**LA CROIX DES LOGES (France, Loire, Martigné-Briand)***

**BACKGROUND** The vines of the Domaine La Croix des Loges are spread over 43 hectares, mainly in the municipality of Martigné-Briand, in the heart of Anjou and Coteaux du Layon wine areas, halfway between Angers and Saumur. This is a family who manages the wine estate and its history dates back to almost a century ago. The modern estate business developed after the Second World War with Joseph and Aline, and then, in the years 70s-80s, Christian and Theresa had their turn at the helm bringing more and more notoriety to La Croix des Loges wines and strictly believing in the local terroir.

Today the œnologists couple, Jean-Christian and Sophie Bonnin, with a degree at Montpellier University, have reached already 18 years of experience in this field and represents the generation that turned their heads to more simplicity aiming at producing typical and easy drinking wines. Their basic idea is primarily to satisfy the thirst for discovery and simple pleasure. When you taste their wines you can possibly hear the echo of their manifesto: “Life is beautiful!”

The 43 hectares, averaging vines 30 to 40 years old, are divided in over 30 different plots lying in gently rolling countryside and producing the following eight varieties: Chenin Blanc, Chardonnay, Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Grolleau, Gamay and Pineau d’Aunis. This great diversity of soils and grape offers a great diversity of wines and, generally speaking, soil could be described as clay and limestone driven with one meter deep top soil. Although the domain dates back to the 1920s the cellars are very modern and the winemaking precise and expressive. And 45 additional hectares are cultivated with corn, sunflowers, etc. This is a full service agriculture estate.

**THE PRODUCTION CYCLE** The Bonnins cultivate the land, develop their wines and sell them. The family commitment essence relies on the signing of Charter of the Independent Winemaker (*www.vigneron-independant.com*).

When the grapes are mature, the long awaited moment of the harvest arrives: it is harvest time. The harvest date is determined by the maturity controls supported by analyses and mainly grapes tasting. The harvest, which range from September to mid-November (for late harvest wines) is, year in year out, the true moment of uncertainty, but is also packed with a sense of joy and satisfaction. For several years, the Bonnins produce each vineyard separately to obtain the most beautiful expression of each of their terroirs.

From October to February each tank is regularly tasted in order to prepare the basis for the ideal blending work. This moment is essential because each wine must be a reflection of the family work, enlightening the true devoted passion for this land. In March, the wines of Domaine La Croix des Loges are usually bottled. And this is just the end of another chapter in the Bonnin family.

**SUSTAINABLE CULTIVATION** At Domaine La Croix des Loges the generations pass but the earth and the environment issues must be daily managed and this is what gives full value to estates grapes cultivation. Respecting and preserving nature is a must and its the best
possible heritage for future generations. This is the reason why the Bonnins have chosen to work with the *Lutte Raisonnée* system, and then adhering since 2001 to TERRA VITIS association and the DEPHY FARM network organized by the Ministry of Agriculture since 2013.

All the daily work is based on three basic rules:

- cultivating in a respectful and responsible way for the environment;
- promote soil-plant nutrients exchange for maximum qualitative expression;
- produce enough grapes to satisfy all the Domaine markets demands and at the same time defending the established quality level.

In the vineyard, this means:

- soil analysis for each vineyard in order to understand its specific features and its “soul” while adapting to viticulture practices;
- a better tillage or cover crop to limit (or substitute) herbicides;
- leaf management and other plants presence in order to establish biodiversity;
- an effective dose reduction for all the phytosanitary measures.

TERRA VITIS Since 2001 the Domaine La Croix des Loges is a proud member of the TERRA VITIS association which gathers 30 growers in Saumur and Anjou alone who respect "nature, men and wines" as written in the constitution act.

Terra Vitis relies and meets the criteria of sustainable development by ensuring product food safety and respect for the environment. From the vine to the bottle, the winemaker ensures transparency of its operations and its practices: the traceability. This is controlled by an independent certification body that ensures strict compliance with the specifications. The combination of details within the Terra Vitis approach means that consumers are brought healthy and authentic wines that allow the terroir they come from to shine through. Terra Vitis manifesto and daily practices are recognized by the Ministry of Agriculture since 1998 by releasing HVE certification (High Environmental Value) since 2012. For More information visit www.terravitis.com.

**ANJOU & CHENIN BLANC** Anjou is the cradle of this interesting and versatile grape. The first record of Chenin Blanc, sometimes called “Pineau de la Loire”, is in the 9th century near Bouchemain probable in the appellation area now known as Savennières. In Anjou, the styles vary from sparkling to still, in a range of sweetness levels: *sec* (dry to off-dry), *demi-sec* (medium sweet), *moelleux* (fully sweet) and *doux* or *liquoreux* (profoundly sweet, almost syrupy). Charming in the first two years of it life, Chenin can go through a closed period, before emerging with the ability to age, seemingly forever. Most of the whites here are made to the recipe of trapping the fruit in the bottle as early as possible without exposing them to new wood although dry, barrel-fermented Chenin Blanc is a growing phenomenon.
The gigantic Anjou region is one of the most important in the Loire, together with its subregions producing a plethora of good wines. It makes up around 10% of the size of the Loire in acreage. The general region is mostly known for Rosé d’Anjou, a rosé that tends to be nervy and powerful, but every style of wine is made here. Anjou’s subregions generally are sweet wine designations. Anjou contains Coteaux-du-Layon (which in turn encompasses Bonnezeaux, Chaume, and within Chaume the miniscule Quarts-de-Chaume), Saumur, and Savennières. All are famous appellations, but basic Anjou-labeled wines are also good. Considering the fact that the region is about 20,000 acres, general quality of Anjou wine is high. With Touraine, it makes up what is known as the Middle Loire; the Middle Loire is the source of most of the Loire’s best wines and all of its best Chenins Blancs.

**SAUMUR SPARKLERS** The Saumur regions bread and butter is its *mousseux* (sparkling wines), while it also produces some dry Saumur Chenin (similar to Anjou’s version) and some impressive Cabernet Franc, chalky dry thanks to the freestone soils. La Croix des Loges offering in USA brought by Steep Hill is the Saumur Brut NV Eden (70% Chenin Blanc, 15% Cabernet Franc, 15% Chardonnay).

Saumur is the next region upstream after Savennières and the eponymous town is best known for its usually dry and racy sparkling wines, whose tiny, often persistent bubbles can demonstrate considerable winemaking skill. These wines are finding a wider market and are characterized by the decidedly un-champagne-like flavors of the Chenin Blanc grape which dominate Saumur’s *mousseux* and the more rigorously made Crémant de Loire. Chenin is a great varietal and it all comes down to the winemaker’s ability to manage some sharp edges, although increasing quantities of Chardonnay used in these traditional-method wines are beginning to internationalize them. The Loire’s Chenin Blanc, while it has all the right acidity for sparkling wine can, in the wrong hands, easily turn sharp and peppery, giving the sparkling wines a hard edge.

Compared with Saumur sparkling wine, the rules for Crémant de Loire allow a higher percentage of Chardonnay and red grapes such as Pinot Noir and Cabernet. This gives the possibility of creamy, soft wines with greater richness and concentration than Saumur normally achieves.

**STATUS QUO** In a nutshell Steep Hill imports the following wines: two white wines made out of Chenin Blanc, the entry level “Anjou blanc 2015” and the barrel fermented “Anjou Blanc Les 3 Failles” 2011 (not present in the picture, sorry for that!); one red dominated by Cabernet Franc (the “Anjou Rouge 2014”). Beside the still wines, a Saumur NV Brut sparkler completes the roster.

Describing his wines Jean-Christian says: "We want expressive wines that show each
vineyard of land, but we want wines that people enjoy - a fresh roundness and not heaviness". Fair enough, correct?

**Anjou Blanc 2015** This is an enjoyable, easy to drink Chenin Blanc coming from several different plots averaging 45 years. Soil is dominated by shale. Vinification process: skin maceration for 24 hours, prefermentary operations under an inert gas environment (CO\(_2\)), following by low-temperature vinification (14-15°C) in order to preserve the full aroma of the grape. Maturing on fine lees for three months to develop its fatness and roundness. Wine and food pairing: During the vinification process, we have chosen to focus on the freshness and fruitiness, that is why the dry Anjou will suit perfectly with your fish and shellfish dishes. It can also pair well with your appetizers.

**Anjou Blanc Les 3 Failles 2011**: Once again here soil is dominated by shale and vines average 45 years. Grape sorting with ripe grapes, candied grapes and overripe grapes. Skin maceration for 24 hours, prefermentary operations under an inert gas environment. Fermentation and three years of aging in 400-liters barrels with regular stirring. 100% Chenin Blanc.

**Anjou Rouge 2014** A delicious lighter style red that can be served lightly chilled in warm weather. Grape varieties: 95% Cabernet Franc and 5% Cabernet Sauvignon. Alcohol 12.5%. Food pairing: A supple refreshing partner for any number of dishes. Bistro dishes like steak-frites and duck confit spring to mind. Unusually for a red wine this is made in the same way as the Bonnin’s white and rosé. To obtain a light extraction during the maceration, the juice and the grapes are cooled down to 7 to 8°C for 4 days. Then the must is warmed up to 18°C for the fermentation which lasts for about 10 days. After, the wine is aged in steel tanks. Best to be enjoyed within 4 years from the vintage.

**Saumur Brut NV Eden** This sparkler comes from a blend of three varietals (70% Chenin Blanc, 15% Cabernet Franc, 15% Chardonnay). Elaborated with the traditional method (second fermentation in the bottle), the three varietals are blended at the beginning of the first fermentation in vat which takes place at 14°C. Then the wine is bottled with the “liqueur de tirage”, which is made up of sugar and yeast, in order to trigger a second fermentation. The wine rests on its lees for two years at least. When the wine has completed its aging period, the sediment is removed, the bottle is topped up with wine. "Eden" displays a nice array of aromatics shifting from floral note to mineral tones linked by a fresh and harmonious fruit. Best to be enjoyed at no more than 10°C, this wine offers its best side within two years from the bottling.