

CHEVALIER

GREAT RIVERS

JULY 2022



rounded and smoothed over millennia, that in some parts cover the ground as far as the eye can see. These striking *galets roulés* are a major component of terroirs such as those found in Châteauneuf-du-Pape, controlling erosion and radiating the sun's heat back at the grapes for smooth and steady ripening.

In hot and cold climates alike, the thermal inertia of rivers can be a blessing to grape growers. It is why the Loire Valley—a cold region at a decidedly northerly latitude—is even suitable for viticulture at all: the relative warmth coming from the Loire is essential to staving off destructive frosts in spring and boosting ripening late in the season. Conversely, river water creates air currents that serve as a local cooling system, ensuring fresh nights in hot regions and providing much-needed ventilation during heat waves. This moderating effect has taken on unprecedented importance in recent years, helping to regulate a climate that is increasingly unpredictable and full of extremes.

In this issue, we are focusing on three of France's great river systems: the Rhône, the Loire, and the Garonne/Dordogne confluence in the Bordelais. While imported wines are no longer shipped abroad via these channels, we can still thank these forces of nature for creating the very landscapes and soils responsible for the fine wines in this pack. We can appreciate their importance to the vineyards' unique microclimates and, ultimately, recognize that their flowing waters play an immense role in the wines flowing out of each bottle and into your glass. —ANTHONY LYNCH

GREAT RIVERS

A single factor ties together many of the world's great wine regions: the Loire, the Rhône, the Mosel, Napa, Sonoma, the Douro . . . You guessed it: rather than climate, soil, or the type of grapes they grow, each of these regions is named after the major river that runs through it. Historically, rivers served as crucial trade routes for the shipment of wine to customers near and far; for instance, the centuries of success Bordeaux has enjoyed beyond French borders could never have been if not for the vineyards' strategic position by the Gironde estuary. But for all their commercial importance, rivers have a far deeper impact on the wines made nearby. The rest, as you probably also guessed, comes down to terroir.

At their most basic level, rivers represent a geological force that shapes entire landscapes, carving out valleys and carrying sediment over long distances. Such processes take millions of years, but they ultimately define an area's topography and geology. The terraced banks of the northern Rhône would not exist without the Rhône itself, its waters rushing down from the Alps and eroding away granite plateaus to expose the dramatically steep slopes we know today. Farther south, the Rhône has deposited quartzite stones,



La Loire ♦ LOIRE VALLEY



2016 CHINON BLANC “CLOS DE LA PLANTE MARTIN” ♦ CHARLES JOGUET \$43

WHILE DOMAINE JOGUET may have built its reputation on its sublime and age-worthy reds, it also produces exquisite whites from Chenin Blanc. Chinon *blanc* is rare, with just 3% of the appellation’s vineyard land planted to Chenin, but the grape is a natural fit for the chalky soils known to yield excellent Cabernet Franc. After a gentle pressing, winemaker Kevin Fontaine ferments and ages the juice in oak barrels with a very small percentage of new wood. Now with some bottle age, this white has developed subtle honeyed notes along with a lovely minerality that is characteristic of these soils. Complex and textural, with notes of quince and a chalky finish, La Plante Martin is a serious Chinon *blanc* that pairs wonderfully with grilled fish, roast beets with goat cheese, or roast chicken seasoned with cumin seed and coriander.

2019 BOURGUEIL “TRINCH!” ♦ CATHERINE & PIERRE BRETON \$30

CATHERINE AND PIERRE BRETON were early pioneers of organic and biodynamic farming in the Loire, and helped transform the Bourgueil appellation from its reputation as a producer of second-class bistro wines to a veritable natural wine Mecca. This is the most ethereal and quaffable of the Bretons’ reds, and the name says it all. For those of you unfamiliar with antiquated German beer hall idioms, it means *Cheers!* and the word was famously popularized by the sixteenth-century French scholar Rabelais, who shouted the term *ad nauseum* with his drinking buddies. This supple, peppery Cabernet Franc is designed to slide down your gullet with such ease you may not even notice. Give it a light chill before you quaff away.



La Garonne & La Dordogne ♦ BORDEAUX

2020 BORDEAUX BLANC “DÉFINITION”

♦ DOMAINE DE L'ALLIANCE \$48

WHEN YOU'RE a *garagiste* winemaker in Sauternes, and Mother Nature has other plans for your crop, you have to pivot. Life throws you lemons—or hail, or frost—so you make lemonade, or, rather, razor-sharp dry whites instead of the sweet wines so dependent on perfect climatic conditions. It's only fitting that Daniel Alibrand, a fisherman in a previous career, in the face of one tough vintage after another, would end up making the kind of wines that have you craving oysters, scallops, and other tiny, briny sea creatures. An electric white packed with chalk and citrus, soaring aromatics, and a long, saline finish, *Définition* is delicious for early drinking but can also be held for several years for a rounder, more honeyed expression of this great Bordeaux terroir.



2016 LALANDE-DE-POMEROL ♦ CHÂTEAU BELLES-GRAVES \$39



A “SATELLITE APPELLATION” to the noble Pomerol AOC, Lalande-de-Pomerol produces reds that, at their best, mimic Pomerol's robust, earthy flavors at a fraction of the price. While there is more variation in terroir within the two appellations than between them, Lalande tends to have more gravel and sand compared to Pomerol's richer clay soils. Château Belles-Graves is named after the abundant gravel in its vineyards, which is notorious for holding the sun's heat into the night. This helps

the grapes (Merlot with a bit of Cabernet Franc) ripen early, giving generous wines dominated by ripe black fruit with very supple, approachable tannins. Their early-drinking charm does not preclude them from aging: this Lalande can easily be held for several more years, developing a deep complexity and Pomerol-esque aromas of black truffle and leather. Fine Bordeaux need not cost a fortune, nor does it need decades of bottle age to be delicious.



Le Rhône ♦ RHÔNE VALLEY

2018 SAINT JOSEPH *BLANC*

♦ LIONEL FAURY \$38



KERMIT BEGAN to collaborate with Philippe Faury in the blending of his *blancs* in the 1990s because he was particular about wanting the wines he imported to remain unfiltered. Today, we continue to work with Philippe's son, Lionel, in selecting the blend of parcels and aging vessels that contribute to this bottling. The 2018 is roughly 85% Marsanne and 15% Roussanne grown on steep granite slopes overlooking the Rhône. It was mostly aged in stainless steel to preserve as

much freshness and fruit as possible, but the small part of the blend that spent time in oak will give you a delightful glimmer of opulence. The result is very delicate, round, and elegant, showcasing classic notes of peachy stone fruit and flowers. Lionel's signature is a delicious balance of richness with finesse, and that rare combination is on full display in this Saint Joseph.

2019 CHÂTEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE "PIEDLONG"

♦ FAMILLE BRUNIER \$65

THE BRUNIER FAMILY has worked the land in Châteauneuf-du-Pape for more than a century, focusing their efforts on the legendary stony plateau called La Crau. "Piedlong" is therefore somewhat of a novelty, highlighting an entirely different terroir of Châteauneuf. Just like La Crau, Piedlong—which sits at one of the appellation's highest points—has a soil littered with the iconic *galets roulés*, giving a profoundly mineral wine that is fleshed out by an elegant dollop of Mourvèdre from the sandy Pignan vineyard nearby. While this bottling certainly possesses the richness and muscle of a great age-worthy Châteauneuf, its stately elegance and purity make it a rewarding bottle at all stages of its life. Paired with a tender roasted leg of lamb, it will be superb young or old.





2016 Chinon <i>Blanc</i> “Clos de la Plante Martin” <i>Charles Joguet</i> LOIRE	Chenin Blanc	Vines planted in 1994–1999 Limestone, clay	Serve <i>cold</i> 48–52° F Decant optional	Quince, honey, nectarine, ginger Vibrant, textured, chalky	Drink now through 2026
2019 Bourgueil “Trinch!” <i>Catherine & Pierre Breton</i> LOIRE	Cabernet Franc	30-year-old vines Gravel	Serve <i>cool</i> 54–58° F Decant optional	Black pepper, raspberry, turned earth Lively, juicy, supple	Drink now through 2026
2020 Bordeaux <i>Blanc</i> “Définition” <i>Domaine de l'Alliance</i> BORDEAUX	50% Sauvignon Blanc, 50% Sémillon	50-year-old vines Gravel, clay, sand	Serve <i>cold</i> 48–52° F Decant optional	Lemon oil, fresh herbs, lime blossom, guava Zippy, bright, saline	Drink now through 2028
2016 Lalande-de-Pomerol <i>Château Belles-Graves</i> BORDEAUX	88% Merlot, 12% Cabernet Franc	40-year-old vines Clay, gravel	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 60–64° F Decant recommended	Cigar box, black plum, cedar Deep, velvety, structured	Drink now through 2028
2018 Saint Joseph <i>Blanc</i> <i>Lionel Faury</i> NORTHERN RHÔNE	85% Marsanne, 15% Roussanne	Vines planted in 1979–1998 Granite	Serve <i>cool</i> 50–54° F Decant optional	White peach, apricot, jasmine Elegant, fleshy, mouth-filling	Drink now
2019 Châteauneuf-du-Pape “Piedlong” <i>Famille Brunier</i> SOUTHERN RHÔNE	90% Grenache, 10% Mourvèdre	50- to 70-year-old vines Alluvial riverbed stones (<i>galets roulés</i>), clay, sand	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 60–64° F Decant recommended	Black olive, <i>régisse</i> , herbes de Provence, blackberry Stony, bold, suave, succulent	Drink now through 2030

front cover: The Rhône near Chavanay. © GAIL SKOFF
inner panel, left: Lazy day on the Loire. © GAIL SKOFF
inner panel, right: The Rhône as it passes Tain l'Hermitage.
© ANTHONY LYNCH
far left top: © GAIL SKOFF
far left bottom: France, Paul, Catherine, and Pierre Breton. © CATHERINE & PIERRE BRETON

middle: Belles-Graves vigneron Xavier Pithon.
© CHÂTEAU BELLES-GRAVES
near left top: Lionel Faury. © GAIL SKOFF
near left bottom: Old vines in soil of *galets roulés*.
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Great Rivers



♦ Alluvial deposits—sediment and stones carried by rivers—are the basis of many vineyard soils, including the gravelly clays found in Bordeaux and the *galets roulés* of Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

♦ Erosion caused by rivers carves out valleys over millions of years. This alters topography and exposes bedrock that ultimately becomes vineyard soil.

Catherine & Pierre Breton

Angers

Nantes

Loire

Charles Joguet

Tours

Bordeaux

Château Belles-Graves

Bordeaux

Dordogne

Domaine de l'Alliance

Garonne

Lionel Faury

Lyon

Rhône

Famille Brunier

Avignon

Mediterranean Sea

- ♦ Rivers have a moderating effect on local temperatures, mitigating extremes of cold and heat throughout the growing season.
- ♦ In cool regions, rivers create a warming effect essential to combating spring frost and helping with ripening late in the season.
- ♦ Rivers serve as air conditioning in warm climates, allowing for cool nights that preserve acidity in the grapes and mitigating the intensity of heat waves.

- ♦ Humid air rising off rivers can create ideal conditions for the development of noble rot (*botrytis*) in adjacent vineyards. Production of Sauternes and the noble late-harvest wines of the Loire depends on this phenomenon.