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The Loire sparkles



The story of Loire sparkling wines is not as simple as it seems.

There is reason, if not justification, behind generalisations. Generalisations help us to rapidly navigate a complex world in which the information available is sketchy, skewed or simply too much. It's a useful, if lazy, crutch that we lean on, repeatedly, when it comes to wine.

Here's a simple example: it's mid week; you need a bottle of sparkling wine (party, celebration, aperitif - we're not talking about cracking open the Krug); there are about 15 bottles of sparkling wine on the supermarket shelf priced between £12 and £20; you have only so much time to get this weekly shop done but you really want the bubbly to be

delicious and you want to not look like a cheapskate when it's put on the table. Did you pick the cheapest champagne? Or the most expensive prosecco? Most likely.

There isn't one of us who hasn't subconsciously run through a series of mental filters in order to make this kind of efficient choice. I've been there, done that, and recently realised how seldom I picked Loire sparkling, dismissing it as a simple wine. So I began to consciously pick Loire sparkling. And it set me on a bit of a mission, because, quite simply, Loire fizz is underrated. (The president of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland would agree, according to his report below...)

The medicinal qualities of sparkling Saumur, according to the president of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, Sir Charles A Cameron

For a start there are families in the Loire who have been making traditional-method sparkling wine for as long as, if not longer, than some big Champagne houses. Companies such as Ackerman trace their production of bottle-fermented sparkling wine back to 1831 – they were selling fizz to customers in France, Belgium and England in 1840. Bouvet-Ladubay dates back to the mid 19th century, and their reach, making own-label sparkling wines for merchants, has traversed the globe: I was fascinated to read hand-drawn labels, beautifully preserved and catalogued in the exquisitely hand-crafted, 19th-century filing cabinets of their museum for cuvées made nearly 200 years ago. An article dated 25 November 1883, from the *Liverpool Daily Courier*, praised the 'Champagne of Saumur'.

Champagne of Saumur: 'prepared with all the care and science bestowed on the manufacture of the finest champagne'.

One of Bouvet-Ladubay's scrapbooks of bottle labels for sparkling wines they produced for clients all over the world in the 19th century.

Juliette Monmousseau shows me her family's beautifully designed and crafted filing system that they used in the 19th century – easier on the eye than a computer database.

Because of this long legacy, and also thanks to deep cellars tracing kilometres of tunnels underground where the ambient temperature is cool and perfect for *sur lattes* ageing, a large proportion of the sparkling wine from the Loire is made via the traditional method, with a secondary fermentation in bottle and at least nine months on lees in bottle before the wine is disgorged. It helps, of course, that the cool climate of the region and the fantastic naturally high acidity of the grape varieties grown there mean that even in

warm vintages, vineyards can deliver the requisite elegance required for good-quality sparkling wine.

Langlois Château has many kilometres of tunnels and caves carved into the tuffeau, where they age their sparkling wines.

But Loire sparkling wines have, for centuries, played the country-bumpkin, second-cousin role to Champagne and even other sparkling-wine producing regions, including upstart England. There are complicated reasons for this, not least because the Loire makes such beautiful dry white, sweet white, still rosé and dry red wines. The strength of this long, river-grooved region has always been heterogeneity. The Loire is all things to all wine lovers. Champagne, on the other hand, has long had time to focus on only one thing.

Grapes ripening on old vines in Saumur

Fizz is not what the Loire hangs its hat on – these sparkling wines are often just a small proportion of production. And yet the pride in production, quality and deliciousness of these wines was the strongest impression I came home with after two days of (almost literally) immersing myself in Loire fizz.

My second takeaway is that 'Loire sparkling wine' is actually more complicated than it looks and if you're going to venture away from your discounted supermarket champagne, industrial cava and prosecco (please do, I beg you), then this is a quick steer to picking *your* ideal Loire fizz:

- If you're having a potluck celebratory lunch and there are all sorts of sides, sauces, marinades, salads, and everyone is there from the just-old-enough-to-drink nephew to octogenerian grandparents, you're looking for **Loire rosé**. Loire rosés are like that favourite aunt in red high heels who is smart as hell but prefers to manage family feuds by charming everyone into having one more glass of something and making sure that the most pugnacious member of the family has their mouth too full of food to start a fight. Loire pink fizz tends to be loaded with character, smarts, a dose of charm and the ability to get on with everyone. I generalise, of course. The aunt may be he and they may be wearing purple trainers.
- If you're worried about not having champagne on the table but #costoflivingcrisis or you want a wine from vineyards that aren't herbicide-balded (a Champagne speciality), look for **Crémant de Loire**. They're a blend of grape varieties, made in the traditional method, and unless you spend your life with your nose in a glass of champagne, you'd struggle to tell the difference. Pick a fat-bottomed bottle and

you'll squeeze past the judgement of most low-budget champagne snobs *and* fill their glasses with something that most likely tastes a lot better. Some producers are picking riper and ageing their wines for longer on lees in the bottle during secondary fermentation (look for the words 'sur lattes' in the tasting notes below: the longer the sur lattes, aka 'on the lees', the toastier and nuttier the wine). If you like your champagne on the more powerful spectrum, look for vintage-aged or long-lees-aged crémants.

- If you love mouthwatering elegance, perhaps verging on aloof, and a touch of herbal stoniness in your sparkling wines, you want **Saumur**. Think Samurai. Saumur wields the sword of sharpness (acidity), minerality (think metal) and stone (think mountain). Sparkling Saumur delivers all the greens of fruit and wild herbs, the blues of wide sky and sea glass, pebble greys and marble edges. You want Saumur with rock oysters and river fish and samphire and even the salt-crusted satin of padrón peppers.
- If you are in that place, or you are that kind of person, who wants, needs, loves cushions (and maybe you once had a Hello Kitty pencil case (I did, I'm not judging)); if you need curves and a packet of sweeties, then **Touraine** is where you're headed. Touraine, even dry, is the sparkling wine that just wants to be next to a meringue. Or a bowl of cream. Or a petit four.
- I've left my personal, entirely-not-objective best for last. **Vouvray** is not even trying to be champagne, or any other sparkling wine in the world, in the way that Crémant de Loire and Saumur perhaps are. Vouvray sparkling wines seem to be the most transparent transmitters of terroir and vintage; they taste of their stones and they taste of their rain; and they taste of their sunshine and hay and honey and flowers. But even in a lean, cold year, Vouvray sparkling is not about cold-shoulder, catwalk sinews-and-bones austerity that Saumur edges towards. Vouvray wines seem to want connection; they are the wines that lean into the food rather than cut across it; they are the wines that celebrate with you rather than etch the celebratory message on a stone. These Vouvray fizzes are the kind of wines you could go through bottles of if you had a pig on a spit, but, equally, you could curl up on the couch in your slippers with a bowl of butternut or carrot soup and that damn Vouvray fizz would be bizzing in your ear, happy as a bee. You could share it. Or not.

Biodiversity and natural cover crops in Saumur vineyards

These 110 tasting notes are grouped by colour (rosé first, then whites), then region, and presented in order of producer (sur)name within those groups, but you can reorder them within groups as you wish.

Select sorting option ▼

Rosé

Dom des Baumard, Carte Corail Rosé Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Very pale pink. Wheaty, wheat-berry nose. I like this! It reminds me of a good couscous salad, with pops of jewel-bright pomegranate and sumac, laced with fresh and dried herbs, spiked with black pepper, green-scented with coriander and dill. The mousse is full, not hard, not too soft. Really good balance and engaging flavours; bravo. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2024

16

Dom de la Bergerie - Anne et Marie Guégniard, Preamble Rosé Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Certified Ecocert organic.

An interesting nose! Sumac, souk dust, white mulberries, damask rose florals. Stunningly taut. The texture is like a linen canvas pulled so tight across its frame that it's vibrating, a sheen of tension. Everything about this wine is felt before it's tasted. Chalky minerals, rosebud delicacy, blood orange and rosehip and goji. Depth and persistence. Proper wine with exciting food-pairing potential. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2025

17

Dom de Bois Mozé, Désirée Anne Rosé Brut 2017 **Crémant de Loire**

Certified AB and Ecocert organic. 100% Cabernet Franc, sur lattes for 18 months.
This rosé really stood out from all the other Loire sparkling rosés. Apricots, sumac, baharat, crispy pastry on the nose, and then, in the mouth, a lilt of roses, peonies, the sweetest of florals and raspberries and lime sherbet and cardamom and cinnamon earthiness and truffles and pine needles. So much here! A kaleidoscope of flavour, energy and texture. This is wonderful. Peppermint-and-raspberry sherbet on the finish. Quite magical, although with a pretty serious undertow. Very food friendly. (TC)

13%

Drink

2022

-

2026

17.5

Bouvet Ladubay, Excellence Rosé Brut 2018 Crémant **de Loire**

A blend of Cabernet Franc and Golleau. Dosage 10 g/l.
Chunky fruit and juiciness. Feisty, exuberant flavours, amplified by the relatively high dosage. This could easily handle big, bold food (sriracha burger, anyone?). (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2023

£14 RRP

15.5

Ch de Brossay, Rosé Extra Brut NV Saumur

Certified HVE.

Very fizzy (although it was poured at the end of a long line of wines and was much warmer than the others) but I like the lollipop-raspberry fruit, blood-orange-sherbet liveliness and slightly medicinal clove notes. Great acidity. Bay leaf. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2024

16

Louis De Grenelle, Louis Rosé Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Certified AB and Ecocert organic.

Super-pale: colour, nose, palate. Clean and neutral. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

15

Dom Dutertre, Rosé Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Medium pink. Very cold sample which smelled correspondingly neutral. Tastes as if it's on the sweeter end of the Brut spectrum. Very much a strawberries-and-cream pink. A tickle of balancing acidity, but not serious. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

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2023
15

Dom La Guillaumerie, Rosé Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Smells quite green. Sweet and sour. No. (TC)

12%
Drink
2022
14

Moulin de l'Horizon, Le Rosé Brut NV Saumur

Pale pink. Wedding-favour pink almonds and strawberry syrup. Pleasant! Not going to write any novels, but the acidity is good and the fruit has a jolly berry sweetness. (TC)

12.5%
Drink
2022
-
2023
15

Dom de Nerleux, La Folie des Loups Rosé Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Chenin Blanc, Chardonnay, Cabernet Franc blend.

Buckets of ripe strawberries. This is all-out, playground-let-loose, zip-zap heady happy on the red berry ripeness and juiciness. But it also comes with a delicious cheeky nip of Thai basil, coriander seeds and mustard leaves. I like this. It's fun but its also got more to it than meets the eye and the flavours really fill the mouth. Good length, too. (TC)

12.5%

Drink
2022
-
2025
16.5

Paris-Simoneau, Rosé Brut NV Touraine

Quite sweet but there is more here than the Jean-Marc Villemaine, L'Élegante Rosé Brut (tasted just before) offers. Strawberry jam, cooked guava, hint of membrillo. Grapefruit sherbet acidity with a touch of sweet minty breath. With a bowl of fresh strawberries? Slam dunk. (TC)

12%
Drink
2022
15.5

Cave des Producteurs de Vin Montlouis, Jardin des Rois Rosé Brut NV Touraine

Heavy bottle! Raspberry jujube nose. Pretty. Pink lady apples, lots of raspberry and guava jelly. Playful, fun, easy, simple. (TC)

12%
Drink
2022
-
2023
15

Cave Robert & Marcel, De Chanceny Rosé Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Smells like tomato skins. Pleasant, soft, like tomato jam with a tiny bit of thyme in it. Peachy mid palate. Decent grip and acidity. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

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2023

15.5

Cave Robert & Marcel, De Chanceny Organic Rosé Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Cabernet Franc, Grolleaux Noir, Pinot Noir and a bit of Chenin Blanc. Grolleaux Noir gives more colour, tannic structure and acidity than the other red varieties.

Deeper colour than their non-organic Crémant de Loire rosé. I like the more rustic acidic grip and louder, less self-conscious fist of fruit. Great acidity. Very lively. A wine for hunks of fatty cured sausages and chunks of buttered baguettes with thick, olive-oil-glistening, salt-flake-glittering tomatoes. Rustic and satisfying. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2024

16

Les Ruaults, Fine Bubbles Rosé Brut NV Saumur

Very pale - almost more yellow than pink. Straw and apricot crème brûlée. Hmmm. Tastes a bit confected, even weirdly oaky in a vanilla-rhubarb bonbons and syrup kind of way. I'm not sure what to make of this. (TC)

12%

Drink

2022

15

Ch de Targé, Méthode Ancestrale de Targé Rosé Brut 2020 Saumur

100% Cabernet Franc.

Smells of oranges and ripe tomatoes. This is GOOD! Whoop! Chiffon and wet-rock texture, minerality, deep honey, bitter-orange peel, citrus flesh. Nacreous. Firm. Long and very very exciting. Serious rosé. Flowers, nectarines, so much here. Bravo. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2026

17.5

Jean-Marc Villemaine, L'Élégante Rosé Brut NV Touraine

Yogurt, cooked strawberries. Frothy. Sweet, simple, pleasant. (TC)

12%

Drink

2022

15

White

Crémant de Loire

Ackerman, Brut NV Crémant de Loire

60–70% Chenin, 25% Chardonnay, the rest of the blend is Cabernet Franc. All the grapes are from their vineyards, bought in 2012. They undertook a major regeneration of the vineyards to make them more adapted to producing sparkling-wine grapes (quite a bit of head grafting). Dosage 10–12 g/l. 18 months sur lattes.

Peachy and charming, and much like their Touraine sparkling, bursting with sweet citrus notes: mandarin, marmalade. Easy, fruity, charming and soft (which is, I am told, what they are looking for in all their cuvées). (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

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2024

16

Ackerman, Royal Brut 2017 Crémant de Loire

Always a minimum of 60% Chardonnay, with around 30% Chenin and 10% Cabernet Franc. Three years sur lattes. Dosage 6 g/l.

More smoky, more spicy than their NV Crémant de Loire. Rounded melon fruit. Tingling acidity and bubbles. Lovely, gentle balance; relaxed into its mid-weight body. You could drink this without thinking too much about it, which makes it a perfect big-party wine.

(TC)

Drink

2022

-

2024

16

Alliance Loire, Prince Alexandre Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Chenin Blanc, Chardonnay, Cabernet Franc.

An ashy (cigarette) nose. But very fruity and quite sweet on the palate. White peaches,

strawberries. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

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2023

15

Amirault, Armantine Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Certified Ecocert organic. Cabernet Franc and Chenin Blanc.

Almondy but also very very sharp. A real crack of the citrus whip. All angles. Gorse blossom and hawthorn. Refreshing but simple. (TC)

11.5%

Drink

2022

-

2023

15

Amirault, Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Certified AB and Ecocert organic.

Golden and smells of Chenin's honey and apples. Absolutely charming and beautifully balanced. A tight, taut little lacework of bubbles, coiled ribbons of acidity wound through the palate. This is lovely! (TC)

13%

Drink

2022

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2024

16.5

Ch d'Avrillé, Cuvée Platinum Pinot Noir Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Pressed-pear and white-linen nose. Wonderful white-pepper spice lilt through the wine, making it one of the most fragrant wines in this tasting. Long acidity through attractive clementine fruit. Energy, poise and balance. (TC)

12%

Drink

2022

-

2024

16.5

Ch d'Avrillé, Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Chenin Blanc blend.

Faint apple-juice nose. Decent clear-cut fruit, a lick of fennel. Clear fruit expression through firm, clean lines. And then this rather attractive spearmintiness which is quite palate cleansing and cool. Different. Lifted. Tiny bubbles resolve quickly into mousse, but don't become overly frothy. The wine has good structure. I'm impressed with this - at first I thought it was going to be a bit simple. But it builds. So much orange-clementine juiciness on the finish. Mouth-flooding! (TC)

12%

Drink

2022

-

2025

16.5

Dom Bablut, Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Clear and clean. Straightforward, light refreshment. Like a spritzer. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2023

15

Ch de Bellevue, Hervé Tijuana Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Stinky-smoky. Lime pickle on the nose, and then playfully appley on the palate. Candied lemon peel. Soft, mouth-filling mousse. Quite a tender little wine with soft acidity. Gentle and lovely. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2024

16

Dom de la Bergerie - Anne et Marie Guégniard, Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Certified Ecocert organic.

Smells a little unusual, and I can't quite put my finger on it. Apple blossom, kumquat, membrillo? Definitely membrillo on the palate. Apricots. Roasted bay leaf and hazelnuts. Tautly muscled body but a wonderful tango of ripe fruit, racy acidity and subtle spiced umami. This is pretty exciting. Layered and complex with dense texture. Quietly confident but not assertive. Bone dry, not remotely fleshy, disciplined, but the fruit plays a defining role and there is mouth-watering juiciness. Long, insistent, strikingly elegant and fine. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2027

17.5

Dom de Bois Mozé, Tradition Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Certified Ecocert and AB organic. 100% Chenin.

This smells like a freshly baked yogurt bread roll, honey sweet, seedy savoury, warm and comforting, slathered with lavender-scented lemon curd. Pretty luscious quince fruit, sculpted by lime and then all the cuts filled with cumin honey. Drowsy summer-bee buzz of bubbles. (TC)

12%

Drink

2022

-

2026

16.5

Bonnigal-Bodet, Brut d'Enfer Extra Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Golden. Ripe apple and cooked apple converging through a veil of cinnamon spice. Lemon-twisted acidity and brightness within a frothy framework of bubbles, which also seem to bring a charming nip of fruit-peel bitterness. Dancingly bright and giving. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2022

Bonnigal-Bodet, Brut d'Enfer Extra Brut 2016 **Crémant de Loire**

Gold colour. Tobacco leaf, pineapple, smoky almost to the point of reduced but there is quite extraordinary depth of ripe tropical fruit on the palate, showing through ribs of pith and citrus peel. Mango, passion fruit, intense orange, pitanga. Exciting and intensely bright fruit set within this smoky frame and around bones of bitterness, etched by acidity and fine, persistent bubbles. (TC)

13%

Drink

2022

-

2027

17.5

Bouvet Ladubay, Blanc de Blancs Brut 2020 Crémant **de Loire**

Shortbread and candied lemon peel. Angelica, white raisins and sweet baking spices. Like a slice of panettone. Good, subtle core bitterness. This ticks all the boxes without raising the heart rate. Solid and pleasant. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

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2023

15.5

Dom des Braumard, Carte Turquoise Blanc Brut NV **Crémant de Loire**

Dosage 4-6 g/l.

Fresh florals. Lots of froth. Green apples with sharp acidity, verging on sour; apple seeds and an interesting earthiness. Lots and lots of chewiness. Certainly a whetstone. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

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2023

15.5

Ch de la Calonnière, Perles de La Colonnière Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Certified HVE. 100% Chardonnay.

Ripe apples. Such fresh fruit on this! It tastes as if a bowl of chopped-two-minutes-ago golden apples and pink guavas has just been handed to me. Absolutely delicious. If Crémant de Loire is meant to be fresh, fruity, fun, easy drinking, then this wine has delivered in spades. Wouldn't it be great if pubs and brasseries sold this kind of sparkling wine instead of some dreadful Prosecco as a house sparkling? (TC)

12%

Drink

2022

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2024

16

Ch de la Calonnière, Perles de La Colonnière Extra Brut NV Crémant de Loire

They have 18 ha in Anjou. Bottle 546 out of 1,000.

There is a quietly pressing purity about this wine that's quite hard to define. Essence of apples. Dew on apple skins and early mornings. New grass. It has a flute-like clarity of

flavour and texture, the bubbles tiny, focused and precise. Very good. (TC)

13%

Drink

2022

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2027

17

Ch de Champteloup, Tête de Cuvée Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Seems like a heavy bottle. Nutty nose. Very foamy. Bakery brioche and rye-bread crumbs with pear and bright, tingling, lemon-scented acidity. Lime-green leafiness. Something that reminds me so much of the almond favours you get at weddings (from the 80s?). The mousse is very very soft, but the acidity is firm and sure and has nice grip. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

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2023

15.5

Clos du Beugnon, Damien Jonin, La Fosse de Tigne Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Chardonnay and Chenin Blanc, 24 months sur lattes.

It actually smells a bit like limoncello. Masses of white and yellow flowers; linden blossom, aloe vera juice, sour cream. A wash of acidity, almost brash, but certainly bracing. A spine of stony minerality. Lots on the mid palate but a bit of an abrupt finish. (TC)

12%

Drink

2022

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2023

15.5

Louis De Grenelle, Louis Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Certified AB and Ecocert organic.

Quite a plain nose. Apple freshness on the palate with a whisker of smokiness and elderflower. A bit short and simple but ticks the right boxes. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

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2023

15

J Delmare, Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Certified AB and Ecocert organic. Chenin Blanc, Chardonnay and Grolleau Noir on schist and tuffeau.

A bit toasty. Pan-roasted nuts dominate the palate, the crisp sharpness of new apples running through the acidity. Fresh but not long. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

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2023

15

J Delmare, Prestige Brut 2011 Crémant de Loire

Chenin Blanc and Chardonnay on schist and tuffeau.

Medium yellow-gold and gorgeously redolent with ripe quince. Less fruity on the palate, however. Dry, savoury, fine texture, slightly salty and bready and umami, like a slice of

warm focaccia. Strikingly elegant mousse, like a mouthful of tiny diamonds. Grapefruit, citrus zest, white almonds, almond blossom. Long and complex and showing beautiful lees development. Quite a serious crémant. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2021

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2025

17

Dumnacus Vignerons, Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Heavy bottle. Very slightly cheesy on the nose but there is an attractive savouriness of lees evolution on the palate. Creamy but also grainy texture, with an element of herbal bitterness and a dab of sweetness. Like a slice of wholemeal bread topped with chicory leaf, avocado, a drizzle of honey, a squeeze of clementine juice. The finish has a very subtle mint fragrance. Interesting. Quite a bit more to this wine than initially meets the eye. (TC)

12%

Drink

2022

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2024

16.5

Dom Dutertre, Blanc de Blanc Brut 2018 Crémant de Loire

100% Chardonnay.

Smells like very ripe melon, some eugenol (clove). Lime and sorrel-leafy greenness that is sharp and refreshing but has depth. Long, undulating, the ripe, sweet acidity defining the way the wine moves in the mouth, flooding it in a sound-wave oscillation. A fan of tangerine fruit. Delicious. (TC)

13.5%

Drink

2022

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2027

17

Maison Foucher, Cuvée des Roys de Naples Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Sunflower seeds and spring hedgerows. Dancing freshness. There is real charm here! Vineyard peaches and sweet-smoked quince and kumquat and grapefruit sherbet. This is quite delicate but joyful. Fine acidity. I was not expecting this to be so good! It's in the super-fresh fruity camp, but over-delivering. (TC)

12%

Drink

2022

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2027

17

Dom des Galloires, Extra Brut NV Crémant de Loire

100% Chardonnay from vineyards west of Nantes, south of Ancenis, belonging to famille Toublanc. 18 months sur lattes.

Frangipani and honeysuckle nose. So pretty! And so fragrant! Soft billows of bubbles. Quince and golden apples and white peaches. Round and unashamedly all about the fruit. Real charm. Absolutely delightful. But don't be deceived, this is not a one-dimensional wine. It may be all about the fruit, but the structure fills the mouth, it buzzes with energy - like a host of golden fireflies. A wine that makes you feel happy and alive. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

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2025

16.5

Dom des Galloires, Léon Jean Brut Nature NV Crémant de Loire

100% Chenin Blanc, sur lattes for 24 months.

A slow-build richness of golden-baked and tropical fruit. Glossy baked pears and cardamom spice, nutmeg and cream, frangipani and frangipane, grapefruit and sweet oregano. The wine seems to move glissando in the mouth, the bubbles lazily unfurling, like golden ribbons underwater. Sinuous. The finish narrows into quince, then nuttiness, and seems to get longer and longer after the wine has gone, taking me to roasting chestnuts on a city bridge on a winter night. Evocative, powerful, stunningly good. (TC)

14%

Drink

2022

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2028

17.5

Dom La Guillaumerie, Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Certified HVE.

A bit sour on the nose. Very frothy. Oddly acrid. Short. Not very pleasant. (TC)

12%

Drink

2022

14

Lacheteau, Blanc de Noirs Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Gritty, whole-grain savoury nose turning into a wine that tastes just like honeyed spelt and buckwheat porridge with a swirl of sour cream and honey and sesame seeds. Lemon-zest on top. Curves of creaminess, deeply comforting, savoury yet sweet. Lovely. Fulsome mousse. Bright freshness tautening the finish. (TC)

12%

Drink

2022

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2025

16.5

Langlois-Château, L'Étra par Langlois Brut NV Crémant de Loire

60% Chenin Blanc, 40% Chardonnay. They call this their 'gateway' Crémant de Loire.
Simple, clean, sparkling. There are better (more interesting) Loire sparklings at this price point. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

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2023

£15 Direct Wines

15

Langlois-Château, Brut NV Crémant de Loire

60% Chenin (of which 10% comes from reserve wines), 20% Chardonnay, 20% Cabernet Franc. Dosage 8 g/l.

Chewy. Dry. A bit green. Ticks the appropriate boxes without being exciting. Serviceable if industrial. (TC)

Drink

2022

-
2023
15

Langlois-Château, Réserve Brut NV Crémant de Loire

60% Chenin Blanc, 20% Chardonnay, 20% Cabernet Franc. Three years sur lattes.

Long and white-bread savoury with some smokiness. The acidity is a bit chewy, turning almost sour, needing a bit more depth of ripe fruit to carry it. (TC)

Drink
2022
-
2023
15.5

Langlois-Château, Prestige Cuvée Quadrille Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Quadrille is Langlois' top cuvée. Four varieties, four terroirs, a dosage of 4 g/l. The blend is roughly the same every year but varies a little according to vintage. 2016 was a sunny vintage; good grape maturity with good acidity. Very clean berries.

Linen texture wraps up folds of hazelnuts, pomelo and a sense of ripe, late-harvest apple pressed into glass. Long, determined, pixellated by the fine bubbles. There is real presence to the acidity. (TC)

Drink
2022
-
2028
€30 RRP
17

Langlois-Château, Prestige Cuvée Quadrille Extra Brut 2016 Crémant de Loire

50% Chenin Blanc, 10% Chardonnay, 20% Cabernet Franc, 20% Pinot Noir. From four different terroirs. Four years sur lattes.

Yeasty evolution on the nose and palate, without losing the fruit and flesh of the wine. Baked apples and pears, lemon curd and dried orange peel. There's a tiny top note of orange blossom and a delicately bitter tug of walnut skin, relaxing into a very slightly peppery hazelnut/praline breadth on the finish. Good stuff! (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2026

17

Langlois-Château, Prestige Cuvée Quadrille Brut 2012 Crémant de Loire

60% Chenin Blanc, 20% Chardonnay, 10% Cabernet Franc, 10% Pinot Noir. The 2016 vintage started with frost in the spring, which meant that fruit set was low and the vintage was late. A good summer and good September, marked by a cold, east wind, but otherwise dry and sunny weather gave them a clean crop with their highest acidity yet.

Very fragrant - irises. Then smoky power and cordite. Salty. Fresh, angular, showing vinous power yet and still very young. Salty pastry and focaccia and some herbs.

Piercing, racy finish. Lots here - a wine that demonstrates that perhaps we should be taking top Loire sparkling wines as seriously as we're taking top sparkling wines from anywhere, including Champagne. (TC)

Drink

2022

-

2028

€30 RRP

17.5

Langlois-Château, Prestige Cuvée Quadrille Brut 2004 Crémant de Loire

A late vintage, marked by freshness but very clean berries. The signature Quadrilla blend of roughly 60% Chenin, 20% Chardonnay, 10% Cabernet Franc and 10% Pinot Noir.

Smoky and very rectangular. Losing fruit and leaning more to lanolin, aloe notes with some sourdough breadiness and cold salted butter. More interesting than exciting, although it hasn't fallen over yet. (TC)

Drink

2007

-

2018

15.5

Maison Laudacious, Axel de Fersen Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Quite sweet. Reminds me a bit of a fresh doughnut. Short. Tastes like a bottom-shelf supermarket fizz. (TC)

12%

Drink

2022

14.5

Ch de Minière, Blanc de Noirs de Minière Brut Nature 2020 Crémant de Loire

Certified Ecocert organic.

Smells like the heart of a young sweetheart cabbage. Tastes of salt and sauerkraut. Grippy, but I'm not sure I get this... (TC)

12%

Drink

2022

-

2023

14.5

Dom de Montgilet 2018 Crémant de Loire

Unusually for a Loire sparkling, the wine has a chunky rectangular density. Green, herbal, firm and strangely heavy, as if the acidity was heavy. Not very long. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2023

15.5

Dom de Nerleux, La Folie des Loups Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Chenin Blanc, Chardonnay, Cabernet Franc.

Lemon curd on the nose, and then curd-and-citrus density on the palate through which tendrils of smokiness draw curlicues. Satiny texture, the bubbles like pinpoint sequins on shining fruit. Kumquat and pomelo. Lemon leaf. Lime peel. Something earthy-dusty. Fine-ground lines of fine-ground allspice pinning the four corners of the wine to the circles of its fruit. This is really rather lovely. And grippy length! (TC)

11.5%

Drink

2022

-
2023
17.5

Dom du Petit Clocher, Brut NV Crémant de Loire

80% Chardonnay, 20% Pinot Noir, 18 months sur lattes.

Really good, proper yeastiness on the nose with appealing baked apple/pear fruit. Rather lovely balance between warm pie fruit, shortcrust-pastry solid comfort, lemon peel and a tingle of acidity. Fine bubbles. This has so much to offer. It floods the mouth with friendliness. Lively acidity, but it's also fruit-laden and open, with just the right amount of leesy development. (TC)

13%
Drink
2022

-
2025
16

Cave Robert & Marcel, De Chanceny Brut NV Crémant de Loire

60% Chenin Blanc, 20% Chardonnay and 20% Cabernet Franc. They pick twice for the Chenin – early for the lime flavours and late for the peach flavours. One year sur lattes in bottle. Chardonnay undergoes malo and receives bâtonnage. Dosage 8-10 g/l.

Great acidity that fills the mouth ahead of the lime and peach notes that oenologist Sydney Griboval talks about, but there is also a little curve of nut butter and praline. The balance is just right. Pretty long! More substance than I was expecting from a relatively large co-operative. (TC)

Drink
2022

-
2025
16

Cave Robert & Marcel, Brut Nature 2015 Crémant de Loire

Chenin Blanc. Chardonnay and Cabernet Franc.

A bit smoky (when I mention this, they tell me that they work with a tiny bit of oak on this wine). Tense and mouth-drawing, and quite demanding, although I'm not sure it was flattered by being tasted after a long day of rather less bony sparkling wines and coming after a rich, aged vintage sparkling. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2021

-

2024

15.5

Cave Robert & Marcel, Impetus Brut Nature 2015 Crémant de Loire

20% Chardonnay, 40% Chenin Blanc, 20% Cabernet Franc and 20% Grolleau. They're looking for a wine that has the fruit of Chenin, the substance of Chardonnay, the red fruit and structure tannin of Cabernet France and the acidity of Grolleau. Very low dosage, 3 g/l. Six years sur lattes. Released late 2022.

Rich, cheesy and leesy. Quince and salt, pomelo-skin bitterness and grippy mousse. Quite powerful and astringent. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2025

16.5

Cave Robert & Marcel, Excellence Brut 2014 Crémant de Loire

80% Chardonnay, 10% Chenin Blanc, 10% Cabernet Franc. With this wine they're aiming for more of a champagne style, low dosage 6 g/l, six years sur lattes. Malo, bâtonnage and lees work but a higher percentage than for their other sparkling wine. Disgorged 2021.

A firm, buttery-brioche and salted-caramel wine with density, length and complexity that goes beyond autolytic flavours. Ripe stone fruit and well-formed acidity that works with the bubbles to create a focused structure. Competent sparkling wine that would outpace many a champagne at a fraction of the price. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2024

16.5

Dom de Rocheville, Favourite Extra Brut 2017 Crémant de Loire

Freshly, sharply floral. It smells, and even tastes, like cutting across a hay meadow filled with wildflowers and long grass turning green to gold in mid summer, the hint of honey in the air. Extraordinary acidity. It comes in broad waves, gleaming, scraping the palate clean each time. Aromatic from end to end. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2025

16

Veuve Amiot, Elisa Brut NV Crémant de Loire

12 months sur lattes.

I can't smell much on this, but the sample is very cold. Attractive, minty, lots of fresh apple fruit. Super-fresh and cooling. White peaches, cantaloupe melon, and this stevia-sweet mintiness that persists through the wine from start to finish. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2023

15.5

Dom Vincendeau, Zeitlos Extra Brut NV Crémant de Loire

Not openly fruity but there is a faint note of apricot conserve in the glass. Very dry, pithy; elegant strands of bitterness. Tiny bubbles that turn lightly frothy. High acidity giving the wine piercing length. Bracing, piquant refreshment. Layers. There is something under-the-cover exciting about this wine. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2027

17

Dom Vincendeau, Gold Brut Nature 2020 Crémant de Loire

Certified Ecocert organic and Demeter biodynamic.

A beautiful nose – subtle, a little smoky, apricots. Very dry, fine-boned, elegant, electric tension and nervosity. Tastes like finely crushed rock and essence of grapefruit. The acidity is piercing, violin-high, high-wired, uncompromising. And yet the mousse soughs through the mouth on the finish like the foam of a wave hissing up on the beach and the whole wine softens out of its austerity. Really, really interesting. (TC)

12%

Drink

2022

-

2026

17

Saumur

Ackerman, Royal Brut 2016 Saumur

They don't make this cuvée every year – it depends on the vintage. 60% Chenin Blanc, 30% Chardonnay, 10% Cabernet Franc. 36 months on lees, disgorged beginning of 2022. Dosage 6–8 g/l. 30,000 bottles produced.

More grippy and textured than their NV Saumur Brut, with an extra layer of flavour and savouriness and a finer mousse. Spice and ripe apples; slightly smoky, chalk-dust finish. (TC)

Drink

2022

-

2024

16

Beaulieu, Eternes Brut NV Saumur

Limestone soils. Certified HVE.

Parma-Violet and talc perfumed. Slightly sweet and floral, rolling into honeyed pears, white peaches, but still notably delicate. Very, very fine mousse. It's all on the finish, which has grip and what I want to call 'tensity', even though there is no such word!

Breakfast wine? (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2023

15.5

Bouvet Ladubay, Bouvet Saphir Brut 2019 Saumur

Traditional method, bottle fermented. 85% Chenin Blanc, 15% Chardonnay, 18 months sur lattes.

Clean and fruity and easy. Apples and pears with a streak of lime bonbon, chalky crunch and lemon jelly. Really friendly. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2023

16

Bouvet Ladubay, Bouvet Tresor Brut 2018 Saumur

80% Chenin Blanc, 20% Chardonnay, aged in barrel for six months before the secondary fermentation. Sur lattes for 30 months. Tasted three months after release.

Cedary and broad; creamy caramel and baked apples shaped by beautiful acidity. Full-bodied and generous. Just the wine for roast pork belly. **GV** (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2026

£16.99 Majestic

16.5

Bouvet Ladubay, Cuvée du Millénaire Instinct Brut **2017 Saumur**

Tropical fruit - mango - with quite a bit of mintiness. Verging on bell-pepper green. But the fruit comes back and overall the balance is good. Easy, approachable, delicious. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2024

16

Ch de Brossay, Brut NV Saumur

100% Chenin Blanc on pure schist soils.

Smells like a slice of toast, hot out of the toaster, spread with lime and lemon curd. It also smells of flowers. Quite high dosage, I suspect. Lime jelly with a minty, zesty, sweet fennel and Turkish delight overlay. Curling and purring with charm. The acidity is so sweet and ripe it tastes like a slug of lemon-barley cordial turned into sherbet. This is a delight. (TC)

12%

Drink

2022

-

2024

16.5

Clos du Beugnon, Damien Jonin, La Bulle du Beugnon Brut NV Saumur

Chenin Blanc and Chardonnay blend from vineyards on schist. Certified HVE.

Creamier and toastier than the other Saumur sparklings. A slice of plain toast, seeded malt. Roasted hazelnuts. Lime flower. Quite soft, too. More bitterness than acidity, but good balance. Small bubbles that start sharp for a fraction of a moment, then spread out soft and friendly. (TC)

12%

Drink

2022

-

2023

15.5

Louis De Grenelle, Grande Cuvée Brut NV Saumur

Chenin Blanc and Chardonnay blend.

A sweet apricot-butter smell. I rather like it! Perfumed, yeasty autolysis note on the palate as well. Fresh apricots, dried apricots, orchard flowers. Dancing and pretty and warm summer breezes. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2024

16

Philippe Elliau, La Fuye Brut NV Saumur

100% Chenin Blanc. Certified Ecocert organic.

Apples. Very clean on the nose but a little rustic and russet on the palate. I love the gritty, grippy texture and the fine-sandpaper rasp of the acidity. But it is just on the 'other' side of edgy; needs food. Pure fruit, very vinous, long and very nervy. Drumming fingers. But this was tasted toward the end of a long, intensive tasting, and it is one of the few wines that I noted that I really wished I could spend more time with, which perhaps suggests that there is more to this wine than was immediately apparent. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2025

15.5 +

Dom des Guyons, Les Andélyys Brut NV Saumur

100% Chenin Blanc. Vigneron Franck Bimont.

Wonderful nose! Just a little smoky, threaded with mimosa, passion fruit, herbs. There is great purity and clarity across the palate, but also a frisson of herb-zested, intricate excitement. Lace-dense texture coming from the bubbles, the fruit, the acidity. A wake-me-up wine. This is thrilling! Dry, skating the edges of edgy, but staying within the right lines. A notion of fino/sourdough/bitter-almond/alpine flowers bitterness and saltiness, but not quite. Love this. (TC)

12%

Drink

2022

-

2026

17.5

Moulin de l'Horizon, Le Brut NV Saumur

Chardonnay and Cabernet Franc (the latter intended to give grip and power).

Fragrant - catmint and lavender. Beautiful fruit. Crisp, intense, dense - fractal and determined. Grapefruit oil, juniper, sweet orange, bitter orange. And then long layers of quince and dried apple. Very exciting. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2026

17

Dom de la Paleine, Brut NV Saumur

Certified Ecocert organic and Demeter biodynamic.

A really pure nose. Apples and pears, ripe and late-harvest, wrinkling into charming sweetness in the mouth, with the tactile tug of drying skins loading spice and ginger root and earth-dry tang into the layers of the wine. Apricots. Umeboshi. Salt and savoury and sweet-tang sharpness. Packed with layers and really rather exciting. One of the best Loire sparklings in this tasting of nearly 100 wines. Like a cello-violin duo playing to the sunrise. Golden, russet and copper tones fill the wine with luminous radiance. Bit of a heart-stopper. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2028

18

Dom de La Petite Roche, Brut NV Saumur

Certified sustainable by Terra Vitis. Schist soils.

Love the hand-drawn back label. Smells like lemon-cream biscuits (cookies). Quite sweet though - as if the dosage is quite high? Candied angelica, rhubarb. Sweet

clementine. A little simple, perhaps. But pleasant. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2023

15.5

Les Ruaults, Fine Bubbles Brut NV Saumur

Limestone soils.

Smoky, roasted almonds, toasted brioche. Lots of time sur lattes, I wonder? Clementines and warm apple jam on white bread, touch of jasmine. Friendly and enveloping without the weight of complexity. (TC)

12%

Drink

2022

-

2023

15.5

Sagesse des Sols, Préambule Brut NV Saumur

100% Chenin Blanc on pure schist soils.

A wine that reminds me of apples picked too early and then left to ripen in a bowl in a cold room: tang-tastic, malic-piquant, tiny hard-green baubles that have slowly wrinkled, half ripened, even taken on a bit of gold in the shadows. So taut with acidity it almost feels tannic. Skinny green apple skins rollerblading the mouth, sprinkling lime-green greengage-sweet popping candy like a handful of fireworks. But not nervous, not aggressive, just bite-size, bright, wickedly sharp, precise and wonderful. Love this. (TC)

11%

Drink

2022

-

2025

16.5

Sagesse des Sols, Sonate Fines Bulles Brut Nature NV Saumur

100% Chenin Blanc on pure schist soils.

Honeyed nose but very dry on the palate. A quiet hum of a wine with a little smoky thrum under its skin. Apple skins and vineyard peaches, rain on crumbling wet rocks and the smell of rain in an orchard where it's hard to tell if the scent comes from earth or grass or fruit or leaves, or even, maybe the sky and earthworms talking to each other. This subtle little wine has soul. Tiny, tiny bubbles. Delicate lime-pickle salty-quinine tang on the finish. Off-beat wine that may well divide the room. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2025

17

Dom des Sanzay, 400 Brut Non Dosé NV Saumur

Certified Ecocert and AB organic. Limestone soils. Methode ancestrale. 80% Chenin Blanc, 20% Chardonnay.

Smells like daphne flowers and sweet-box winter blossoms. Dry and very, very chewy, and playing the crazy purple taste of blueberry wine gums off the bitter florals of hawthorn. Quince and pomelo. Quite gritty, almost tannic. Edgy. A wine that makes you stop and think. Which is good. (TC)

13%

Drink

2022

-

2025

16.5

Ch de Targé, Brut NV Saumur

100% limestone soils. Hand-picked grapes, whole-bunch pressed.

A bit stinky! As in, overwhelmingly so. Baby nappy. Tricky... (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

14.5

Touraine

Ackerman, Monmousseau Cuvée JM Brut 2018

Touraine

60% Chenin Blanc, 20% Chardonnay, 20% Cabernet Franc.

Smells ripe and appealingly fruity, offering a panoply of fresh apricot, kumquat, pink guava and rosy grapefruit. An uncomplicated fruit salad of a wine but that's not a criticism. This has buckets of summer refreshment and really lovely acidity. The touch of fruit-formed sweetness means it's a wine that will as readily handle a barbecue/buffet spread as it will a tikka masala curry. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2024

16

Dom de la Girardière, Brut NV Touraine

Certified Terra Vitis sustainable.

Goat's cheese aroma, a smell which lingers into the palate. My sister makes a (very nice) goat's cheese ice cream, and this wine reminds me of it. A little herbal, a little appley, a little sour-creamy. Kumquat. Fresh and pert. Perhaps it may not suit everyone, but I like it. I'd love to have tried this with food. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2023

16

Monmousseau, Cuvée JM Brut NV Touraine

White linen. Neat. White citrus. Very well-disciplined lace cloud of bubbles. Lovely ripe pomelo. Easy and relaxed. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2023

16

Paris-Simoneau, Prestige Brut NV Touraine

Certified HVE.

Bit chalky on the nose, bit 'damp' smelling. Awkward sweetness. Like aspartame-sweetened apple-flavoured cordial. (TC)

12%

Drink

2022

14.5

Marc Villemaine, L'Élegant Blanc Brut NV Touraine

Fresh pears. Lovely clean lines of pear fruit, even with the sense of silky graininess of ripe pear skin. *Gouleyant*, with just enough bitterness to give it an insouciant shrug of structure. So pretty. Understated, fresh and very easy to love. (TC)

12%

Drink

2022

-

2024

16

Vouvray

Aubert, Le Temps d'Aimé Brut NV Vouvray

Oooh, this is a little different from the line-up. Yogurt (or sour cream?). Lemon cheesecake. I wonder if this has seen quite a bit of lees contact? It's very different but it certainly has depth and there is a compelling, even rather addictive, craqueler of chalky, white-peppery, wet-stony minerality. A certain richness, as well. Mandarin, bitter orange, tamarind and even a dab of lime pickle and marmalade right at the back. This is complex. Very interesting. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2026

17

Dom des Aubuisières Bernard Fouquet, Fines Bulles Brut NV Vouvray

Curds garlanded with yellow flowers. A touch of lemon zest. Mouth-filling and mouth-watering. Bright and zesty. Good balance of yeasty autolysis, sharpness and fruit. Really chewy, pleasure-giving, chalky minerality. Builds well in the mouth. More serious than I first thought. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2024

16.5

Dom des Aubuisières Bernard Fouquet, Cuvée Zéro Brut Zéro 2017 Vouvray

Hawthorn blossom on the nose, and then the start is white-knuckle dry, white-pith bitter. But it's interesting in the way that it quickly coils into a nervy mid palate of lemon-scented pomelo juice. Dry and sharp, yes, but not mean or austere. The bubbles form a loose lace of froth, softening the edges of the acidity and there is a fine, fine line of leesy evolution, giving it depth. Impressive. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2025

17

Bourillon Dorléans, Premium Brut NV Vouvray

One of the few Loire sparklings in a clear-glass bottle. I wonder why, when everyone else is bottling in green/olive/brown? A bit goaty on the nose and a bit cardboard on the palate. Not faulty, but not especially a wine you'd want to drink. Oddly sweet, in an ersatz way. (TC)

12%

Drink
2022
15

Bourillon Dorléans, Cuvée Gaston Dorléans Brut Zéro

2015 Vouvray

Bloody hell, this is a heavy, fat bottle! Golden colour. Frangipani flowers on the nose, but the first impression is the taste of age more than flowers. The curl of a golden tobacco leaf, not fully cured. Warm pastéis de nata, drying apple and apricot slices. Frangipani still there on the palate, garlanding the frame, rose petals lying underneath. Bronzed citrus brightens up and tightens up the core of the wine, drawing it into a long, focused finish. It's very good. Lots here. The only thing letting it down – and I am being pernickety – is the length. It doesn't feel as long as it should be, to balance the weight of complexity and build-up on the mid palate. (TC)

13%
Drink
2022
–
2026
17

Vincent Carême, Brut 2019 Vouvray

Certified AB and Ecocert organic.

A beautiful nose, flush with the panoply of Vouvray aromas – ripe stone fruit, yellow apples, sweet pears, masses of yellow flowers. But not flowery or even very 'fruity' in the mouth. Dry, direct, the acidity pulling the wine into gentle focus, into a persistent line of white citrus. Faint white-apple underline turning crisper and more defined toward the end. And it's only at the end that the mid-palate concentration shows. This is extremely good. **VG** (TC)

13%
Drink
2022
–

2025

£18.40 Wine Affairs

17

Vincent Carême, Plaisir Ancestral 2019 Vouvray

Certified AB and Ecocert organic. Old vines. Sec.

This smells just like membrillo. Delicious! Exciting depth of fruit that seems to go on and on. The longest wine so far. Tiny traces of spice are folded like secret love notes into the fruit, and the acidity envelops every sip with its chalky lemon-sherbet ribbons. Apricots and golden figs. Fragrant with lime. This is truly thrilling. (TC)

13.5%

Drink

2022

-

2026

17.5

Champalou, Brut NV Vouvray

Certified Terra Vitis.

Gently rounded, starting golden and staying golden through the soft arc of fruit, acidity and bubbles. It's a wine that tastes of small sweet summer figs, is fragrant with quince, and has the soft tannic tug and affably piquant bite of crabapple. Mellow acidity that flares out a little on the end. Absolutely textbook Vouvray. (TC)

13%

Drink

2022

-

2023

16.5

Jean-Paul Couamais, Cuvée Suprême Blanc de Blancs Brut 2017 Vouvray

100% Chenin. From a 36-ha estate which Ackerman bought in 2014. The vines grow on silex (flint) soils so maturity 'is interesting', marketing director Estelle Guerin tells me. 'When we begin the harvest, the grapes are 13-14 % potential alcohol but with very high acidity. The first fermentation leaves about 20 g/l residual sugar, so we can add a yeast for second fermentation without any need for tirage.' Dosage 10 g/l.

One of the richest Loire sparklings I tasted on this trip. Almost dessert-wine lusciousness. Apricots, brioche toast, walnuts and hazelnuts, the silky slippery juice and seduction of mango. Full-bodied, structured, rich and very, very interesting. Beautiful cashmere softness of bubbles and then a phosphorescence of acidity on the finish. A lingering taste of marmalade. Quite a different angle on Vouvray sparkling wine. (TC)

Drink

2022

-

2026

17

Dom La Croix des Vainqueurs, RH Cuvée Prémium Brut 2017 Vouvray

Base wines vinified in barrique for six months. Sur lattes for 24 months.

Golden colour (more than most others in this tasting) and smelling a little of lemongrass-scented beeswax. Dry and just a little smoky. The fragrance of the lemongrass and richer notes of warm wax persist through the palate, although with an interesting addition of sweet baby edamame beans. The bubbles start with a little prickle on the tip of the tongue - just one or two - and then they fill the chambers with froth. Almost too frothy. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

-

2024

16

Maison Darragon, Brut NV Vouvray

Clear fruit, one story, apples. Fresh chopped apples. And then, in a small twist at the end, liquorice laces. Firm, direct, straight up. No fuss. (TC)

13%

Drink

2022

-

2023

15.5

Maison Darragon, Chenin Blanc Extra Brut NV Vouvray

Shortbread and lemon blossom. Such good density – almost muscular in the mouth. Fine bubble and bright acidity – so bright it feels as if the acidity itself is also fizzing. Good balance. (TC)

13%

Drink

2022

-

2023

16

Huet, Pétillant Brut 2017 Vouvray

Certified Ecocert organic.

Smells of sweet peas – heady fragrance. Quince and sweet peas, jasmine and Parma Violets. So fragrant in the mouth but also indelible. There's a sweet leafiness, something like lemon verbena and the newest of baby-green fennel fronds, that comes with the

sugar-shock snap of bright-green just-picked mangetout peas. It's tiny green-gold figs and the chalk-tannin-tang rasp of crabapples and a lemon-dipped slice of Granny Smith apple. Complex, dainty, a wine that draws you in with slender fingers. Very, very fine lacework of bubbles. (TC)

13%
Drink
2022
-
2025
17

Dom de Mouton Noir, Brut NV Vouvray

I love the label of this wine – a little black sheep in a sickle moon! Mimosa florals in the glass turn to something a little more warm-white bready in the mouth. Very frothy. Soft and plump. (TC)

12.5%
Drink
2022
-
2023
15.5

Dom Pichot, Clos St-Mathurin Brut 2016 Vouvray

Certified HVE.

Waxy yellow in colour and soy-waxy yellow in flavour. Saffron-scented bouffant mousse laced with candle smoke and petrichor and grapefruit-tight acidity. The palate veers momentarily towards soapiness, and then self-corrects. (TC)

12%
Drink
2020
-
2023

Cave Robert & Marcel, De Chancey Rendez-Vous Brut NV Vouvray

100% Chenin Blanc, 10% fermented and aged in 225-litre old barrels. 48 months sur lattes.

Linden tea and saffron fragrance over layers and layers of jacquard-opulent, creamy, complex hazelnuts, lemon curd and honeysuckle. Has a gorgeous bite. Long and singing beautiful tension. Creamy volume narrowing to the dancing prettiness of fennel pollen and a scrawl of toasty smoke on the end. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

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2027

17

Cave Robert & Marcel, Excellence Brut 2019 Vouvray

Chenin Blanc. 10% from 2018 (which was a very rich and very warm vintage), the rest from 2019 (more elegant).

Guava, dried pear, as in classic Vouvray style, markedly more honeyed than the Crémant de Loire wines. Personally, I love this. The richness has a melting-wax sheen, and the honey deepens on the palate, becoming almost caramelised. The wine has a kind of golden tulle 'tendresse' despite its baked-pear richness. (TC)

13%

Drink

2022

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2026

17

Alain Robert, Troglodyte Brut NV Vouvray

More leesiness on the nose of this cuvée than his Extra Brut. More bitterness – although still well-integrated. This is very much on the grapefruit-pith-and-peel spectrum, with a touch of dark bread crust. The bubbles start small and then billow up into a cloud of froth. A little distracting, but the finish is satisfyingly chewy and juicy with citrus tang. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

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2024

16

Alain Robert, Chenin Blanc Extra Brut NV Vouvray

From a selected parcel of vines, 36 months sur lattes.

Honey and honeysuckle aromas. Delicate bitterness within the slipstream of citrus. Pointed and racy and very dry. Fine-boned with dazzling acidity fanning out across the finish. This is bracing! But beautifully controlled. Very refined. (TC)

12.5%

Drink

2022

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2024

17