

Les 5 du Vin

Banyols-Budd-Cobbold-Lalau-Vanhellemont

More on Chenin

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Since I also (together with Jim Mr Cool-it Budd, here showing just how to cool down a glass of sweet Chenin properly) attended the recent and very interesting Chenin congress in the Loire town of Angers, I will attempt to cover here a few points that stood out for me during the 2 and a half days of focus on this fine grape variety, hopefully without covering again too much of the ground that Jim has already trodden in his recent post. I will also list some of my

favourite wines from the various tasting sessions that I managed to slot in between listening to the speakers at the congress or visiting a local appellation.



The history of Chenin was one of the subjects addressed during the congress and it was handled with characteristic modesty and the archaeologist's precision by Henri Galinier. One of the main problems when delving into written archival sources to look for traces of grape varieties is the frequent use of synonyms for varieties that we now name in a fixed way. Chenin is no exception and it appears that a unified use of this term to describe that particular cultivar only goes back about 100 years. The most frequent term to be found in old documents for what we now know as Chenin Blanc is Franc Pineau, but it was also called Blanc d'Anjou, as well as, just in Saumur, Chenin. There were many others as well (60 in all). All of this takes us back to the 17th century, which is also the period when Dutch traders took it to South Africa, where it became known as Steen.

Calling it Chenin Blanc, as we frequently do, is superfluous according to the ampelographer Jean-Michel Boursiquot, as one could drop the « blanc » since this variety bears no relation to that which is sometimes named Chenin Noir and whose proper name is Pineau d'Aunis! The term Pineau can also be a constant source of confusion since, phonetically speaking, the word sounds just like Pinot, the Burgundian grape family (Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, Pinot Blanc, etc), whereas Chenin Blanc (aka Franc Pineau) is not linked to that family. Now we know, thanks to Jean-Michel Boursiquot and his team, that the two parents of Chenin are in fact Savagnin (aka Traminer) and (with a probability of 95%) Sauvignonasse (aka Sauvignon Vert). Hope you are all following out there!

The best known of Chenin's parents is Savagnin, as it is known in

France's Jura region, but which has many synonyms in Switzerland and northern Italy from where it probably originates. Sauvagnin is an important vine genitor and its offspring also include Sauvignon Blanc and Petit Manseng in France, as well as the Iberian varieties Verdejo, Arinto and Gouveio. Grape varieties, like other plants, have no concern with man-made boundaries, which fact only makes the protectionist moves on the part of several French appellations to prevent other French regions from planting certain varieties seem as grotesque as incoherent.



Lovely sweet Chenin at its best from Quarts-de-Chaume and Château Pierre Bise

Chenin can be found, alone or in blends, in a total of 35 French wine appellations (Loire, South-West and Languedoc regions) as well as in 9 other European countries, but it is South Africa which harbours by far the largest area planted to this grape today, and has done so for a long time. Agronomically, its yields are very variable according to environment and weather conditions, and it is indeed used to make a wide range of styles, from light sparklers to light dries, richer dries, semi-sweet and luscious. It is even used as a base wine for distillation in South Africa. It starts its vegetative life early, making it vulnerable

to spring frosts yet it ripens late. It also is susceptible to various fungal and wood diseases. Having been around for quite a long time, it has considerable clonal diversity and 441 of these are present at the national conservatory at Montreuil-Bellay. It is also adaptable to a wide variety of climates, as is shown by its success both in South Africa and in northern France. It seems to show good resilience to drought, which could be a useful element in the future. All of this adds up to a variety that is considered to be an excellent vehicle for showing up nuances in growing conditions as well as wine making.

So here are the wines that I really enjoyed at the tasting, which was intelligently organised on a self-service basis with short and factual information sheets under plastic in front of each bottle. The wines were grouped according to their respective countries or appellations, which I will follow in my lists of favourite wines, starting with France and in alphabetical order of the appellations.

Anjou Blanc

Château de la Roulerie (<http://laroulerie.com>), Magnolia 2018

Frédéric Mabileau (<http://www.fredericmabileau.com>), Chenin des Rouillères 2018

Château de Fesles (<https://www.fesles.com/fr>), La Chapelle 2017

Château Princé (<http://www.chateauprince.fr>), Les Ardoisières 2011

Patrick Baudoin (<http://www.patrick-baudouin.com>), Les Gats 2014

Domaine de Juchepie (<https://www.vigneron-independant.com/domaine-de-juchepie-0>), Le Clos 2014

Domaine de la Grézille (<http://la-grézille>), cuvée la Galopinière 2003
(this was very unusual but excellent, deep yellow/orange in colour, with flavours reminiscent of a Vin Jaune, it also announced 17% alcohol)

Chinon *(yes, white Chinon is from Chenin. Small selection here)*

Charles Joguet (<http://www.charlesjoguet.com>), Clos de la Plante Martin 2018

Coteaux de l'Aubance *(the only sweet wine appellation whose wines I managed to taste this time)*

Château d'Avrillé (<http://www.chateau-avrille.com>) 2018

Domaine de Bablut (<http://www.bablut.fr/web/>) 2011

Domaine de Bablut (<http://www.bablut.fr/web/>), Noble 2002

Jasnières (*there were many more but they mostly tasted like battery acid to me. Jasnières could use a bit more global warming!*)

Domaine de Bellivière (<https://www.belliviere.com>), Les Rosiers 2017

Saumur

Frédéric Mabileau (<http://www.fredericmabileau.com>), Chemin du Puy 2015

Château de Parnay (<http://www.chateaudeparay.fr>), Clos d'Entre les Murs, 2013

Savennières (*this seemed to me to be the most consistent of the Loire appellations on show at the tasting. It is of course quite small and its wines sell for relatively high prices, which partly explains this*)

Domaine du Closel (<http://www.savennieres-closel.com>), Les Caillardières 2016

Domaine du Closel, La Jalousie 2016

Domiane Ogereau (<http://www.domaineogereau.com>), l'Enthousiasme 2016

Château Soucherie (<http://www.chateausoucherie.fr>), Clos des Perrières 2015

Domaine FL ([http://www.domainefl.com/.](http://www.domainefl.com/)), Le Parc 2015

Touraine Amboise

Domaine Bonnigal-Bodet (<http://www.bonnigal-bodet.fr>), Les Clos de Beauce 2017

Vouvray (*a disappointing selection on the whole, but quite a few of the top producers did not show a wine for some reason*)

Alain Robert (<https://www.vigneron-independant.com/vignoble-alain-robert>), Ammonite 2016

Vincent Carême (<https://vincentcareme.fr>) 2018





A « fucking marvellous » (dry) Chenin from Ken Forrester (see below)

South Africa

Radford Dale (<https://www.radforddale.com>), Renaissance 2017

Radford Dale, Standford 2018

Ken Forrester (<http://www.kenforresterwines.com>), The FMC 2015
(les initials signifient « fucking marvellous chenin »)

Kleine Zalze (<http://www.kleinezalze.co.za>), Family Reserve 2017

Klein Zalze, Vineyard Selection 2018

Hogan Wines (<http://hoganwines.co.za>), Carl Everson Single
Vineyard 2017

Allesverloren Estate (<https://www.allesverloren.co.za>) 2019

Switzerland (*only one wine shown, but I tasted another very good one back in May in the Aigle region, whose name I have forgotten*).

Domaine Louis Bovard (<http://www.domainebovard.com/fr/accueil.php>), Salix 2017

Maybe more next week. I am off on a motorcycle to Corbières and then Catalonia.

David Cobbold

2 réflexions sur “More on Chenin”

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As seen from South Africa: <https://news.wine.co.za/News.aspx?NEWSID=35006&CLIENTID=&SPOTLIGHTID=>

🕒 [15/07/2019 À 21:28](#) ↩ **RÉPONSE**

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Notre ami Jim publie un article sur la renaissance du Chenin en Loire et en Afrique du Sud, sur le site de Decanter, ici:

<https://www.decanter.com/premium/chenin-blanc-renaissance-loire-south-africa-421009/>

🕒 [20/07/2019 À 14:19](#) ↩ **RÉPONSE**

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