



# Wine Committee Tutored Tasting

## Chenin Blanc

16th April 2026



Speakers: Frank Larkin & Iain Roxborough



**Anjou-Saumur**



**Touraine**

## The grape

Neither of the two most popular white wine grapes, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc, are suited to very long-term ageing, though there are certainly exceptions. In contrast, serious Chenin Blancs and Rieslings almost always repay ageing. One reason is the relatively high acidity. The acidity also facilitates another distinguishing feature shared by these two grapes: their versatility in respect of potential winemaking styles, from dry to very sweet.

Generally Chenin Blanc is a relatively easy grape to grow, though a difficult one from which to make consistently top quality wine. It is the white wine grape of the Middle Loire, between the Melon de Bourgogne of Muscadet in the west and the Sauvignon Blanc of Sancerre and Pouilly Fumé in the Upper Loire. It is widely planted in California and South Africa where it makes unremarkable off-dry wines, although a small number of superb Chenin wines are now being produced in particular South African districts. However, in its homeland of Anjou and Touraine, it makes age-worthy characterful wines at all degrees of sweetness. It makes slightly honeyed dry still wines, and characterful sparkling Saumur, Vouvray and Montlouis. Finally, in their best vintages, Chenin grapes in the Loire infected by *Botrytis cinerea* make some of the greatest and long-lived sweet wines.

## Chenin wine production in the Loire, from west to east

The *Anjou* AOCs, immediately south of Angers, are as follows:

*Coteaux de l'Aubance.*

*Coteaux de Layon*, including *Quarts de Chaume* and *Bonnezeaux*.

*Savennières*, including *La Roche aux Moines* and *Coulée de Serrant*.

Geographical characteristics are well drained schist slopes, sheltered from the north and east. The north bank of the Layon river is

sheltered and perfectly exposed for ripening of the grapes and, in good vintages, botrytis infection. Quarts de Chaume and Bonnezeaux are the best sites and have appellations of their own.

The Savennières appellation on the north bank is of particular interest and Anjou's most prestigious dry appellation. These low-yield wines are very dry and famously long lived. The appellation covers only 124 hectares, but within this are two very small grand cru appellations, La Roche au Moines and Coulée-de-Serrant, which complete the picture.

**Saumur** Chenin Blanc is most commonly vinified as a sparkling wine, using grapes that are considered insufficiently ripe to make still wine. However there are some good still wines made.

**Vouvray** is immediately east of Tours on the north shore of the Loire, facing **Montlouis** on the south bank. Bottle labelling will indicate whether a wine is dry (*sec*), off-dry (*demi-sec*), sweet (*moelleux*) - or sparkling. Cool rainy seasons will result in wines that are predominantly *sec* and some *demi-sec*. Warm autumn conditions are necessary for botrytis infection for potentially great *moelleux* wines. Sparkling wines from these appellations, all produced from Chenin, is widely agreed to be among the best outside Champagne. They have a reputation for more honeyed character and ageing potential than sparkling Saumur. Montlouis wines tend to be lighter than those from Vouvray, perhaps as it does not have the south facing vineyards of the best Vouvray sites.

Recent Loire white wine vintages have on the whole been consistently good. Hugh Johnson's *Pocket Wine Book 2026* rates as exceptional the 2022 vintage and seven consecutive vintages from 2014-2020.

## Chenin wine production in South Africa

The best New World source of Chenin Blanc, and represented at our tasting, is South Africa. Here, Chenin was a ubiquitous workhorse white wine grape for over a century, but in recent years several excellent producers have recognised its potential. These include Alheit, Forrester and Mullineux. Some superb old-vine Chenin wines are produced especially in Swartland and Stellenbosch.

## Chenin Blanc food pairings

Because of its high acidity and inherent sweet flavour, it pairs particularly well with foods that have a sweet and sour element. Southeast Asian cuisine or pork chops with apples pair well with a richer and sweeter style Chenin Blanc. Dry Chenin is a good option to pair also with turkey but seldom considered. Sweet Chenin wines are ideal pairings with the less sweet, fruit-based, desserts.

# WINES

## 1. **Domaine de la Taille aux Loups, Triple Zéro NV, Sparkling Montlouis (ABV 12.5%)**

The Montlouis appellation was established in 1936, following which for decades its wines were regarded as lower in quality than those from Vouvray on the opposite bank of the Loire. In 1988, Jacky Blot, former paratrooper, then wine broker, established this Domaine in an attempt to bring the Montlouis appellation out of the shadows of its neighbour north of the river. It was an unequivocal success. Jacky died in 2023, leaving the domain in the hands of his son Jean-Philippe, who had been hands-on in making the wines for over a decade. Jacky was one of the world's greatest exponents of the Chenin Blanc variety: his hectares of vineyard are planted with nothing else.

Triple Zéro is the cuvee that used to be Jacky's standard Petillant Naturel. The name refers to the fact this sparkling cuvee is not chaptalised or dosed and contains zero residual sugar. Essentially it is as pure as sparkling Chenin gets: taut, finely-tuned, intense floral flavours of citrus, minerals, white peach and apple blossom, overlaying a creamy, supple texture. The NV Montlouis-sur-Loire Triple Zéro spends between two and three years on lees, lending a richness to the mid-palate. It is bottled with no dosage, but picking later gives the wine balance and roundness - no austerity or hardness. The Triple Zéro is gently sparkling (bottles at 3 atmospheres rather than the usual 5-6 for champagne) with clarity and precision.

## 2. Montlouis sur Loire 'Rémus', Domaine de la Taille aux Loups 2022 (ABV 12.5%)

Rémus is a vineyard with a shallow clay-flint topsoil that loses the sun quite early in the day. The result is a Montlouis which is taut and very citrusy, with floral and pastry notes. The viticultural philosophy of the domaine centres around working closely with nature; fertilisation is now an extinct practice, chemical treatments are practically non-existent and pruning is radically short, keeping yields down to an average 25 hl/ha. Malolactic fermentation is eschewed in all the cuvees, giving these wines a precise clear-cut feel. It equips them well for long ageing in bottle. Note that Blot described over-ripeness as 13.5% alcohol. Fermentation and élevage is carried out in barriques and all the cuvees receive the same oak treatment: 20% new, then equal parts one, two, three and four years old barriques.

Rémus is the domaine's entry level white, made for early drinking but with potential for keeping 4-5 years. This wine is the final vintage made by Jacky Blot before his death in summer 2023.

## 3. Vouvray sec 'Confidences', Famille Bougrier 2024 (ABV 13%)

Maison Bougrier is a successful family-owned *négociant* in the Loire founded in 1885, now run by the fifth generation of Bougriers. The company has significant domaine and winery holdings in three major areas: Touraine, Anjou and Muscadet giving it full control over vineyards, grapes and production in a number of sites. Their Touraine vineyards produce whites from Chenin Blanc. This is a crisp and refreshing modern expression of Chenin Blanc.

#### **4. Savennières, Le Clos du Papillon, Domaine des Forges 2024 (ABV 13%)**

Domaine des Forges is run by Stéphane and Séverine Branchereau, another multigeneration Loire winemaking family, based in Saint-Aubin de Luigné in the Anjou. They make a wide range of mostly Chenin wines, but some Anjou Villages reds. They have grand cru holdings in Quarts-de-Chaume and Savennières La Roche au Moines. They bottle two other Savennières AOC wines, one of which is Le Clos du Papillon. The vineyard is sandstone schist-based and enjoys southwest-facing exposure. Hand harvesting is done in two or three successive passages. The wine is aged on its lees with stirring (bâtonnage). In common with other Savennières producers, the domaine advises drinking young while still fruity, before 4 years, or wait for 8-10 years for tertiary aromas to develop.

This wine is in reserves in the Athenaeum's cellars and will be moved to the Coffee Room list in due course.

#### **5. Savennières La Croix Picot, Domaine FL 2022 (ABV 13.5%)**

Elegant and distinguished, the Savennières 2022 from Domaine FL expresses all the nobility of Chenin Blanc. Produced from schist soils bordering the Loire, the goal of this winemaker is subtle balance between purity and mineral tension. This dry wine develops fine aromas of white-fleshed fruits, white flowers and light honeyed notes on the nose, evolving over time towards more complex nuances of dried fruits and sweet spices. On the palate, it is distinguished by a mid-palate lively and persistent freshness, supported by a mineral structure typical of the terroir of Savennières. Its length and elegance make it a wine of character. This wine also is accessible when young and should drink well with several more years of bottle age.

Vintages of this wine have been on the Coffee Room list since 2021.

## **6. Ken Forrester, Old Vine Reserve Stellenbosch Chenin Blanc 2024 (ABV 13%)**

This rich, rounded white wine is from Stellenbosch, South Africa's most celebrated wine region. Founded by Ken Forrester in 1993, the winery has earned him the moniker "King of Chenin" for its dedication to producing world-class wines from this grape variety. Bush-trained vines, some over 50 years old, yield small berries packed with flavour. The result is a layered white wine, full of ripe peach, baked apple and oak. Barrel ageing and lees stirring bring a creamy texture, while zesty citrus lifts the finish. It is elegant, generous and food-friendly. The old vines lend ripe stone fruit, creamy spice and citrus freshness. A match for creamy chicken dishes.

## **7. Ken Forrester, The FMC Chenin Blanc 2024 (ABV 13%)**

Arguably the greatest dry Chenin Blanc in South Africa. Awarded 89 points at the Decanter World Wine Awards, the FMC - 'Forrester Meinert Chenin' - sets the standard for South African Chenin. Crafted from a tiny plot of very old vines, long skin contact and careful use of oak give a textured, full-flavoured wine. Melons, pears, peach stones and mouth-watering greengages are supported by nutty oak, minerals, and a fresh, kiwi fruit acidity. Delicious now with white meats, pink fish or mixed bean salad, it will age into a honeyed, super-rich solo sipper.

## 8. Vouvray demi-sec, Le Haut Lieu, Domaine Huet 2022 (ABV 13%)

Domaine Huet is seen as the leader of the Vouvray appellation on the north bank of the Loire River where the Chenin Blanc grape is king. The house style is one of purity of expression and the wines are legendary for their tautness and minerality. The tuffeau (calcareous rock used to build the Loire chateaux) and limestone-rich soil helps provide near perfect conditions for Chenin. There are three Huet vineyard sites, all of which are managed on biodynamic lines and certified so: Le Haut Lieu, the original vineyard of the domaine, tends to be the earliest to mature; Le Mont, which is usually the last vineyard to be picked; lastly, the walled vineyard, Le Clos du Bourg, which is the most regular producer of sweeter styles. Huet makes the whole spectrum of Vouvray styles, from bone dry through to fully sweet and sparkling. The vintage conditions determine which wines are made in any one year; in less good vintages only *sec* wines tend to be made. Most vintages produce *demi-sec*, whereas the sweetest style, *moelleux*, and the special cuvées of sweet wines are only produced in more favourable years.

From the Haut-Lieu vineyard situated on the plateau above Huet's cellar, this wine is a benchmark Vouvray, combining the delicate aromas of citrus pith and white flowers, with seemingly perfect acidity carrying the textured palate. Drink in its youth, or wait. Ideal with fruit-based desserts.

Huet's current proprietor is Chinese-American financier, Anthony Hwang, also owner of the famed Királyudvar estate in Tokaji, Hungary.

## 9. Moulin Touchais, Coteaux du Layon 1996 (ABV 13.5%)

Documents prove that sweet wines were being produced in Layon in 1579, and the Touchais family know they have been making sweet wines since the 1780s. They own 150 hectares of vines, 35 of which are Chenin Blanc used for the production of Coteaux du Layon. Jean-Marie Touchais is the current incumbent, with little having changed. Hand harvesting is in two passes: the first provides high acidity, and the second (weeks later) ensures concentration, often with less noble rot than other dessert wines, relying instead on *passerillage* (drying on the vine). This is followed by long fermentation, bottling early in the March following vintage and a minimum of ten years in the cellar. For this reason there is a wealth of old stock in their extensive kilometres of cellars; each bottle is labelled to order, checked, reconditioned (topped up with the same vintage) and given a new cork before release. The wines are known for a perfect balance between high sugar levels (residual sugar content ranging from 70 to 80g) and vibrant acidity, allowing them to age for decades. Moulin Touchais is one of those wines that shouldn't exist but does: delicious wines with decades of bottle age, that are affordable.

## Members and Guests:

Ann Anderson  
George Anderson  
Andrea Aspinall  
Dr John Ballard  
Dr Colin Barrow  
James Bartos  
Richard Bellfield  
Richard Borchard  
Thomas Brand  
Professor Kathleen Burk  
Dr Stephen Cannon-Brookes  
John Clark  
Professor James Crabbe  
Guest of Michael Douek  
Professor Michael Douek  
John Eger  
Clarissa Farr  
Jonathan Ferrer  
Simon Fraser  
Joy Giorgi  
Professor Barbra Goff  
Angus Hamilton  
Selina Hamilton  
Lucinda Harris  
Dr Edward Henderson  
Dr Sally Henderson  
Annette Hughes  
Professor George Jackson  
Michael Jary  
Dr Sameer Jauhar  
Kate Jennings  
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Nick Meyer  
Margaret O'Rorke  
Professor Alexander Oliver  
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Dr Joanne Ormandy  
Professor Neil Pearce  
John Peric  
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Martin Smedley  
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Lady (Elisabeth) Stheeman  
Sir Robert Stheeman  
Michael Jones  
Professor Wendy Thomson  
Ian Tollett  
Dr Justin Turner  
Professor Charles Watkins  
Simon Wethered  
Guest of Isobel Williams  
Dr Isobel Williams