

Domaine Huët

Chenin Blanc's Holy Ground

Since its founding in 1928, Vouvray's Domaine Huët has been the standard-bearer for great, age-worthy Chenin Blanc. And to this day, year after year, the estate produces some of the world's most compelling white wines—and in a remarkable range that spans sparkling, dry, semi-dry, and breathtaking dessert styles.

Chenin Blanc has been identified with Vouvray since at least the 9th century, and many of its great vineyards were known by the 14th century. By those standards, the 80-year-old Huët estate is relatively young. Yet it was this youngster that established, once and for all, that Vouvray was capable of world-class quality.

The domaine's founder, Victor Huët, was a Parisian bistro owner. However, with lungs and nerves shattered by his experiences in WWI, Victor re-settled to the town of Vouvray in France's beautiful Loire Valley. He soon purchased the first of his great vineyards, Le Haut-Lieu, in 1928, and Domaine Huët was born.

Victor's son Gaston (born 1910) worked with his father from the beginning, and assumed full charge by 1937. With an obsessive devotion to quality, and an engaging showman's personality, Gaston built the Huët legacy over the next 55 years, despite spending 5 years in a German POW camp during WWII.

The Grand Crus. For all his salesmanship, Gaston understood clearly that quality must come first—and that quality started with great vineyards. His Haut-Lieu parcel, which lies on Vouvray's "Première Côte" (or "first slope"), is home to virtually all of the appellation's acknowledged grand cru vineyards.

As the estate prospered in the post-WWII era, Gaston secured two additional prime vineyards on the Première Côte that would ensure the domaine's stature: Le Mont (purchased in 1957) and Clos du Bourg (farmed since 1953, purchased in 1963). Collectively, these three vineyards, and the wines made from them, account for Huët being the greatest of all Vouvray producers.

A Perfect Pair. In 1971, Gaston was joined by his talented son-in-law, Noël Pinguet. Together, they crafted legendary wines from their three parcels—with the vineyards and nature dictating which grapes would become Sec, Demi-Sec, or Moelleux. The estate always held back significant stocks of older vintages, and these wines' near immortality



Huët's Prized Le Mont vineyard

has helped to further the Huët legend.

In 2002, with Gaston ailing, a financial partner was needed to ensure the continuation of the estate's rich legacy. Anthony Hwang, a Filipino-born, New York businessman, was brought into the partnership. Gaston passed away that year, but, with the security and enthusiasm brought by Tony, Noël Pinguet has been able to continue Gaston's important work.

In fact, today, the estate may be making its most consistently great wines. Pinguet was one of the earliest adopters of biodynamic practices, and his recent wines, perhaps more than any in the domaine's history, achieve a fascinating level of transparency, purity, and knife-edged balance.

The Wines. As previously mentioned, at their discretion, the estate produces Sec, Demi-Sec, Moelleux, or Moelleux 1ère Trie ("first selection") from any of the three principal vineyards. A superb sparkling *Pétillant* is also made, drawing grapes from all three vineyards, as well as from other small parcels on the estate.

LE HAUT-LIEU—The original Huët vineyard is nearly 9 hA. It has the richest soils of the domaine's three crus—a deep limestone-clay—and the wines are generally the estate's most approachable. In some vintages, small quantities from nearby estate parcels may be added to Le Haut-Lieu.

LE MONT—For many insiders, the argument over Vouvray's greatest vineyard comes down to two sites: Le Mont and Clos du Bourg. Undisputably a grand cru vineyard, Le Mont enjoys a choice site on the Première Côte. With less clay and more stone than Le Haut-Lieu, Le Mont yields young wines of intense minerality. With age, the wines develop great length and finesse.

CLOS DU BOURG—Gaston Huët believed this to be the greatest of all Vouvray vineyards. With the Première Côte's shallowest, stoniest soils, its wines often synthesize Le Mont's intense minerality with Le Haut-Lieu's generous texture.

CUVÉE CONSTANCE—Since 1989, the estate has also produced this magical, botrytized dessert wine selected from one, two or all three vineyards. When made, the Cuvée Constance (named for Gaston's mother) ranks among the world's greatest dessert wines.

Domaine Huët

Loire Valley, France

OVERVIEW

Proprietors: Anthony Hwang / Noël Pinguet

Winemaker: Noël Pinguet

The Loire Valley's most famous estate was founded in 1928 by Victor Huët, and rose to prominence under his son, Gaston. Gaston's son-in-law, Noël Pinguet, joined the estate in the 1970s, and has continued to build on the Huët legacy.

RECENT VINTAGES

2009 – This is an epic vintage, especially for dessert wines. May rival historic greats like 1989 and 1947.

2008 – Rain at flowering led to low yields. A great vintage for Demi-Sec.

2007 – An uneven year, with some great Sec wines, and a (very) few Moelleux.

The Vineyards

Vouvray is made solely from Chenin Blanc, and all Huët grapes are harvested by hand. All of the estate vineyards lie on Vouvray's esteemed *Première Côte*. The *Côte's* limestone-rich clay soils yield wines of intensity and great longevity.

Le Haut-Lieu

The estate's first vineyard, purchased in 1928. Its 9 hectares have the richest soils and, generally, yields the most precocious wines.

Le Mont

Purchased in 1957, Le Mont's clay has a green tinge, and ample stone and silica present. The wines are the estate's most reticent, but develop the strongest perfume with age.

Size: 8 hectares

Clos du Bourg

This ancient, walled vineyard has the estate's shallowest, stoniest soils. The wines are rich and intense. Many consider Clos du Bourg to be Vouvray's finest single-vineyard site.

Size: 6 hectares

The Wines

Pétillant

Fruit Source: Several estate parcels on Vouvray's *Première Côte*.

Avg. Production: 3,500 cases

Sec

Fruit Source: Vineyard-designated

Avg. Production: 6,000 cases

Demi-Sec

Fruit Source: Vineyard-designated

Avg. Production: 3,000 cases

Moelleux

Fruit Source: Vineyard-designated

Avg. Production: 1,600 cases

Moelleux 1^{ère} Trie

Fruit Source: Vineyard-designated

Avg. Production: 1,600 cases

Cuvée Constance

Fruit Source: Selected from 1, 2, or all three vineyards.

Avg. Production: up to 400 cases

ADDITIONAL NOTES

Noël Pinguet was one of the first French *vignerons* to adopt biodynamic viticulture. He credits biodynamics with enhancing the personalities of the estate's *terroirs*.

Depending on the vintage, the estate can make Sec, Demi-Sec, Moelleux, and/or Moelleux 1^{ère} Trie (selected berries), from each of the "big 3" vineyards.

The estate's esteemed Pétillant is fashioned from grapes in the "big 3" vineyards, plus other small nearby parcels.