

*In all the wine world, there is only one Loire Valley...*



# Touraine Wine Report

by Select Wine Journeys

WHAT'S NEW IN THE TOURAINE APPELLATIONS OF VOUVRAY, BOURGUEIL, CHINON AND MONTLOUIS

## 2009 in Touraine: Highlights and Memories of a Great Year

**Vancouver BC, October 2009** - We have made it through 2009! With world economies struggling to deal with the global recession, the Tourism sector in **Touraine** faced unprecedented challenges...challenges that we have met and worked through. As I left **Vouvray** a couple of weeks ago now, there was optimism among the locals that their economy is improving and that 2010 will be much better for them. We share their optimism, and are busy putting the finishing touches on our 2010 Journeys.

Our year in **France** started once again last February with the **Salons des Vins de la Loire** in **Angers**. This is a great venue for any wine amateur or professional, to sample new releases and meet with some of the great wine producers in the Loire Valley. Over 600 wine-makers were present, with all appellations represented...big and small.

It was a good year weather wise in Touraine, starting with a decent spring, (unlike the spring of 2008!), a typically hot July and August with perhaps a little less moisture than is usual for this area, and most recently September which was picture perfect. In fact, as harvesting got underway in most regions the week of Sept. 27<sup>th</sup>, a little rain would be welcome by most opinions...but never too much at this time of year of course. Both chenin blanc and cabernet franc were plentiful on the vines, and most growers I met with were very pleased with the quality to date. There were some early signs of rot in the vines in Vouvray which they are monitoring of course, but at this point it all looks good. Perhaps some great sweet Moelleux this year?!

We have just arrived back in Vancouver following our last week on the ground in Touraine. The weather was spectacular, and with harvest in full swing in all areas, our timing was simply perfect. The week was organized for a group of Canadians that asked us to combine aspects of our History & Wine and our Regional Cuisine & Wine for them. It was a packed week for sure. We ate like Kings and Queens of long ago, soaked up as much history as we could manage, and of course, sampled regional wine at every opportunity.

The success of the recent "Customized" week has led us to highlight this option on our website as a "feature week" of travel with Select Wine Journeys. You simply choose the dates and then have fun working with us to create the perfect week for your group.

There is so much that I can write about our time in Touraine, but as we have just finished the year with a fantastic "Customized" week, I would like to tell you about it:

**Some highlights were...**

...our visit to the **Chateau Chenonceau**...often referred to as the 'Ladies Chateau' due to the many powerful women who lived here in the XVI and XVII centuries, Chenonceau is a wonderful place to

visit for those who are interested in Renaissance history. The Chateau which played a vital role in the life of the French Monarchy of this era is still adorned with its original furniture, many great works of art including original tapestries.

...a visit with wine-maker Alain Le Capitaine at **Domaine Le Capitaine in Rochecorbon**. Alain has been a great friend over the years and is a real local character who enjoys meeting our groups and introducing his wine to our guests. Alain and his brother Christophe have been making "typical" Vouvray wine, sparkling and still, for 25 years in Rochecorbon. Alain makes an excellent sparkling Demi-Sec "Methode Traditionelle" wine that is so delicious...but so hard to find here in Canada and the U.S.A.

...a foie gras tasting with **Edouard Clement at Chateau du Vau in Ballan-Mire**. Our good fortune had us arriving to a table laden with home made riette (pork pate) and two varieties of Edouard's foie gras that we were eager to taste! After a tour of the farm and the kitchens, we settled into our tasting accompanied by 2 bottles of Vouvray Moelleux Reserve 2003. Fresh bread, duck and goose foie gras, fleur de sel and sweet Moelleux wine...there is no going back I'm afraid! What a decadent treat!

...We harvested "**Grolleau**" grapes with organic wine-maker **Sebastien Brunet at Domaine de la Roche Fleurie in Chancay**. (Appellation Vouvray & Touraine) All grapes were picked by hand and participants had a great time calling out to "Le Hauteur" who would run over so that we could dump our basket of just picked grapes into his 80 kilo capacity (175 lbs) bin on his back. The group enjoyed an hour of picking grapes under a picture perfect blue sky. Back breaking work for sure if we had to do it all day...and impressive to see in operation. We headed back to Sebastien's cellar, which is an enormous cave carved out of the limestone centuries ago and expands approximately 12 km's (7.5 miles) underground. There we saw grapes pressed...tasted the first pressed juice and had lunch with Sebastien and his team of harvesters before they headed back out to the vines. The group will just have to come back next fall to taste their hard earned contribution to the Sparkling "Methode Traditionelle" Rose of 2009!

...We visited the **Royal Abbey in Fontevraud**, one of the most significant Monastique sites in all of Europe. Dating back over 800 years, the tombs of Kings and Queens of the early Angevin dynasty are there to be seen. Henri Plantagenet (Henri II), Eleanor of Aquitaine and Richard the Lion Heart, Henri's son, are buried side by side in the Abbey. The tombs are in perfect condition even after sitting quietly for 8 centuries. Many years later, the Abbey was turned in to a prison by Napoleon, and was used as such during the World Wars and until the last prisoner left in 1985. The Abbey grounds are impressive and it was well worth a morning visit.

...Following Fontevraud, we headed to one of my favorite villages nearby...**Chinon**. The old city centre is beautiful and our group enjoyed lunch in a local café and a walk-a-bout on the old city streets.

...We followed our visit to Chinon with a stop on the bluffs near **Cravant les Coteaux and Panzoult**. Chinon is arguably home to the finest cabernet franc in the world. My favorites are usually the barrel aged "**Vielles Vignes**" that are silky smooth with good fruit aromas and have soft tannins. The harvest teams were hard at work in vines nearby and we enjoyed watching them with a glass of **Jacques Grosbois's** 2005 "Vielles Vignes" cabernet franc in our hands. This cab franc was a gorgeous ruby colour with vivid red berry fruit...a perfect way to end our afternoon before our farewell meal at **Au Soleil Levant in Monnaie** that evening.

All of our Journeys include a mid-week day off. I usually use this time to continue my exploration of Touraine and beyond. Guests are welcome to relax around our Manoir for the day or explore the region on their own. They are always welcome to join me on my travels, and this week they all chose to come along with me!

We headed to Juno Beach in Normandy, where Canadian forces landed on D-Day, as well as the Juno Beach Centre. I was also able to arrange a quick meeting with friends Alain Berthelot, the Mayor of Larre, a little village in Normandy, and his wife Catherine. Alain, a local Military Historian is forever grateful to the Allies who liberated this part of France and in particular a group of young Canadian and

British aviators who crashed in a farmer's field in his town. A monument has been erected in memorial of these soldiers, where we met Alain for a brief ceremony. It was a quick stop but very moving for us Canadians to experience the reverence in which our soldiers are held by local citizens in this part of France.

The Juno Beach Centre, coupled with a stop at the Canadian Military Cemetery in **Beny-sur-Mer**, were very emotional to visit. Speaking for the group...we were all very pleased to have had the opportunity to visit this area of Normandy. Words can not do it justice.

While writing this newsletter, I received an email from Alain Le Capitaine that after 3 weeks of harvesting, they are finished (Oct. 22), and are very pleased with the 2009 potential. The weather stayed perfect throughout harvest and the quantity and quality of his chenin blanc grapes were excellent. Alain remarked, "Ils ne nous restent plus qu'à le vendre!" (The only thing left to do is sell the wine!) That never seems to be a problem for Alain, and let's hope he cellars a bottle of two for us to taste next year!

Whether we are visiting a 500 year old Renaissance Chateau, tasting wine with wine-makers who have been in Touraine for generations, savouring the local cuisine, or even experiencing the D-Day landing beaches in not too far off Normandy, the local history, culture and traditions that are the fabric of daily life in the Loire are all around to discover and enjoy.

Thanks again to all who joined a **Select Wine Journey** this year. Our dates for the 2010 season are now posted and we can hardly wait to be back on the ground introducing you to the best Touraine has to offer!

A la prochaine!

Cheers,

Dave

Dave Kasper  
Select Wine Journeys  
[www.selectwinejourneys.com](http://www.selectwinejourneys.com)