

Speaking of my most recent article wherein I discussed getting started with wine as a hobby . . . my instructor in Boston wanted to start his class off with a wine that was light in alcohol content, a good aperitif, and/or a good match with food. Enter Muscadet!

Muscadet is a white French wine produced at the western end of the Loire Valley, near the city of Nantes in the Pays de La Loire region. More Muscadet is produced than any other Loire wine. It is made from the Melon de Bourgogne grape, often referred to simply as MELON. As a rule in France, APPELLATION D'ORIGINE CONTROLEE wines are named after either their growing region or after their variety. The name Muscadet on the label is therefore an exception. The name seems to refer to a characteristic of the wine produced by the melon grape variety . . . a wine with a musk-like taste. (Experts have been forthcoming in their opinion that there is little or no musk-like flavors or aromas in the Muscadet wine.)

The wine-growing tradition in the region where Muscadet is produced dates from an edict of the Roman Emperor Probus who had the first vineyards planted by his soldiers. The exact origins of the Muscadet wine, and its association with Melon de Bourgogne, is not clear, however most Ampelographers (see Winespeak) believe that the Melon de Bourgogne grape was introduced to the Nantes region in the Seventeenth Century by a Dutch Trader looking for a sufficient source of neutral white wines that could be distilled into brandy. This program had a short-lived success because it was interrupted by a devastating freeze in 1709.

Vineyards in the Muscadet region are scattered across a wide array of terroirs ranging from gentle slopes near the rivers to rolling hills to flat, fertile land near the mouth of the Loire River. The vineyards are grouped into three sub-appellations:

- 1) Muscadet-Sevre et Maine. Established in 1936. This AOC produces 80% of all Muscadets.
- 2) Muscadet-Coteaux de la Loire. Established in 1936. Produces less than 20%.
- 3) Muscadet-Cotes de Grandlieu. Established in 1994.

I point out the different sub-appellations because you may see them named on the labels. In addition to this, the melon grape found in each of the sub-appellations has been found to survive best in its own MICROCLIMATE, of which there are three.

A word about SUR LIE. The Process of SUR LIE is leaving the wine, for a period of time after fermentation is complete, in contact with the lees (spent yeasts). Wines that have been left *sur lie*

take on a creamy, rounder mouthfeel and generally display a more complex flavor. This process applies to Muscadet wine as well as any other white wine and to use the term Sur Lie on the label one must comply with the regulations of 1994. (Stay with me on this because it gets very strict.) In 1994, French authorities designed regulations that limit the use of Sur Lie to only wines that comply with a set guideline. First, while the sub-appellations, named above, are permitted to use the term Sur Lie, any wine labeled with just the generic AOC MUSCADET cannot use the term. Second, the wine must spend at least one winter in contact with the Lees and not be bottled until after the third week of March following the harvest. Third, the wine must be bottled directly off the Lees and not go through any racking or filtration process. (Look for the Sur Lie term on the paper label or embossed on the bottle.)

The wine that we are featuring is light-bodied, dry, and with very little residual sugar. Master of wine Mary Ewing-Mulligan says Muscadets as fresh and crisp and will remain so up through their third year.

Now, why did I devote all of the above space to so much background information? That's easy. Because we are in the Lowcountry and we have oysters in abundance, and Muscadet has been called the Perfect Oyster Wine. Go to your favorite fish store, stock up on some Lowcountry oysters. Then head for your favorite wine shop and stock up on some Muscadet. The Muscadet will be wallet friendly and I am sure that you will enjoy this food and wine pairing.

WINESPEAK

I owe you a definition from the text above. "Ampelography" is the science of the identification and classification of grapevines according to their physical properties, such as the size and shape of their leaves and grape clusters. Increasingly, grapevines are also being identified by DNA typing.

At the Mouth of the Loire River

Written by Terry Connor

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I am going to drop a name and you should use it to impress your friends. CHATEAU de la CASSEMICHÈRE Muscadet Sevre-et-Maine, Clos du bon Cure, Sur Lie. This Muscadet comes from 50-year-old vines. It is a delicate, gentle, fresh wine that invites you to drink more than you should. If you see a bottle you will see the Sur Lie and the Sub-appellation on the label>