

FROM THE GRAPEVINE

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May-June 2006

The French are coming! Yes, Bastille Day is still a ways out, but I had the chance to indulge my inner Francophile early this year when the **2006 Loire Valley Tastings & Road Show** hit town in May. Billed as the only tasting devoted exclusively to the wines of the Loire Valley, this event — open only to the media and trade — touched down in New York City, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

One of my first stops was to visit winemaker and owner Alain le Capitaine, of **Domaine le Capitaine**. I've had the pleasure of visiting his 50-acre winery near the Loire River, where he produces a full range of Vouvrais (sec, demi-sec, moelleux and traditional). At the road show, I began by sampling Capitaine's *2004 Vouvray Sec Les Perferes*, a dry white with tangy citrus and a nice finish. Next came the *2004 Vouvray Sec Les Flots Rians*, a drier bottle with more complex dark fruits. Also notable was the semi-dry *2004 Vouvray Cuvee Adrien D/S Les Perrieres*, which was light in color and sweet on the palate. We wrapped up with the distinguished *2002 Cuvee Adrien*. I quite liked this older wine – it showed delicate peach on the nose, a structured body and a long finish.

My next visit was to the **Baudry-Dutour** display. First served up by this Chinon-region winery was its *2004 Chinon Rouge Domaine du Roncee*, which showed the inky dark color you'd expect given its Cabernet Franc base. This wine sang with raspberries, and showed off a sophisticated structure and mild finish. Their other noteworthy wine poured was the *2004 Chinon Rouge Coteau des Chenanceaux*. This was a true 'wow' wine, charging the palate with complex notes and tannins. Grab it if you find it.

From heavy to light, I cooled down with Anne de Choulot's appealing *2004 Sancerre Blanc Vieilles Vignes*. This crisp, balanced white is a summer delight. I was interested to learn that De Choulot's winery, the **Chateau de Thauvenay/Comte Georges de Choulot**, was founded in 1819 by a Napoleonic minister. The winery has stayed in the family ever since.

I moved on to yet another Chinon winery, **Couly Dutheil**, which experiments with rich tannic wines on their 300-acre Loire vineyard. First up was their *2005 Chinon Rose Rene Couly Cuvee Prestige*, a pleasantly sweet drink. Moving up significantly on the intensity

scale was the 100% Cabernet Franc *2003 Chinon Rouge Baronnie Madeleine*, which had a short maceration yet still possessed round edges. And while I liked the velvety-smooth *2003 Chinon Rouge Clos de l'Echo*, the *2003 Chinon Rouge Cuvee Crescendo Clos de l'Echo* blew me away with its complex richness.

My virtual French vacation continued at **Domaine Laporte**, a 50-acre vineyard in the middle of Sancerre planted mostly with Sauvignon Blanc. The full-bodied *2005 Menetou-Salon Blanc Le Prieure de Saint Ceols* had an attractive bouquet and a great citrus tanginess. The other bottle I thought tasted well was the 100% Pinot Noir *2005 Menetou-Salon Rouge Le Prieure de Saint Ceola*. This dark, deeply fruited wine was a great surprise from the Sancerre area.

My final stop comes from close to the English Channel and is one of the oldest properties of the Muscadet Sevre et Maine appellation. The **Chateau du Cleray-Sauvion** served up an admirable *2005 Muscadet Sevre et Maine sur Lie Haute Culture Chateau du Cleray-Sauvion Brut*. Yes, the name is as big as the glasses in which the wine is served. This big, earthy and complex bottle nicely lived up to its lengthy label.

Overall, this event did exactly what it set out to do: Introduce some really nice wine personages and products to our region. I hope distributors bring some of these gems to our shores.

In the meantime, when Bastille Day rolls around, why not toast it with a charming little French number?

As always, happy drinking!

Joel M. Fisher Ph.D writes a monthly column for the [Chefs de Cuisine Association of California](#) and has been the wine instructor for the Culinary Arts Department, [Art Institute of California-Los Angeles](#). He is Director of Public Affairs for Avalon Hollywood, and as a partner in [WineVineandDine](#) conducts wine tastings, wine dinners, and wine-and-food pairings throughout Southern California. His email address is joel@winevineanddine.com. In the course of her evolving writing career, Sara Fisher Chapin has written on topics ranging from the wines of Chianti to high-tech IPOs. She finds the former much more entertaining.