



WINE  
JOHN WILSON

# Loire summer offerings

These whites are perfect for a lazy day by a cool river – with strings attached

I'm sure I'm not the only one who, in midwinter, dreams of being transported to France, where I can be found dozing on the banks of a slow-moving river in the shade of a tree, bottle of wine chilling in the water (attached to a string), with a picnic of locally bought cheese, salad, charcuterie, cold butter and a freshly baked baguette. The sun is shining and there is a gentle, cooling breeze.

I have come close to this idyll, mainly on holidays in the southwest of France, but for many of us, it means the Loire valley.

The region seems to promise gentle sunshine and memories of holidays past. The Loire is the longest river in France, just over 1,000km from its start in the Massif Centrale in south-eastern France until it reaches the Atlantic Ocean in Saint-Nazaire. Grapes are grown along much of the river, providing us with a huge array of wines. Every style, from sparkling to sweet, is produced.

The white wines share a crisp, refreshing acidity and vibrant fruitiness, while most of the reds have an elegance and lightness. Both styles make for perfect summer drinking. I covered the red wines a few weeks ago. As for the white wines, I covered Muscadet in June, and the two other most widely grown varieties are Sauvignon Blanc and Chenin Blanc.

Sauvignon is grown in various parts

of the globe, but the Loire is its spiritual home and source of some of the finest examples. Loire Sauvignon tends to be drier, the fruit a little less exuberant, often with a brisk cleansing mineral acidity. Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé are the best-known names and produce most of the finest wines, but Quincy, Reuilly, Coteaux du Giennois, Menetou-Salon and Touraine can also produce fine examples. Many of the less expensive versions, which can be very good value, will simply be labelled Val de Loire.

Chenin Blanc produces almost every style of wine, from sparkling through dry, semi-dry to lusciously sweet. Even the sweetest wines have a wonderful pure acidity that refreshes. While some young wines can seem a little austere, they go beautifully with food. The best wines will last and improve for decades, taking on a honeyed richness. Vouvray is the best-known name but Savennières Anjou, Saumur and Montlouis are all home to some excellent producers.

Sauvignon goes well with sushi, plainly cooked fish, goat's cheese, herby salads, sauces such as pesto, and fresh tomatoes of all kinds. Although less aromatic than Sauvignon, Chenin Blanc goes with most of the above foods, including plainly grilled fish, trout, poached salmon, and all sorts of summer salads.

And of course, both wines would be perfect for that al fresco lunch by the river.



**Le Grand Cerf, Touraine Sauvignon Blanc 2020, 12.5%, €12.95 down from €15.95**

Lightly aromatic with attractive ripe green fruits and lemon zest, finishing crisp and dry. A great summery aperitif or with lighter seafood and herby salads.

**From:** O'Briens



**Pouilly-Fumé 2021, Domaine des Berthiers, Jean-Claude Dagueneau, 13%, €20.18**

A wonderful winning combination of perfectly ripe succulent green fruits and mouth-watering flinty mineral acidity. Great on its own, but even better with goat's cheese, tomato salads or simply-cooked white or oily fish. Outstanding value for money.

**From:** WineSpark.com



**Sinople Chinon 2020, Cru du Chateau de Coulaine Organic, 13%, €25**

Deep gold colour, with lemon zest and pears, overlaid with honey, light toast and spice. A lovely atypical complex wine that demands food. Baked salmon, chicken with lemon or roast cauliflower with tahini would be good

matches.

**From:** Whelehan's Wines, Loughlinstown.



**Vouvray Sec 2019, Le Haut-Lieu, Domaine Huet, Biodynamic, 13%, €44**

A nicely floral nose; youthful green apple, quince and pear fruits with a strong mineral backbone. Subtle, complex and precise with wonderful balance. Enjoy with light seafood dishes or keep for up to a decade.

**From:** 64 Wine, Glashule;

Avoca, D4, Rathcoole, Malahide; Blackrock Cellar; Deveney's, Dundrum; Grapevine, Dalkey; La Touche, Greystones; McHugh's, D5; Mitchell & Son, IFSC, Glashtule; Neighbourhood Wine; Redmonds, D6.

## ANOTHER ROUND

Liam Tutty is the founder of Dead Centre, a craft brewery, bar and restaurant in Athlone. Like many restaurant owners, he is facing challenges recruiting staff, Italian pizza chefs in particular. Many of

them moved home during the pandemic and never returned.

"The brewing side is great," he says. "We've been really lucky. We are in the unusual situation of being at full capacity and we can't make anything more in the brewery. We've made 13 limited-edition beers so far this year; it gives us something to shout about and show to our customers."

"We keg all the beer and put it out

in the bar. It's a great way to get good honest feedback. Customers will tell you straight to your face if they don't like it."

They are planning a larger brewery in the locality.

"We are making a nitrogenated raspberry cream stout – like a pink pint of Guinness. It is for the Midlands Craft Festival; last time we sold the first cask in 20 minutes."

"The next specials will be for our

Octoberfest on October 1st. We'll have a range of German and good Irish German-style beers; Wide Street will have their Keller lager on tap. St Mel's are bringing their Bock. "We'll have a schwarzbier, a brass band and lots of fun."

Tickets are available through its website and Eventbrite.

The Dead Centre beers are available through O'Briens, select SuperValu outlets and specialist off-licences.