



Les Chesnaies Chinon, Loire Valley

Les Chesnaies

Pascal and Beatrice Lambert started the property in 1987. It remains a family owned and operated winery with their children now helping as well.

All farming is organic with some biodynamic practices.

Vines in the best vineyard sites are fifty to eighty years old.

Pascal and Beatrice make Cabernet Franc from low yielding old vines situated on the slopes of Chinon's most sought after vineyards.



Pascal Lambert

Chinon

- ∴ Located in the heart of the Loire Valley on the bank of the river Vienne, three hours southwest of Paris by car.
- ∴ French writer and thinker Francois Rabelais was born in Chinon. His love of life and all things tasty typifies the down to earth attitude of many wine growers in the region.
- ∴ Cabernet Franc is the red grape. Tiny amounts of Cabernet Sauvignon are grown but can not exceed 10% of the final wine. Small amounts of white wines are made from Chenin Blanc.
- ∴ Like most great wine regions, Chinon's most prized wine comes from the rocky slopes of a south facing hill overlooking a river. In this case from Cravant les Couteaux, home of Les Chesnaies.
- ∴ There are two styles of Chinon. The light, fruity wine of Parisian wine bars is made to be quaffed young. The wines from the slopes have much more depth, do well with more complex foods and age gracefully for a decade or more.

Les Chesnaies and Food:

Lamb and duck cooked over an outdoor fire are lucky to finish their lives paired with a Cuvee Danae with a few years' age.

Cab Franc has a lighter tannic structure than Cabernet Sauvignon. It can be interesting with beef, but prefers more tender cuts - filet mignon as opposed to flank.

The area around Chinon produces some terrific "Charcuterie" and the various preparations are often a terrific choice for younger wines from Les Chesnaies. Try a plate of sausage and pork rillettes, a fresh baguette and a few cornichons with a glass of Pascal and Beatrice. It's a recipe for unpretentious, down to earth, happy times.

Thoughts on Les Chesnaies, Cabernet Franc, and Chinon

The good folks who make Harlan, Mouton Rothschild, Gaja's Darmagi and every other Cabernet Sauvignon owe at least a small thank you to a centuries old romantic liaison that forever linked the Loire Valley's two most famous grapes; Cabernet Franc and Sauvignon Blanc.

These two darlings of the modern day Loire Valley grew side by side in the vineyards of Bordeaux for generations. Somewhere along the way, genetic testing has proven, Franc and Blanc got a room. Each provided half of the genes and half of the name. Cabernet Sauvignon was born; a plant whose blood, or sap in this case, was as noble as either of its parents and has since wrestled Franc from its throne as King of Bordeaux. Today, Franc has been relegated to a minor role as a blending grape in the region, starring only in a few select spots such as Cheval Blanc in St. Emillion.



Pascal harvests by hand.

Fortunately, there exists a place where Cab Franc still rules the roost and where its dominance is cheered by faithful local growers. Chinon, located in the center of the Loire Valley and wedged between the rivers Vienne and Loire, produces distinct and age worthy red wines exclusively from Bordeaux' former king.

In broad terms, two types of Chinon are grown. The first is the light hearted, fruity, easy going variety that graces the wine list in so many Parisian bistros. It is grown on the sandy, gravelly flood plains lying next to the two rivers. These are wines to enjoy young in the company of simple foods and happy people.

The second is a broader, deeper and made to spend a few more years in a quiet corner of the cellar. Let's be clear, Harlan's vines may be a direct descendant of Cab Franc, but few Cab Francs will ever be confused with Harlan. Much like great Pinot Noir, however, one would be wrong to equate lighter tannic structure with reduced nobility. In fact, Cab Franc can ages wonderfully and rewards its patient fans with an experience as delicious and as elusive as great Pinot.

Surprisingly, some of the wine world's most trusted observers seem only to have tasted Chinon of the first sort. Praise for light, fresh wines often precedes warnings not to Chinon age past a few years. Hogwash! Take a trip to a regional tasting in the Loire. If you ask good questions and show a real interest, it will not be long before at least one winemaker reaches below the table to share a magnum of something his father made. More often than not his father will be there with him and can tell you all about the harvest in 1989 or 1985 or if you are lucky, perhaps even 1978.



The Lamberts.

Pascal and Beatrice Lambert are starting a similar tradition. They bought their property in 1987 and were proud to share a fabulous 1996 that was full of life in 2006. If their children are lucky, that same wine might still be on display when they themselves are making the wine a few decades from now.

For more information on Chinon, Les Chesnaies and the Loire Valley, please see www.candidwines.com/leschesnaies.html.