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The lure of Loire 2014 - a great vintage



As joyfully trumpeted by Loire champion Charles Sydney last month, 2014 is reputed to be an outstanding vintage for the wines of the Loire Valley. From the evidence I recently tasted, those trumpets were not blown in vain.

Standards appear to be very high for all the styles I encountered: Muscadet, Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc (though I didn't taste any sweet examples) and Cabernet Franc. In particular, the baseline for quality is way above average, meaning that inexpensive, everyday examples of these wines have great fruit definition, fine balance and excellent typicality. They therefore deliver exactly what the Loire is famed for: refreshment, lightness and purity.

As price and appellation increases, so does quality - however, this tasting doesn't include the most fêted names of each appellation. Without wishing to put too much emphasis on scores, I would expect the best 2014s to be capable of scoring comfortably above 18, based on those

wines that I scored 17.5. I am particularly keen to try more Cabernet Francs, since the few that I tasted were so extremely promising. The Muscadets encapsulate everything unique and delicious about that appellation, making leesy, citric, fulsome wines. Sauvignon Blancs offer precision and minerality while the Chenins range from waxy and rich to compressed and austere.

In short, it is a vintage to buy indiscriminately, and should please all palates.

Notes are grouped by style then arranged in descending score order.

MUSCADET

- [Bonnet-Huteau, Ch La Tarcière 2014 Muscadet-Sèvre et Maine](#)Now, this has a sort of nutty character that might almost be mistaken for rot, but I think it adds a lovely classic complexity to the palate. Loads of citrus and fragrance, with that nut aroma persisting on the finish. (RH)Drink 2016-2020
17
- [Gadais, Dom de la Tourmaline Sur Lie 2014 Muscadet-Sèvre et Maine](#)Fragrant, yeasty nose with fruit that pushes through on the palate. Super texture: rounded and glossy but not fat. The lees contact gives it that substance and fragrance without any heaviness - the mark of good Muscadet. (RH)Drink 2015-2020
17
- [Bonnet-Huteau, Les Laures 2014 Muscadet-Sèvre et Maine](#)Almond, lemon juice, autolytic dough aromas. Refreshing and fleshy, with succulence and ripeness to the fruit and good layers of concentration on the finish. (RH)Drink 2016-2022
17
- [Veronique Chéreau-Günther, Ch de la Gravelle 2014 Muscadet-Sèvre et Maine](#)Sweet citrus with a bitter juniper tang. Loads of concentration and pith. Long, really layered finish. Impressive stuff - fully benefits from the vintage power. (RH)Drink 2016-2020
16.5
- [Jérémie Huchet, Dom de la Chauvinière 2014 Muscadet-Sèvre et Maine](#)Loads of fresh leesy character and really great apple fruit bursting out - this is where the quality of a vintage shows, in the sheer deliciousness of the fruit. Excellent. (RH)Drink 2015-2019
16.5
- [Les Herbauges, La Roche Blanche 2014 Muscadet-Côtes de Grandlieu](#)Dense, concentrated, expressive and floral on the nose and palate. Smooth, succulent texture. (RH)Drink 2015-2019
16.5
- [Dom de la Fruitière 2014 Muscadet-Sèvre et Maine](#)Four hours of skin contact pre-fermentation. Lovely mineral edge here, and loads of refreshing, ripe fruit. Not hugely lengthy, but with plenty of balanced, generous flavour on the palate. (RH)Drink 2015-2018
16.5
- [Ch de la Placelière 2014 Muscadet-Sèvre et Maine](#)Hard cheese and green apple with great substance and concentration. Long, layered, chewy texture. (RH)Drink 2016-2022
16.5
- [Veronique Chéreau-Günther, Grand Fief de la Cormeraie 2014 Muscadet-Sèvre et Maine](#)Lime and bay leaf, with a gooseberry fruit that tips its hat to Sauvignon. Ample, fleshy palate. Long, pristine fruit. (RH)Drink 2015-2019
16
- [Les Herbauges, Le Fief Guérin Sur Lie 2014 Muscadet-Côtes de Grandlieu](#)Bumptious, lively

fruit. Has a ripeness to it that veers towards tropical character, and a floral note that could almost be Muscat, in fact. (RH)Drink 2015-2018

16

- Jérémie Huchet, Ch de la Templierie Sur Lie 2014 Muscadet-Sèvre et Maine Not quite so fruit-driven as their Chauvinière. More textural and chewy. Much fuller than the average Muscadet. (RH) Drink 2015-2019
16
- Les Herbauges 2014 Muscadet-Côtes de Grandlieu Nuts, lemon juice and salt: absolutely spot-on. Finishes with a sort of gentle floral character. Very good. (RH)Drink 2015-2018
16
- Sauvion, Baronne du Cléray 2014 Muscadet-Sèvre et Maine Tomato stalk and greengage on the nose, bright and brisk with ripe citrus on the palate. Ample body. (RH)Drink 2015-2019
15.5
- Bonnet-Huteau, Ch de Gautronnières 2014 Muscadet-Sèvre et Maine Less fleshy than some 2014s - instead has a sort of sharp citrus fruit and perhaps not quite enough other flavour besides. (RH)Drink 2015-2022
15.5
- Les Herbauges, Clos de la Sénaigerie 2014 Muscadet-Côtes de Grandlieu Apple peel, a bit of sweet spice and medium body. (RH)Drink 2015-2018
15.5
- Lieubeau Vigneron, Joseph Grégoire 2014 Muscadet Modern, fruity, vibrant and really clean and pure. Yes, it's a neutral white, but with the strength of a good vintage behind it, this is enjoyable easy-drinking refreshment. (RH)Drink 2015-2017
15.5
- Ch de l'Aulnaye 2014 Muscadet-Sèvre et Maine Lime, lemon and herbal fragrance. Medium body, fine balance and chewy structure. Pithy and refreshing. (RH)Drink 2015-2018
15.5
- Gadais, Vieux Clocher 2014 Muscadet Bright and clean with a glossy texture and lots of lime character. Quite a bit like good trocken Riesling, actually. Very enjoyable floral character. (RH)Drink 2015-2017
15.5

SAUVIGNON BLANC

- Vincent Pinard, Cuvée Flores 2014 Sancerre Apple, lemon juice, floral perfume - much daintier than their Clémence cuvée. Just as lengthy, though, and with more mineral character showing through. (RH)Drink 2015-2022
17.5
- Alphonse Mellot, Cuvée Nuance 2014 Sancerre Smoky, citric, bright and insistent on the palate. Compressed core fruit with loads of aging potential. Massive persistence and concentration. (RH)Drink 2015-2024
17+
- Alain Cailbourdin, Les Cris 2014 Pouilly-Fumé Smoke, crisp lime fruit, crunchy apple and very fine persistence. Such pristine fruit! Satisfying and exotic and with a remarkable length. Superior. (RH)Drink 2016-2022
17
- Dom de Bel Air 2014 Pouilly-Fumé Citrus tang as sharp as a nail: resplendent fruit, and generous concentration too. Not much complexity yet, but this is one of those Sauvignons that will probably surprise you with how well it will age. (RH)Drink 2016-2022

17

- André et Edmond Figeat, Les Chaumiennes 2014 Pouilly-Fumé Sweet, ripe fruit. Almost tropical, in fact - though the finish is savoury, and the acidity stays crystal clear. Attractive flinty notes on the finish. (RH) Drink 2015-2018

17

- Cave des Vins de Sancerre 2014 Sancerre Classic gooseberry and blackcurrant leaf aroma with a flinty, stony edge. Long, satisfying, multi-dimensional. (RH) Drink 2015-2019

17

- Marie Berneau-Maréchal 2014 Sancerre Charming combination of citrus and blackcurrant - bursting with primary fruit and finishes with a blast of crunchy herbs. (RH) Drink 2015-2018

17

- Vincent Pinard, Clémence 2014 Sancerre Pretty tame on the nose, but packed with flavour on the palate. Loads of core citric power on the palate and snappy acid giving a lemon sherbet character. One for the rack. (RH) Drink 2016-2022

17

- Alphonse Mellot, La Moussière 2014 Sancerre Very little oak evident, but there is a more developed, open-knit style than their steel-fermented Sauvignons. Very full and unctuous on the palate. I suspect the oak treatment gives more texture than flavour here. (RH) Drink 2015-2018

17

- Caves de Pouilly-sur-Loire, Bergerie 2014 Pouilly-Fumé Petrol and oil alongside the green citrus fruit: bold and ripe and modern, but with an almost Mosel mineral edge. Fragrant and satisfying. (RH) Drink 2015-2018

16.5

- Albane & Bertrand Minchin, La Tour St-Martin 2014 Menetou-Salon Morogues Wet stone aroma - could this be mistaken for Chablis? From the fruit, no: this is Sauvignon through and through - all citrus and bitters. Sharp, crisp definition. (RH) Drink 2016-2018

16.5

- Marchand et Fils 2014 Pouilly-Fumé Candied fruit with a sort of banana character that is perhaps a fermentation aroma yet to dissipate. Attractive though incongruous flavours. Salty finish. (RH) Drink 2015-2018

16.5

- Alain Cailbourdin, Cuvée de Boisfleury 2014 Pouilly-Fumé Straightforward citrus on the palate, then a soft, chewy character on the palate with gentle but persistent fruit. Characterful yet not exactly complex - but I can see that developing. (RH) Drink 2015-2020

16

- Laporte, Rochoy 2014 Sancerre A little stinky on the nose, probably from recent sulphuring. Bright and ripe with a little mineral tang adding interest on the finish. (RH) Drink 2015-2018

16

- Laporte, Terre des Anges 2014 Sancerre Salty, snappy and citric on the palate. Much leaner than their Rochoy cuvée. Punchy and refreshing. (RH) Drink 2015-2019

16

- Laporte, La Roche Blanche 2014 Pouilly-Fumé Vibrant, lemon-lime fruit, grassy and herbal. Lifted and exuberant. (RH) Drink 2015-2018

16

- Thierry Merlin-Cherrier 2014 Sancerre Medium intensity, reasonably full texture. Impeccably made, but not especially flinty or mineral, and the fruit is pretty suppressed. (RH) Drink 2015-2017

15.5

CHENIN BLANC

- Dom d'Orfeuilles, Silex Sec 2014 Vouvray Delicate, tender fruit and subtle, lifted perfume with loads of pristine fruit on display. Charming mineral tang too. Effortless but full of funkiness. (RH) Drink 2015-2025
17
- Dom d'Orfeuilles, Les Coudraies 2014 Vouvray Loads of extravagant fruit with an orange peel character that suggests brief maceration. This really works - it is absolutely overflowing with fruitiness and purity. Still exceedingly youthful, but utterly persuasive. (RH) Drink 2015-2025
17
- Nicolas Paget, Mélodie 2014 Touraine Azay-le-Rideau Waxy, woolly and acidic - textbook Chenin Blanc. Charming roasted nut aroma on the finish. (RH) Drink 2015-2020
16.5
- Dom des Aubuisières, Le Petit Clos Sec 2014 Vouvray More honey and ripeness to the fruit than their Marigny cuvée. Good length and a classic woolliness to the finish. (RH) Drink 2016-2026
16.5
- Ch Gaudrelle, Sec 2014 Vouvray Freshly squeezed orange, dry finish with a fleshy, ripe fruit. Succulent, perhaps just off-dry and with a lovely honeyed finish. (RH) Drink 2015-2020
16.5
- Jérémie Mourat, Moulin Blanc, Blanc de Blancs 2014 IGP Val de Loire Vendée 65% Chenin Blanc, 35% Chardonnay. Rounded and balanced with pithy apple fruit. Good concentration, though it doesn't have the character that 100% Chenin would. That's probably the point, but I'd rather it was varietal. (RH) Drink 2015-2018
16
- Dom des Aubuisières, Le Marigny Sec 2014 Vouvray Toffee, cream, some medicinal character. Plenty of pure fruit, though this sample is heavily sulphured, so it's hard to be sure about the quality. (RH) Drink 2015-2020
16
- Ch Gaudrelle, Ammonite 2014 Vouvray Fleshy, floral and reasonably light. Slight mineral tang with a simple, fruit-driven palate. (RH) Drink 2015-2020
16
- Cady, Sec 2014 Anjou Creamy and buttery on the nose, with pineapple and toffee on the palate. Chenin in Chardonnay's clothing? (RH) Drink 2015-2017
15.5
- Jérémie Mourat, Ch Marie du Fou 2014 Fiefs Vendéens Mareuil 70% Chenin Blanc, 30% Chardonnay. Green fruit, slight leafiness. Dry and savoury on the finish. Quaffing fare. (RH) Drink 2015-2016
15.5

CABERNET FRANC

- Nicolas Paget, Les Quatres Ferrures 2014 Chinon Ripe, opulent red fruit - so well formed! Impeccable clarity, and just the right tannic bite to lend some shape. Gosh, this is utterly charming stuff - a real wine-lover's wine, and manages to get full refreshment and ripeness at low alcohol and light body. (RH) Drink 2016-2024
17
- Baudry-Dutour, Dom du Roncée 2014 Chinon Superb floral fragrance. About as firm as Chinon gets - not aggressive but certainly robust in structure. Great clarity of fruit. Fine, layered, lengthy. (RH) Drink 2016-2026

17

- Dom de la Perrière 2014 Chinon Crunchy black fruit, violet perfume, subtle but not at all deficient - really showcasing the greatness of light Loire reds. Finishes with a long, spiced character. (RH) Drink 2016-2024

16.5

- Dom des Sanzay 2014 Saumur-Champigny Pencil lead, very pronounced red fruit with pixel perfect resolution. Light-footed with the faintest tannic grip and delicious menthol hints on the finish. If this is the baseline for 2014 Loire Cabernet Franc, then it is truly a great vintage. (RH) Drink 2015-2020

16.5