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Virtual Wine Tasting – 29th May 2020

Loire Wines from your Local Supermarket

**background notes on the wines
and
suggestions for food pairing**

with thanks to

Patrick McHugh
and
Ann Chapman

Le Grand Ballon Sauvignon Blanc from Waitrose (£6.74)

What Waitrose don't tell you is that this wine is the standard *Touraine Sauvignon Blanc* from *Domaine Joël Delaunay*. We have visited this vineyard twice in recent years and WCoMC is lucky to have several cases of their superior *Touraine Chenonceaux La Voûte* in our cellar.

Good Sauvignon Blanc from the Loire Valley tends to be zesty with notes of grass, herbs, lemon and lime. Sauvignon Blanc is a green-skinned grape variety that originates from the Bordeaux region of France. Wine experts have used the phrase "crisp, elegant, and fresh" as a favourable description of Sauvignon Blanc from the Loire Valley.

The wine is usually consumed young, as it does not particularly benefit from aging. Dry and sweet white Bordeaux, including oak-aged examples from Pessac-Léognan and Graves, as well as some Loire wines from Pouilly-Fumé and Sancerre are some of the few examples of Sauvignon Blancs with aging potential.



They say: zesty with notes of grass, herbs, lemon and lime.

A versatile Sauvignon Blanc, this is delightfully refreshing on its own and also makes a great accompaniment to *fish and seafood*. Try with some *smoked salmon* or a *goat's cheese salad*. It went well with *pan-fried sea bass* and would also go with *plain chicken* or with a *light sauce*. Not tried yet, but I think it could also go through to a seasonal dessert of *gooseberry fool sweetened with elderflower syrup*.

Les Andides Saumur Chenin Blanc from Waitrose (£7.99)

The Chenin Blanc grape is often underrated in an era when the more assertive Sauvignon reigns supreme, but Chenin is quite its equal in terms of its lively acidity and the gorgeous honeyed character that can develop. Chenin Blanc is also known as *Pineau de la Loire* among other names. Chenin Blanc originated near Saumur in the Anjou wine region of the Loire sometime in the 9th century and from there travelled to Touraine by at least the 15th century. Eleanor of Aquitaine is buried in the Abbaye of Fontevraud near Saumur. (*Eleanor got around a bit and has been the focus of many of our Wine Club travels in recent years! Ed*).

The high acidity of Chenin Blanc means it can be used to make everything from sparkling wines to well-balanced dessert wines. WCoMC has the wonderful *Chenin Blanc Domaine du Fresche Liqoureau 2018 Alain Boré* in our cellar. Away from the Loire, Chenin Blanc is found in most of the New World wine regions; it is the most widely planted variety in South Africa. In cool areas the juice is sweet but high in acid with a full-bodied fruity palate.

In the past due to the unreliable summers of northern France, the acidity of under ripened grapes was often masked with chaptalisation,¹ with unsatisfactory results, whereas now the less ripe grapes are made into popular sparkling wines such as *Crémant de Loire*. The white wines of the Anjou AOC are a popular expression of Chenin as a dry wine, with flavours of quince and apples. In nearby Vouvray AOC they aim for an off-dry style, developing honey and floral characteristics with age. In the best vintages the grapes can be left on the vines to develop noble rot, producing an intense, viscous dessert wine which may improve considerably with age.



They say: produced by one of the Loire's biggest co-operative vineyards. This wine is splendidly fresh, fruity and crisp with a lovely grapefruit zestiness, tempered by a subtle honeyed sweetness.

I found this one quite challenging as Chenin Blanc is not my grape of choice. To me, this is quite sharp and not one to drink on its own. Anything too salty or, despite the slight honeyed flavour, too sweet, doesn't work, so no *crisps* or *honey-roast peanuts!* *Slightly salted pistachios* work as a nibble. We found it worked well with *cold chicken and salad*. We think this would probably also go with *pear, fennel and walnut salad dressed with olive oil and very little lemon juice*. The producers suggest spicy Thai or Chinese, but to our taste, this wine would not be our first choice for those.

¹ this is the process of adding sugar to unfermented grape must (the juice pressed from the grapes) in order to increase the alcohol content after fermentation

Les Nivières Saumur Cabernet Franc from Waitrose (£7.99)

This red wine comes from vineyards planted on the south bank of the Loire around the historic castle town of Saumur in Anjou. The Angevin empire was established in the 12th Century by Henry II, as Count of Anjou, Duke of Normandy and King of England, and as well as by right of his wife Eleanor of Aquitaine (*here we go again! Ed*).

Les Nivières is made from 100% Cabernet Franc grapes grown on the sand and limestone slopes of the region. Specially vinified to bring out the rich raspberry, blackcurrant, violets and graphite notes so characteristic of the delicately balanced reds of the Loire Valley, this is a wine to enjoy in the full freshness of its youth. Cabernet Franc is believed to have been established in the Libournais region of southwest France sometime in the 17th century, when Cardinal Richelieu transported cuttings of the vine to the Loire Valley. They were planted at the Abbey of Bourgueil under the care of an abbot named Breton, whose name became associated with the grape. By the 18th century, plantings of Cabernet Franc were found throughout Fronsac, Pomerol and St-Emilion, making quality wines. The renowned red wines of Bordeaux rely primarily on three grapes Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc. Cabernet Franc is not often the sole grape, more often being grown for blending, making this an interestingly different wine.

WCoMC has three different Cabernet Franc wines from Bourgueil in our cellars: *2005 Domain Thibault*, *2015 Domaine Thibault 'Alouette'* and *2014 Domaine Nathalie and David Drusse*.



They say: a supple berry-fruit laden blackcurrant and spice medium-bodied wine.

We recommend this should be drunk slightly chilled as a versatile summer red. It can be drunk alone or try with *chorizo crisps*, *grilled goat's cheese canapes*, *bresaola* or a mixed charcuterie plate. Personally, I think this is a little lightweight to be the ideal BBQ wine, but try it with *sausages*, or *mushroom and courgette skewers*, with or without *haloumi cheese*, for the non-meat eaters!

Taste the Difference Touraine Sauvignon Blanc from Sainsbury's (£8.00)

Vibrant aromas of green apple, lime and gooseberry combined with lemon zesty flavours. The Touraine appellation of the Loire Valley is renowned for its ability to produce iconic Sauvignon Blanc, admired the world over. Pierre Chainier, whom we understand produces this wine, is one of the region's historic producers; his vineyards are located between Tours and Blois in the heart of Touraine and extend over 250 hectares.

The Sauvignon Blanc grape most likely gets its name from the French words *sauvage* ("wild") and *blanc* ("white"). The grape is also a component of the famous dessert wines of Sauternes and Barsac. Sauvignon Blanc is widely cultivated in France, Chile, Romania, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Bulgaria, and the states of Washington and California in the US. In cooler climates like the Loire, the grape has a tendency to produce wines with noticeable acidity and "green flavours" of grass, green bell peppers and nettles. In warmer climates, it can develop some tropical fruit flavours (such as passion fruit) and floral notes (such as elderflower) but risks losing much from over-ripeness.

If you want to spend a wonderful lockdown evening, open a bottle of this Sainsbury's cracker and watch the film *The Lion in Winter*. It is set during Christmas 1183, at King Henry II's château and primary residence in Chinon, Touraine, in the medieval Angevin Empire. Henry wants his youngest son, the future King John, to inherit his throne, while his estranged and imprisoned wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, temporarily released from prison for the holidays, favours their oldest surviving son, the future King Richard the Lionheart. (*There is no stopping this woman! Ed*) Meanwhile, King Philip II of France, the son and successor of Louis VII of France, Eleanor's ex-husband, has given his half-sister Alais, who is currently Henry's mistress, to the future heir, and demands either a wedding or the return of her dowry. (*You will be tested on this history in due course – the film is a good watch! Ed*)



They say: vibrant aromas of green apple, lime and gooseberry combined with lemon zesty flavours.

As we couldn't find this wine owing to the lockdown, we tried a Lacheteau Touraine Sauvignon Blanc from Tesco.

They say: the expressive bouquet is dominated by notes of exotic fruit and redcurrant; well-balanced, full and fresh on the palate.

Like the Delaunay, these wines would accompany a range of *smoked or unsmoked seafood and fish dishes*, even *fish and chips*, or *light chicken dishes*. Delicious with a *soft lemony goat's cheese on sourdough*.

WINE TASTING – THE BLICK GUIDE

The method favoured by generations of *Master of Wine* students (those aficionados chasing the industry's most prestigious title) goes by a five-letter acronym: "The BLICK". This is a shorthand way to describe the five qualities that separate the pleasantly *ordinaire* from the *prestigieuse*.

B

Pour yourself a glass of wine and look for **Balance**, specifically the balance between ripe fruit and freshness. Too much fruit and the wine will be sickly; too much acidity and the wine will be sour. Now think of a score. In the *Master of Wine* exams this is one, two or three ticks, three ticks meaning a perfectly balanced beauty.

L

After Balance consider the wine's **Length**. Experts feel that the longer a wine lasts pleasantly on your palate the better it is. Three ticks mean 15 seconds or more!

I

Next you should look for **Intensity**. Not big, spicy and expansive like a madras curry (one tick) but focused, detailed and precise like a fine tuna sushi (three ticks). For example, if you can taste strawberries (even if you loath strawberries) rate the wine on the intensiveness of the strawberries.

C

Now consider the **Complexity**. Does the wine smell of one thing or of several? If you can find more than four smells, then give the wine three ticks.

K

Finally its **Keepability**. All great wines will reward patience, so add to your score one tick for *drink on release* to three ticks for *will last a lifetime*. Young red wines with high tannins will keep well. With white wine, however, you should look for some weight and a slight sweetness to aid Keepability.

With the BLICK system you can separate your ephemeral barbecue wines from the great. You can also enjoy becoming one of the world's wine hacks. If asked to pronounce on a (red) wine, just fall back on the BLICK system: "*Well*" you say, "*it's a well-balanced wine, good length with attractive fruit intensity and complex character. It'll probably keep well too*". For a white, this might be: "*Vibrant balance of fruit, pleasant length, delightful intensity, yet not too complex*."