



# PLUMPJACK

WINES

## WINE CLUB July 2006

The Loire Valley lies at the heart of France. The length of the Loire river, the varied terrain, geology and climates through which it flows, make the Loire Valley the only region in France to produce excellent wines of every variety: red, white, rosé, still, sparkling, dry, and sweet. The Loire is the longest river in France, and the last wild river in Europe. For much of its 630 miles - from the mountains of central France to the coast of Brittany - the Loire is vineyard country, and total wine production makes

up the third largest AOC (*appellation d'origine contrôlée*) viticultural area in France. There are about a hundred different wines produced in the Loire Valley, but with the exceptions of the famous Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé, most of the wines are highly underrated outside of France. This may be because many of its finest whites are made from Chenin Blanc, a grape variety associated with very ordinary wine outside the region, and its reds are notable for their delicacy rather than their weight or longevity. Our wine selections this month are appropriate with summer in full swing, and especially for those wine drinkers who live in areas other than San Francisco, where temperatures can climb to unbelievable highs, testing one's level of tolerance (106° as I write this in Cloverdale!). Both white and red offer fruity aromas and refreshing acidity. They are food friendly and are not overpowering. And best of all, they are organoleptically unique.

***2004 Domaine aux Moines  
Savennières- Roche aux Moines  
La Roche-aux-Moines, France***



***2005 Domaine des Sablonnettes  
Les Copains d'Abord  
Rablay-sur-Layon, France***

Consisting of only 150 acres, Savennières AC is one of the smallest appellations in the Anjou area of the Loire Region. The grape used is Chenin Blanc, and the dry white wines produced are thought to be some of the best in the area. Savennières's distinctive personality can be attributed to the fact that it's the Loire Valley's only Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée on the north bank of the river. The three hills that make up the Savennières appellation face south and southwest, allowing the grapes to ripen in the full day's sunlight. The sub-climate is cool and dry, much less humid than the great sweet wine terroirs on the opposite side of the river. There are two Grand Cru vineyards with their own appellations - Coulée de Serrant and La Roche aux Moines. These sites are the most famous because they impart the most mineral character to the wine while also creating the longest-lived examples of Savennières. Domaine aux Moines is one of just 3 estates in Roche Aux Moines. It is located at the top of the hillside bordering the river and is thus the highest point of Roche aux Moines. Monique Laroche bought the estate in 1981, when land prices were very depressed, and made the wines until 2001. Her daughter Tessa took over, after several years of working in the Languedoc, Bordeaux and Burgundy. Domaine aux Moines' production is miniscule - 1800 cases, mostly in dry Savennières. They follow traditional techniques: fermentation in temperature-controlled stainless steel, limited barrel aging (they own 25 barriques equivalent to 625 cases), and no malolactic fermentation. Viticulture is essentially



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organic. Peter Gibson, a wine educator and author, writes, “The aromas of a great Savennières grab my attention, as few

wines can, with their uncanny ability to speak with rare clarity and authority of a singular place...It’s as if Mother Nature created this site specifically for the purpose of making a singular wine. And in the right hands, Savennières is one of the world’s most authoritative, compelling and long-lived white wines.” The 2004 Domaine aux Moines Savennières-Roche aux Moines displays the classic mineral characteristics that Savennières is famous for. The wine is taut with fresh pear, lime, citrus peel, honey and flinty aromas. In the mouth, the wine has a complex combination of fruit and minerals and there is a touch of oak on the finish. These characteristics are only a preview to the aromatic complexity and palate richness this wine will acquire as it matures. It will be very long-lived. The 2004 vintage was the top-rated Savennières at the Angers fair in 2005 - the most important showcase for Loire wines. Monique Laroche recommends having this wine with steamed asparagus with fresh cream, salt and pepper, any fish dish with *buerre blanc*, or baked goat cheese on toast with honey.

The 2004 Domaine aux Moines Savennières-Roche aux Moines is \$20.99/bottle, \$226.70/case.



Domaine des Sablonnettes is a biodynamic producer. It is owned by Christine and Joel Menard, who have been making wine in Rablay-sur-Layon for 20 years. They cultivate 8 hectares of vineyard (about 20 acres) in the Coteaux du Layon and Anjou appellations. The domaine makes several beautiful white wines, including the rich and lush Coteaux du Layon dessert wine, but it’s their delicious Les Copains d’Abord, made from 100% Grolleau, that we are featuring. It’s extremely rare to see Grolleau outside of France’s Loire Valley. The name comes from an old French word, ‘grolle’ which translates to raven. The black bird’s dark feathers were reminiscent of the grape’s color. According to the [Oxford Companion to Wine](#), “Grolleau (or Groslot) produces extremely high yields of relatively thin, acid wine, and it is to the benefit of wine drinkers that it is so systematically being replaced with Gamay and, more recently, Cabernet Franc. It is not allowed into red versions of Appellation d’Origine Contrôlée wines such as Anjou, Saumur, and Touraine.” Wine critic Robert M Parker, Jr. agrees and has said he thought all the Grolleau vines should be ripped out and replanted with Gamay and Cabernet Franc. Thankfully, a handful of producers continue to cultivate Grolleau with care. Christine and Joel’s attentive vineyard management has revitalized this grape’s reputation. Their Grolleau vineyards are 40-years-old and certified organic. The grapes are fermented whole (carbonic maceration) with ambient yeast and then crushed. The new wine is aged in barrel until spring and then bottled. No sulfites are added at any step along the way. The 2005 Les Copains d’Abord has strawberry-cherry aromas and a touch of earth in the nose. It is light-bodied without much depth or weight, but crisp, juicy and minerally. It is a bright and refreshing wine that has a gravelly note, a touch of berry, and a long finish of blackberry tea. Take this wine on your summer picnic and have it with barbequed pork or chicken, grilled vegetables, or Chevres from the Loire Valley. This wine is delightful served slightly chilled.

The 2005 Domaine des Sablonnettes Les Copains d’Abord is \$16.99/bottle, \$183.50/case