

According to my traveling companion Franco, the Loire translates into beautiful castles on manicured grounds, romance, lots and lots of terrific wines, and some excellent wineries staffed by some very talented winemakers. However, Chris Kissack, also known as the Wine Doctor, gives a more sophisticated description when he states that “the Loire Valley has intrinsic beauty, both in its natural landscape as well as the many manmade features such as the fine Chateaux, the Churches and Monasteries. The great architectural heritage and plethora of historic towns and villages are evidence of millennia of interaction between humans and their environment, and reflect the importance of the region during the Renaissance, and its culture.” (Maybe I should put Franco in touch with Mr. Kissack.)

The Loire Valley is a long sliver of land about two hours’ drive southwest of Paris. Drive to the village of Sancerre. Here the Loire River splits the area between the two villages of Sancerre on the left and Pouilly-sur-Loire on the right. Sancerre wines are produced from the Sauvignon Blanc grape and they are characterized by a “gunflint” and spicy flavor. The wine is food friendly when consumed young. Sancerre is abundantly available in the US. It is competitively priced and is a good selection as an alternative “white” to Chardonnay. (The locals also have a Pinot Noir that you should try while you are there. It may be a secret because it is not found anywhere else.) Crossing the river to the village of Pouilly-sur-Loire, we find wine also produced from the Sauvignon Blanc grape. It is called Pouilly Fume and it is not to be confused with Pouilly-Fuisse, the white wine of the Macon. Again this wine is also available in the US.

Travel east along the Loire River and the next stop is Orleans for touring and shopping. For more wine I would continue along the river and stop at the city of Tours. Hugh Johnson, in his Atlas of Wine, states “that everything royal and romantic about France is found in Tours; in this countryside of great chateaux and ancient towns along the gently flowing river.” Here is also found vineyards of the Chenin Blanc grape. If the grapes could talk about history, we would learn that, for an untold number of years, the Chenin Blanc grape from there has been produced from vineyards that lie on chalk hills. These hills have also provided cellars and dwelling caves for the winegrowers of the district. The Chenin Blanc at its best and unblended, is honeylike and sweet. However, the Vouvray produced for us here in the US is a blend. Although the price varies, the quality is very good. Vouvray is plentiful in the US and is another good alternative “white.”

Continuing east along the river, I would make my next stop at Anjou. This is a very complex area. Here “complex” is good and interesting. The primary grape is, again, Chenin Blanc. Again, Hugh Johnson points out that the wines produced from this area have something in common with German white wines. The better they are the sweeter they are. At their very best they are dessert wines with a velvety texture, smooth with glycerin, and they carry flavors of peach,

apricot, and hazelnut.

Still in the Anjou area we find the Cabernet Sauvignon grape from which is produced the Rose d' Anjou. Although this wine is produced from a very small area, there is still enough produced for export to the US. Rose d'Anjou is available in the Lowcountry at very competitive pricing.

Adding to the complexity in the Anjou area is the small appellation called Savennieres. The wines produced are DRY, which confounds most experts as the grape is Chenin Blanc. Savennieres wines are "big" wines which will bottle-age well for an additional two to three years. A perfect partner to your Salmon. If you are able find a bottle, grab it. It may have to be special ordered; however you will experience a very real wine drinking pleasure.

Our last stop is Pays Nantes, the home of Muscadet. This is a very real success story. An unheard of vin de pays 40 years ago, it is now producing wines that pair perfectly with shell fish. The wine is inexpensive, light in alcohol, produced in high volume, and available in the Lowcountry. It should sell at around \$9 - \$13. In the short period of time it took to read this article, you covered 320 miles.

Cheers.

Next stop is Alsace

WINESPEAK

If you go to France, try to add the Loire to your itinerary. Clearly it does not get the publicity of other areas; however it is a jewel for travelers. As you can see from above, you have the opportunity to combine wine, food, architecture, road and river travel, and the opportunity to experience a different culture. In addition, if you enjoy history, you will have a ball.

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