part of the history of France. They incorporate the *douceur angevine*, that gentleness that never degenerates into blandness; that sweetness that does not exclude force... Tasting them, one imagines strolling with a beautiful young blonde along a path of flowering linden trees as the sun sets in all its sumptuousness” (my translation). Curnonsky died in 1956. Given the state of the Angevin vineyards at that time, he must have been sipping pre-phylloxera Coteaux du Layon or a 1947 Bonnezeaux from the mythic Jean Boivin, who had brought techniques used at Château d’Yquem to his Château de Fesles. For generally speaking, those were dark years for Anjou wine.

By the 1950s, rosé wines—particularly sweet ones—had conquered Anjou. The workers’ cafés emptied 15 barrels of sweet rosé for every barrel of dry. And Anjou rosé was abundantly quaffed during the weekly broadcasts of the soap opera *La Famille Duranton* on Radio Luxembourg, further stoking the appetite for the wine that then accounted for 58 percent of Anjou’s production. Anjou’s sweet rosés were as

ubiquitous in Paris bistros as Muscadet and Beaujolais, becoming the vinous identity of the region as a whole, to the detriment of the great *liquoreux*. Hillside vineyards were abandoned, and flatlands were planted with Grolleau and Cabernet. Then the postwar decline in the popularity of sweet wines struck the rosés, as well as the *liquoreux*. And a dry rosé—Rosé de Loire—was created. But the region was left without an identity.

To survive, vintners sold their wines door to door. Vincent Ogereau (profiled below) spoke of his father’s experience: “We had trouble selling our wines. Anjou had a tradition of direct sales. We’re a leader in direct sales to clients. Producers went on tour to visit clients—mostly in the west of France—in Brittany and La Sarthe. Our wines were not known. Our clients asked for a range of styles, so we met their demands and made everything. Clients always found at least one wine they liked. These people had only Anjou wines in their cellars because we could provide them with anything: two rosés, a Cab d’Anjou and a Rose de Loire; an Anjou blanc, which was a combination of Chenin and Sauvignon Blanc; a Layon; a Layon St-Lambert; a Vin de Table blend of Grolleau, Cabernet, and Gamay Freau; three traditional-method sparkling wines, brut, demi-sec, and rosé.”

Producers were still making the full range of wines—even more than those I’ve listed above—when I arrived in the region in 1989. But change was in the air—and on the ground. Revolution #1 had started.

Above: Vincent Ogereau checking the sugar level of his carefully tended Chenin. Overleaf: Christophe Daviau examining vines on his centuries-old domaine.

The beginning of ceaseless evolution

The first time I met Vincent Ogereau was in August 1989 at Le Fief de Vignes, the leading wine shop in Nantes. I was talking with Jean-François Dubreuil, one of the managers of the shop, when Vincent and his wife Catherine came in. Jean-François introduced them, saying, “Vincent is one of the current generation of winemakers revolutionizing Anjou.”

Fellow revolutionaries included Victor Lebreton, Jean-Yves Lebreton, Didier Richou, Mark Angeli, Philippe Cady, Philippe Delesvaux, and Vincent Lecointre. Many of them had studied viticulture and enology in Bordeaux or in local schools like the Lycée Agricole de Montreuil-Bellay. They had done stints in other wine regions. They were replanting the best slopes, lowering yields, renewing cellars, harvesting grapes for their best wines by hand and, for their sweet wines, by successive passes through the vineyards.

Among the four producers profiled below, I’ve selected Ogereau to represent Phase 1. But he, now working with son Emmanuel, embodies equally well the ongoing revolution—the ceaseless evolution of winemaking in Anjou. I also selected Christophe Daviau, who joined the family domaine in 1989 and might be said to represent Phase 1.5. The rest of the profiled producers work in the Coteaux du Layon—which covers a vast swath of Anjou—whereas Daviau’s domaine is in the much smaller Coteaux de l’Aubance (more on this below). Eddy and Milene Oosterlinck-Bracke (of Domaine de Juchepie) and Thomas and Charlotte Carsin are outsiders who chose to make wine in Anjou. And the Carsins, who created their domaine in 2008, more or less exemplify the youthful, naturalist-ish, amphora-ifying generation.

Before getting to the profiles, I’d like to outline the current state of the ongoing revolution in broad strokes. Viticulture: increasingly organic, biodynamic, and some form of naturalista; lower yields; later harvesting; a higher degree of phenolic ripeness. Vinification: greater use of wild yeasts; less reliance on, or total abandonment of, additives, particularly sulfur dioxide, the use of which is now generally limited to a “medicinal” dose at bottling. Producers are now streamlining the range of their wines. They may be producing as many cuvées as before, but increasingly the focus is on Chenin—in particular, dry Chenin. On a smaller scale of importance is the delightful evolution of Cabernet d’Anjou. Now made from ripe grapes and with less residual sugar, it’s a lovely apéritif and would nicely accompany a fruit tart.

But I digress. It really must be said that the story—not to mention the glory—of Anjou wine is Chenin Blanc. And never more so than today. Indeed, the greatest changes in Anjou wine concern the cultivation and vinification of Chenin. In the bad old days—and even in the getting-better days—you couldn’t drink Chenin for years because of the high doses of sulfur dioxide that had been added. Now you can start drinking Chenin directly after bottling. Similarly, there used to be a nasty side of Chenin—when the wine gave off an offensive odor that reminded me of wet wool that had been thrown into an airtight, musty closet for a month. With greater phenolic ripeness, it is increasingly rare to detect that off-putting scent in the wines.

Botrytis was not a major focus—or presence—in the sweet wines of Anjou, which were more often the result of overripe grapes and/or *passerillage*. For Jean Boivin at Château de Fesles, the ideal grape cluster was a mix of shriveled grapes,

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botrytis-affected grapes, and those that were simply overripe. Sometime in the mid-1990s, producers actively sought botrytis, and today it is frequently noble rot that defines the Anjou *liquoreux*. (As delicious as these wines are, I remain a big fan of *liquoreux* with a high proportion of shriveled grapes.) Whatever the ripeness makeup, Anjou’s *liquoreux* are now much sweeter than in the ’90s, when a good year would result in a Layon with, say, 60 or 70 grams of residual sugar per liter. Today, that might apply to the lightest bottling. For a sense of the sweetness of the more prestigious bottlings, multiply those figures by two or even three.

One of the most dramatic aspects of the permanent revolution has been nothing less than the birth of serious Anjou blanc sec. Stagnation in the market for sweet wines is nothing new, but the current market has spurred winemakers to concentrate on developing very serious dry Chenins outside Savennières. And producers now often make at least as many different bottlings of dry Chenin as they do of sweet. Alas, if only they could find a name more dignified than Anjou Blanc. The best suggestion to come along—and it’s not bad at all—would be to do as the Vouvrillons do and simply denote the wines as, say, Coteaux du Layon sec or Quarts de Chaume sec.

DOMAINE VINCENT OGEREAU

My first visit to Vincent Ogereau’s domaine was in September 1989. A fourth-generation winemaker who had studied at the Lycée d’Agriculture in Beaufort (Bordeaux), he had taken over the family’s 20ha (50 acres) of vines in and around St-Lambert. He was one of the many young vigneron working with consulting enologist Didier Coutenceaux, and his cellar looked like an experimental lab bubbling with microvinifications. In one corner, part of the first *tri* of Layon St-Lambert was fermenting in new oak barrels. The rest of that *tri* had been divided in three to try out different approaches to skin contact. Ogereau subsequently bottled three versions of Layon that year, each a gorgeous, nuanced wine.

As I’ve followed the domaine since my first visit, I’ve watched them go from strength to strength. The progress has not stopped for a millisecond. The Ogereau’s son Emmanuel, age 28, came on board two years ago having earned a degree in agricultural engineering (graduating first in his class), doing stints at the Cave de Buzet, at the Domaine Serene and Dundee Hills in Oregon, at the Cave de Tain Hermitage, and six months working with the biodynamic Domaine Carrick in New Zealand. And he earned a master’s in international commerce at the University of Dijon (first in class again). Not surprisingly, he came back with lots of ideas and bold ambitions.

The Ogereaus are converting to organic farming and are two years away from certification. Emmanuel is taking courses in biodynamics and getting advice from Domaine de Juchepie's Eddy Oosterlinck (see below). They want to make more dry Chenin on Chenin soils, so they're looking for land. Emmanuel particularly wants additional land in Savennières, and they've been gradually adding better land while selling off less interesting parcels. Most recently, they're about to plant a hectare in the commune of Chaufonds overlooking the Layon, which brings the domaine to 25ha (62 acres) overall.

Ogereau traditionally made two versions of rosé, but he's eliminating the dry Rosé de Loire. Happily, he's keeping Cabernet d'Anjou. Called L'Anjouée en Rosé, it's a pure delight, with only 20g/l residual sugar rather than 30, which had been the norm, the grapes—Cabernet Sauvignon—macerated for 8–12 hours. The wine is fresh, ripe, and nicely balanced and would be lovely with a raspberry tart. Ogereau is also limiting his production of sparkling wine to a single Crémant de Loire. A blend of Chardonnay and Chenin, with no sugar added for the *prise de mousse*, the 2012 was irresistible, an invigorating blend of ginger and lemon and lemon-zest flavors.

In their ongoing quest to extend their range of dry Chenins, the Ogereaus now make four. The first—and simplest—is Anjou en Chenin—from schist-rich soils in St-Lambert. The 2015 was a tender Chenin with alluring notes of minerals and citrus. Much more serious was a recent addition, Anjou Vent de Spillite from the rocky, volcanic soils of Pierre Bise in Beaulieu. Though the vines are young—the 2015 was their second year of production—the wine was energetic, pure, and mineral-driven, an exacting, chiseled, truly limpid wine interweaving delicate flavors of citrus zests and ginger.

There are two iterations of Savennières, both from the Ogereaus' 2ha (5 acres) of Le Clos le Grand Beaupreau, a 40ha (100-acre) parcel above the Coulée de Serrant and La Roche aux Moines. The site is a gentle slope, the highest in the area, facing full south. Because of its altitude, it is extremely well ventilated. The soils are a complex mix of phtanite, three different types of schist with sandy topsoils. Yields average 40hl/ha, with cluster thinning in the summer and deleafing on the side of the plant that faces the rising sun. Harvest is done by hand, in three passes, as Vincent seeks grapes that have fine-textured, gold skins. The grapes ferment in 400-liter oak (not new) barrels, and the wines may or may not go through malolactic fermentation. They spend 14 months on their fine lees before being bottled.

My overall impression of Vincent's Savennières is that they resemble the land on which the vines grow: high, fragrant notes of fruit, citrus zests, and sometimes sweet spices, which make me think of the thin layer of sandy topsoil skimming above a core of deeper flavors—stone, quinine, chamomile, verbena, Darjeeling tea—that represent the bedrock of ancient schist. The power of the wines is undeniable. Indeed, the pellucid 2015 persuaded me that this piece of land merits promotion to cru status like La Roche aux Moines. (I believe that Domaine des Baumard's Clos du Papillon does as well.)

Ogereau makes a second Savennières from the same plot but exclusively from a vein of sandstone running through it. Called L'Enthusiasme, the 2015 was a limpid wine, as pure as a teardrop. Salty, too. Somewhat acid-driven, it was balanced by flavors of flint and minerals, quince and apples.

The Ogereaus were able to buy a small parcel in Quarts de Chaume. 2015 was their first vintage. Simply delectable, it was hard not to finish the bottle. Creamy texture, gorgeous balance, and a long, honeyed finish. I paired it with some Colston Bassett Stilton, making a bridge of buttery nuances and textures and beautifully contrasting yet complementary flavors. It was, indeed, a taste of heaven

Of the domaine's three reds, the first is an Anjou rouge called L'Anjouée. Chiefly Cabernet Franc with 10 percent Grolleau, it's designed to be casual. And it succeeds. The 2015 was a very pure, juicy, light red, with tasty cherry accents. Les Tailles, named for its *lieu-dit*, is Ogereau's first Anjou Villages. Pure Cabernet Franc, the 2015 was smooth, supple, with light cherry and thyme flavors—downright gulpable. Made only in good years, Clos de la Houssaye, Ogereau's second Anjou Villages, comes from an east-facing slope with thin, pebbly topsoils above a hard schist and sandstone mix. Pure Cabernet Sauvignon, the 2015 was strong, firm, and solidly structured, with mingled flavors of mellow cherry, mild oak, licorice, and birch bark. A very nice companion for a veal chop.

The Ogereaus now make three versions of *liquoreux* from distinct parcels. All are harvested by multiple passes through the vines in order to select the grapes at the desired maturity for a particular cuvée. The first, a Coteaux du Layon St-Lambert, is the kind of Layon that could unify a jury. The 2015, with 80g/l residual sugar, had lovely balance, as well as flavors of apricot and juiciness that were like biting into a ripe grape.

Not made every year, Coteaux du Layon Village Les Bonnes Blanchés comes from a *clos* of the same name, a gentle slope near the Layon with schist soils and a wide opening onto the surrounding countryside. Harvest is conducted grape by grape in search of noble rot or shriveling. The harvest is immediately pressed, and it ferments and ages for 18 months in 500-liter barrels. The 2015, at 11% ABV, was captivating in every respect—in structure, freshness, and in its honeyed flavors mixing with those of citrus zests and herbal tea. It will age beautifully—if you can resist drinking it right away.

Sometimes good things happen to good people. In that vein, the Ogereaus were able to buy a small parcel in Quarts de Chaume. The entire parcel—a south/southwest-facing slope with stony, pebbly, and schist rich soils—is called La Martinière. It is a bit over 2ha (5 acres), with 80 ares (2 acres) in Quarts. The vines are young, and 2015 was the Ogereau's first vintage. The wine was a deep gold and richly honeyed but never cloying. Simply delectable, it was hard not to finish the bottle. Creamy texture, gorgeous balance, and a long, honeyed finish. Making it even more of a gourmandise, I paired it with some Colston Bassett Stilton, making a bridge of buttery nuances and textures and beautifully contrasting yet complementary flavors. It was, indeed, a taste of heaven.



DOMAINE DE BABLUT

The Domaine de Bablut has been producing wine since 1546 in the Aubance-Brissac area, which lies 9–12 miles (15–20km) directly south of Angers. This is the southernmost subdivision of Anjou Noir. Indeed, parts of Bablut's land is actually located on the calcareous soils of the Saumurois. Unlike the Coteaux du Layon, which lies to its west and which is virtually one continuous slope from Passavant to Chalonnes, Aubance-Brissac consists of many low hills. Its shallow top soils lie on schist.

The Coteaux de l'Aubance is a small appellation with 160ha (400 acres) of vines within ten communes and, like the Layon, is devoted to making sweet wines from Chenin Blanc. It takes its name from a river roughly 22 miles (36km) long. Anjou-Villages-Brissac, an appellation created in 1998 and named for provincial town of Brissac, covers the same terrain.

Christophe Daviau, 54, joined his father Jean-Pierre in 1989 having studied enology at the University of Bordeaux and working with Denis Dubourdieu researching methods of toasting wine barrels. Jean-Pierre retired in 1999, but Christophe had already started making big changes, converting the domaine's 50+ha (125+acres) of vines to organic farming and, later, to biodynamics.

He is one of the only Loire winemakers I know to have brought in Mexican workers to t-bud rootstock formerly grafted with Gamay Teinturier Freau to Chenin Blanc and Cabernet Sauvignon. He has planted hedges separating vine parcels, as well as islands within parcels, selecting, for example, elderberry, wild rose, viburnum, and redcurrant, because they grow naturally in the area and offer an extensive

period of flowering favorable to the life cycles of insects useful for the growth of his vines.

All of Daviau's white grapes are hand-harvested, generally by multiple passes through the vineyards. Half of the red grapes are hand-harvested; the rest are machine-harvested after manual deleafing, as well as elimination of unripe grapes. Daviau uses only indigenous yeasts for vinification.

One of the most lip-smacking surprises was Daviau's 2015 Sauvignon Blanc. The grapes, between 15 and 20 years old, macerate for one night before being slowly pressed. They ferment and age in stainless-steel tanks with regular stirring up of the lees for several months before springtime bottling. Fresh, ripe, and nicely structured, the wine had appealing flavors of minerals and ripe stone fruit. It is classed as an IGP Val de Loire, yet it rivaled many AOP Sauvignons in Touraine and the Sancerrois. Indeed, were there to be a critical mass of Sauvignon Blancs this good in Anjou, it could—and should—lead to an upgrade to AOP.

In the latter years of the past century, when someone wanted to taste an old Cabernet d'Anjou, they headed directly to Domaine de Bablut where there was quite a library. I recall a deliciously honeyed 1961 with interwoven flavors of licorice, hay, coffee, and grapefruit. This was very far from any kind of norm for the category, and although Christophe Daviau continues to make Cabernet d'Anjou, he does not intend for it to be cellared.

Instead, he's making a style that, if less remarkable, is more useful and very admirable. Indeed, it was the first of the "new" iteration of Cab d'Anjou that I tasted, and it was a delectable discovery. A direct press of equal parts Cabernet Franc and



Sauvignon—harvested overripe—the wine had 17g of residual sugar per liter (g/l RS). An enormous improvement over the old unripe Cabs with 30g/l RS, it was fresh and nicely balanced, with a lovely nose of cranberry and cherry—delightful. Daviau also makes a sprightly, berried Rosé de Loire and solid Crémant de Loire—50 percent Chardonnay blended with Grolleau, Cabernet Franc, and Chenin—that spends four years *sur latte*.

Daviau makes two versions of Anjou blanc, both pure Chenin. The first, Petit Princé, comes from a breezy slope with soils of red and ochre schist, as well as outcroppings of quartz. Fermented in tank, the wine ages for 18 months on its fine lees. The 2014 was a tender dry white with flavors of apricot and quince, as well as lively acidity. The 2008 had mellowed with age, with richer flavors of yellow stone fruit, yet retained the freshness of youth.

The geologically named cuvée Ordovicien comes from a rocky schist slope dating from the Primary era. Grapes are hand-selected at the point of overripeness and ferment in barriques (both new and newish). The wine is then transferred to different barriques for aging for 18 months, during which time its lees are stirred up every two weeks.

As rich as a *moelleux* but entirely dry, this is an impressive, mouth-filling wine. The generous 2014 mingled flavors of quince, citrus, quinine, and apricot and promised to age beautifully. The 2005, a lightly burnished gold, had flavors of ripe apple and old wood and again teased you into thinking it would be *moelleux* only to make you smile at its utter dryness. It brought to mind two descriptors that I have never used vinously: I found the wine “wide” and “broad.” Not fat, not fleshy, not voluptuous—wide or broad as a six-lane highway compared

to a one-way street, for example. Or the tablelands and mesas of the American Southwest. I imagined how well it would pair with plumed game in a wild mushroom cream sauce or bacon-wrapped, spit-roasted woodcock or lobster. And now I find myself wondering if I have any Ordovicien in the cellar.

Daviau makes three different iterations of Anjou-Villages Brissac. The difference between Brissac and other Anjou Villages? “I can’t honestly say,” Daviau noted, “except that the Brissac area is lightly dryer because we’re protected by the forest of Brissac. We’re precisely at the point of a geological break: Brissac is at the limits of metamorphic and sedimentary soils. Cabernet Franc hates hydric stress, so we plant it on sedimentary soils; Cabernet Sauvignon loves hydric stress, so we plant it on schist.”

His first Brissac is a blend of 70 percent Cabernet Franc from grapes grown on Anjou Blanc (clay-limestone) soils and 30 percent Cabernet Sauvignon grown on schist and sandstone. The grapes are destemmed and macerate for three weeks. Then the wine ages for 18 months in concrete tanks. The 2014, 12.5% ABV, was a smooth-textured, red-blooded red to chill and enjoy. It was also my favorite of Daviau’s reds, and therein lies the rub. I found Petra Alba—pure Cabernet Franc grown on Paris Basin marl, and Petra Nigra, Cabernet Sauvignon grown on rocky slopes with schist and sandstone soils—too heavily extracted. Each vatted for more than 60 days. And although the wines softened and the flavors melded over several days, they never revealed the charm of the simplest bottling.

But Daviau is nothing if not smart, ambitious, and talented. I fully expect him to rethink and adapt his spectrum of reds until they are as irresistible as his other wines—like the four

sumptuous bottlings of Aubance that follow, each one of which I drank over an entire week, observing fugitive nuances and relishing every sip.

All the grapes for Daviau’s Aubances are harvested by successive passes through the vineyard in search of “roasted grapes” that have been attacked by noble rot. He also looks for 20 percent of overripe grapes for added freshness. The grapes ferment slowly in new and newish barriques and fermentation stops naturally, without the addition of sulfites. Then follows 18 months of aging in barrel before bottling.

Daviau’s first bottling of Aubance is called Selection. The 2010 demonstrates the balance and freshness he looks for in this cuvée. The wine has 13.6% ABV, 88g/l RS, and 4.7g/l total acidity (TA). An opulent, well-structured wine, it offered delectable flavors of honey, lemon zest, and herbal tea. The Grandpierre bottling takes its name from the parcel on which its grapes were grown. Not surprising, then, that I found it had the strongest “sense of place” of Daviau’s Aubance wines. The 2010, pure botrytis, with 11.8% ABV, 118g/l RS, and 6g/l TA, was a pale, buffed gold. There were notes of toast, honey, yuzu, and lemon, as well as a beautiful blend of succulence and acidity.

As its name suggests, Noble is Daviau’s cuvée de Sélection de Grains Nobles. The 2010, harvested October 13 and 15, had 11% ABV, 204g/l RS, and 5.2g/l TA. A deep, burnished gold, it was a creamy wine with flavors of toast and honey. The structure was lovely, freshness and acidity supporting the wine’s richness. Quite lip-smacking. The Unique cuvée, true to its name, is not made every year. Daviau makes it in years so exceptional that conditions do not permit him to make the three aforementioned bottlings. The intense heat of 2003 was such a year. The grapes, harvested at the end of September and the first two weeks of October, resulted in a wine with 13.6% ABV, 87g/l RS, and 3.7g/l TA. Tasted in May, the wine was an amber gold with flavors of honey and honeycomb. With its Loire freshness, it seemed to have been born yesterday. Splendid.

DOMAINE DE JUCHEPIE

When Eddy and Mileine Oosterlinck-Bracke bought their home in Anjou in the mid-1980s, it was the realization of a long-held dream. Passionate about wine, they had always wanted to make their own, but they happened to live in Belgium, where Eddy had a substantial hardware business (now run by his son). Part of the property belonging to the house were 30 ares of vines (0.7 acre). Eddy purchased another 2ha (5 acres), but it wasn’t until he built his holdings up to 4ha (10 acres)—which would permit him to work his soils and farm the way he saw fit—that he began to make his own wine. The Oosterlincks now have 8ha (20 acres), all within a 15km (9-mile) radius in the heart of the Layon, as well as a potential of 22 (54 acres).

Soils are a mix of just about every type in Anjou—primarily schist—red and purple, phtanite, rhyolite, spilite, sandstone, quartz, and more, spread out in different degrees in their various parcels. Farming is biodynamic. Yields are extremely low: for dry wines, 30hl/ha; for *liqueureux*, 10–15hl/ha.

The Oosterlincks have built a cellar, which they keep augmenting. They are aided by a couple of men in the cellar and vineyards and, during harvest, have teams of ten passing

Opposite: Eddy Oosterlinck-Bracke savoring one of his seven superb Chenin cuvées. Overleaf: Idealists Charlotte and Thomas Carsin, dedicated to “natural” wines.

I believe I’ve tasted about every wine in every vintage since the Oosterlincks started. While the wines were always wonderful, now they are glorious. The Oosterlincks are tireless perfectionists, and the wines have become increasingly precise and authoritative

through the vines for a period of six weeks. Once harvested, the grapes are hand-pressed in an old vertical wood press. Neither yeasts nor sugar are added.

I believe I’ve tasted about every wine in every vintage since the Oosterlincks started. While the wines were always wonderful, now they are glorious. The Oosterlincks are tireless perfectionists, and the wines have become increasingly precise and authoritative. More than anything, the Oosterlincks have succeeded in turning their vines into a cru. Were the Layon to follow the principles of St-Emilion, Juchepie would most certainly be awarded premier grand cru classé status.

When they started, the Oosterlincks made three cuvées—one dry and two *liqueureux*. Now they make four dry Chenins and four *liqueureux*, though they don’t make every cuvée every year. As Eddy explains, “We observed that different lots had different styles, and we wanted to keep the styles apart.” The dry Chenins carry the Anjou Blanc appellation. Pure Chenin, the yields are 30hl/ha. Grapes are harvested by hand, and Eddy uses that old vertical wooden press, noting that pressing for the dry wines lasts for 24 hours so that there’s naturally some skin contact.

The first of the Anjou Blancs is Les Monts. Made from grapes that don’t go into the Le Clos bottling, it spends a year in 220-liter barrels around five years old, followed by two months in tank before being bottled. When tasted in April 2017, the 2014, 13% ABV with 4g/l RS, led you to believe it was going to be sweet, but on the palate, it came across as completely dry. There were fleeting aromas of peach, apricot, mirabelle, and ginger backed by flint. A limpid, elegant wine, it had fine structure. Rather magnificent.

Grapes for Le Clos grow on a mix of soils including red and purple schist, spilite, and phtanite. Oosterlinck considers it the most mineral of their dry Chenins. Like Les Monts, it spends 12 months in barrel and two in tank. The 2014, 13.5% ABV and 6g/l RS, was a crystalline wine with flavors of herbal tea and minerals. A discreet beauty, it was difficult to stop drinking it.

La Jarre de Juchepie, a cuvée introduced in the 2015 vintage, takes its name from the vessel in which the grapes ferment and age. Oosterlinck was inspired to try the method because so many of his colleagues were experimenting with similar modes and he wanted to see what difference it would create in his wine—though Oosterlinck’s *jarre* is made of sandstone, it’s large (1,000-liter capacity) and was baked at high temperatures to make it less porous than your typical amphora. When tasted in April, the wine was lightly oxidized on the nose, though not on the palate. Steely and juicy, with vibrant flavors of lemon zest, it was straight as an arrow. Rectilinear.

Le Paradis de Juchepie, another cuvée introduced in 2015, is based on the domaine’s oldest vines, those grouped around the house, and ferments and ages in new, fine-grained, heavily toasted barriques. Not surprisingly, oak dominated on first taste.

After a bit of aeration, hints of coconut appeared along with fresh lemon, both of which continued through a long finish.

The yields for the Oosterlincks' sweet wines—all of them Coteaux du Layon Faye—are 10–15hl/ha. “It’s rare that we don’t have botrytis,” Oosterlinck observed. Once in the cellar, the grapes are placed in the vertical wooden press, where they will be slowly pressed for 36 hours. Oosterlinck wants to keep the juice in the grapes as long as possible in order to extract the dry matter. They generally ferment in 220-liter barrels around five years old. The lightest cuvée, Churelles takes the name of its plot, in which light, silty soils mix with rhyolite, quartz, and phtanite. The grapes are picked at a maximum of 18% potential alcohol. The 2015 had 13.5% ABV and 84g/l RS. More than half had been attacked by noble rot; the rest of the grapes were either shriveled or overripe. A softly burnished gold, the wine was nicely structured and extremely appetizing, with an abundance of honey, fine acidity, citrus fruit, oak, and an appetizing undertone of bitterness. The flavors seemed to shimmer, like light on satin.

The next cuvée is Les Quarts de Juchepie. The 2015, 12% ABV and 126g/l RS, was a brilliant gold. Elegant and silky, it slid down the gullet, leaving behind memories of honey and lemon zests. Exquisite acidity, lip-smacking bitterness—a ravishing wine. La Passion de Juchepie is another cuvée the Oosterlincks do not make every year. There was none in 2016, and the 2015 was still in barrel, so we had to go back to 2010. For this bottling, Oosterlinck looks for potential alcohol of 20%, and yields are even lower, 5–10hl/ha. The 2010, with 10% ABV and 175g/l RS, was a burnished gold, the wine exuding flavors of orange zest, quinine, and honeycomb. Despite its richness, it was fresh, with soft notes of oak. A *vin de méditation*, made for sipping fireside.

The final cuvée, La Quintessence de Juchepie, is the richest of all. The grapes must have a potential of 22% alcohol and the wine will have at least 200g/l RS. It will ferment and age in oak for 24 months, followed by two months in tank. The 2011 had less than 10% ABV, over 210g/l RS, and 6g/l TA. A sumptuous wine, reprising flavors of La Passion, it was a meal in itself. Another *vin de méditation*.

And then there’s this: Although Eddy Oosterlinck’s laser focus is on Chenin, the domaine does have a hectare (2.47 acres) of old Cabernet Franc, and to his dismay, they make a red wine with its grapes—a very good wine, as it happens. “All the reds here are behind the house, so it’s our ‘view,’ our landscape, so I won’t rip them up.” The resulting wine is called Le Rubis de Juchepie. Harvested at 17hl/ha, vatted for 20 days without added yeast, and aged for six months in tank, Le Rubis is an utterly charming red that is site-specific, supple, and irresistible. I’m not alone in loving it. No less a Cabernet Franc expert than Bourgueil/St-Nicholas de Bourgueil’s Yannick Amirault admires it. Eddy is overruled.

CLOS DE L'ÉLU

In January 2008, Charlotte and Thomas Carsin, both in their early 40s, acquired the 20ha (50-acre) Clos de l'Élu domain in St-Aubin de Luigne, one of my favorite communes in the Layon. Neither had come from Anjou or from wine families. As a young married couple they worked the harvest in Burgundy during school vacation. Thomas fell in love with wine and decided to become a winemaker. For internships that were part of his studies in tropical agronomy, he and Charlotte went to Sonoma

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Valley, where Thomas worked for Christopher Creek, a small winery, and Charlotte worked in the tasting room of Clos du Bois. Then followed jobs in wine shops in Paris and in consultant agencies in Reims and in Brignoles (Provence).

When it became time to create their own winery, they chose Anjou. They were both from Brittany and were fond of the west of France. What’s more, they both loved Chenin Blanc. My first taste of their wines was at a small event in Paris several years ago. I was charmed both by Charlotte and by the wines and wanted to get to know the domaine, so I made an appointment to visit their winery this past April.

On the eve of my appointment, frost struck Anjou hard. A substantial proportion of the domaine’s vines were affected. Our meeting was canceled, and the Carsins promised to send me samples and technical information. They currently produce 11 wines, of which they sent me six, described below. Those not sent were an Anjou Blanc and three VdP—two reds, the first a red blend of Gamay, Grolleau, and Cabernet Franc; the second, a blend of Gamay and Cabernet Franc; and a Sauvignon Blanc.

The wines tasted are far from perfect but not without promise. Like many of Anjou’s newcomers, the Carsins are idealists and seem devoted to making “natural” wines. My hope is that their wines will keep improving as they master the craft of winemaking. As we all know, such mastery does not come overnight.

The Carsins’ 20ha comprise six parcels on south-facing slopes. Soils, for the most part, are composed of schist, shale, and sandstone. And, they note, “Each parcel has its own personal régime: the way the soil is tilled, natural cover crops, more or less severe debudding (which involves a team of 15 people working for three weeks), clipping and pruning where necessary.” Yields are kept low, generally no more than 30hl/ha and less for sweet wines and the top cuvées. During harvest, a team of 20 picks the grapes, hand-sorting in the vineyards.

In their cellars the Carsins make as much use of gravity as existing conditions allow; grapes are pressed slowly; yeast is never added, and the musts are never chaptalized. Whites ferment in vats or barrels and age for a minimum of eight months. Ninety percent of the reds are made by whole-bunch maceration. They are not filtered; and the whites rarely are. All of the wines get a low dose of sulfur dioxide at bottling.

First in the lineup was the 2015 Anjou Blanc Bastingage, 14% ABV. The wine aged in old oak barrels for a year on its lees



and, after assembling, spent another two to four months in tank. A nicely structured wine, it had mild notes of mint, other herbs, and citrus, as well as salt. In its relative neutrality, it recalled the pleasant Chenin-based whites from the Vendée more than it did the more commanding wines of the Layon.

Ephata is the name of the domaine’s top Anjou Blanc bottling, made from 50-year-old vines whose yields are limited to 20hl/ha. After fermentation, followed by six months in barrel, the wines age in 140-liter clay amphorae for a year. The 2014, 13.5% ABV, demanded very slow tasting on my part. Faint scents of apples and salt vanished quickly, like a vapor, leaving nothing. Six hours later, the wine had more substance. At least there was a beginning and an end, a sense of fruit and salt. Day 2: Nothing on the nose; on the palate, the wine resembled Bastingage. Day 3: Apples and salt. Day 4: The wine seemed more solid and was as enjoyably drinkable as Bastingage, which it continued to resemble.

As a result of this experience, I immediately opened the domaine’s top red cuvée, Magellan, an Anjou Village made from Cabernet Franc grown on shale, sandstone, and phtanite soils. The grapes, destemmed but not crushed, are placed immediately in amphorae. After five weeks of light punching down, they are pressed. Then follow 20 months in used oak barrels. The 2014, 12% ABV, presented varietal aromas mixed with salt, all of which disappeared instantly, phantom-like. Several hours later, the wine had more flavor and substance. It tasted like a Cabernet Franc. Not bad. Day 2: The wine gained in intensity; it had body; it was muscular and presented some pleasant herbal notes; several hours later, it had evolved into a rather nice, supple, smooth, lightly herbaceous, eminently food-friendly red.

Followed over several days, it became downright amiable—one of the domaine’s best wines.

EAiglerie is the name of the domaine’s Anjou Rouge, another Cabernet Franc grown on schist-rich soils. With whole-cluster fermentation for three to five weeks, followed by six months in vats without racking, the 2014, 14% ABV, is a mix of free-run juice and *vin de presse*. Fragrant, supple, and light on its feet, the wine mixed flavors of berries and herbs such as thyme. There was quite a bit of acidity, but all in all, it was a very pleasant red that, nicely chilled, would make a tasty lunch wine.

Alas, Espérance, pure Pineau d’Aunis, was surely bottled either before all the sugar had fermented out or before malo had finished, as evidenced by the significant amount of fizz. But hope springs eternal. After ten days in the fridge, whatever fermentation was going on had more or less finished, and the wine had deepened in color to a rusty red—it had been nearly translucent at first—and only faint memories of CO₂ were apparent. There was even a glimpse of Pineau d’Aunis’s characteristic pepperness.

The Carsins are fortunate enough to have a piece of Chaume, one of the best terroirs of the Layon—a mix of shale, sandstone, spilite, and phtanite soils on well-exposed hillsides. (Chaume was recently awarded premier cru status, but that’s another story.) The vines are relatively young—10 to 15 years old—and yields kept at 15hl/ha. Harvested by several passes through the vineyard, the 2014, 11% ABV, seemed a mix of overripe, shriveled, and botrytis-attacked grapes. Fermented and aged for 12 months in oak barrels, the wine was concentrated and offered flavors of raw apple interwoven with honey. It is by far the Carsins’ best wine. And very delicious. ■