

Domaine Luneau-Papin

Muscadet from Domaine Luneau-Papin.



Pierre and Pierre-Marie Luneau.

Profile

Pierre et Monique Luneau-Papin head this 50-hectare estate in Le Landreau, in the heart of Muscadet country, where small hamlets dot a landscape of vineyards on low hills. Their estate, also known as Domaine Pierre de la Grange, has been in existence since the early 18th century when it was already planted with Melon de Bourgogne, the Muscadet varietal. Pierre and Monique are the eighth generation of winemakers in the family. Pierre is a genial, low-key, distracted professor type. He is technically retired and has passed the torch to his son Pierre-Marie (who is officially heading the estate as of the 2011 vintage), but still very active in everyday aspects of cellar and vine work. His wife Monique, lively, energetic and equally genial, is the business manager.

Muscadet is an area where, unfortunately, a lot of undistinguished bulk wine is produced. Because of the size of their estate, and of the privileged terroir of the villages of Le Landreau, Vallet and La Chapelle Heulin, the Luneau family has opted for producing smaller cuvées from their several plots, which are always vinified separately so as to reflect their terroir's particular character. The soil is mainly micaschist and gneiss, but some plots are a mix of silica, volcanic rocks and schist. The estate has a high proportion of old vines, 40 years old on average, up to 65 years of age.

The harvest is done by hand -also a rarity in the region- to avoid any oxidation before pressing. There is an immediate light *débourbage* (separation of juice from gross lees), then a 4-week fermentation at 68 degrees, followed by 6 months of aging in stainless-steel vats on fine lees. This is the classic Muscadet-sur-lie process, where the wine is kept on its lees, with a fair amount of CO2 as protection, until bottling in the spring following the harvest. The only modern technique used here is *macération pelliculaire* (maceration of lightly crushed berries before pressing), which varies in proportion according to the cuvées.



Luneau-Papin Soil.

Interview

This interview with Pierre-Marie Luneau took place at the *Salons des Vins de Loire* in February, 2012.

Tell us about *Domaine Luneau-Papin*.

We are vigneronns in the Muscadet-Sèvre et Maine. We're to the South-East of Nantes, which is only 15 kilometers away. In Muscadet, there are 8500 hectares of vines spread over 25 communes. We're located in a small commune called Le Landreau; there are 800 hectares of Melon de Bourgogne here shared by 35 estates.

Our cellar is in Le Landreau, where my father Pierre Luneau was born. We also have vines in Chappelle-Heulin, where my mother's family, the Papins, are from. The two estates merged together in the 90's, hence the name.

You're 32 and 2011 was your first year as head vigneron for *Luneau-Papin*. What built up to that?

I've always been cradled by the tanks and the tractors, and I often joke that my crib was a palette case! I have such wonderful memories from my childhood, and running through the vines brings me joy to this day.

When I turned 18, I was curious about viticulture outside of Nantes, so I took a two year B.T.S in Bordeaux. By the early 2000's I didn't feel the urge to stay in school, so I decided to do a working tour of France. I worked in Sancerre, Bordeaux for a while, then I was in the South (between Perpignan and Rivesaltes) for a good year, then back to Sancerre. I came home for a year before moving to Australia for 6 months, but that trip was mostly to learn how to speak English!

I was back for good in September 2005, and I've worked all six vintages since.

Tell us about the work in the vines.

Luneau-Papin is a family estate. My father was always very knowledgeable about the area, and searched far and wide for the best parcels our land could offer. He was able to procure many of these in the 80's and we find ourselves today with 50 parcels spread over 10 plots. We have 50 hectares of Melon de Bourgogne, at about 7000 vines per h; because of the density of the plantation, we average about 50 hl/h yields. Our distinction at *Luneau-Papin* is that we work parcel by parcel, terroir by terroir. You can't claim terroir if you don't highlight the link between the soil, the vegetal state of the vines and its surrounding environment.

40 h is a lot of vines, and today we surround ourselves with a team to thoroughly work on each parcel. This means working the soil so we don't have to use herbicides anymore; to create a more natural place for the soil and the vines. This really started in 2008, when we acquired the "*Terre de Pierre*" plot. Because of its rocky serpentine, I knew we had to work the soil. It was a time when we had the human and technical resources do so, and my father and I agreed it needed to be done.

This process is parcel by parcel, and we began on 5 new ones last year. Also, we only use copper and sulfur in the vineyards now. In France, an entire property has to be converted to get an organic certification. You have five years to convert, and today 15 of our hectares are completely organic. I

am convinced that in 5 years we will succeed at this. It means a lot more work from us and our team, and we are in the process of figuring it out. This is my main challenge and goal for the estate. I want to do this so that we can best express the mineral purity of Melon de Bourgogne in our soils. I'm seeing a lot of young vignerons completely in love with their place and their terroir. I'm glad to be part of it!

Can you elaborate on making cuvées parcel by parcel?

Muscadet is France's largest single variety A.O.C: everything is 100% Melon de Bourgogne. We have a rich history of exporting our wine because we are very close to the ocean, and for generations Muscadet would be shipped from the Loire to England and Holland. And you can't forget that for a long time, 80% of the production was purchased locally! None of this created much of an incentive in making cuvées that highlight terroir.

But both my grandfathers were passionate about winemaking. They were already working in the Burgundian style, fermenting and aging everything in little barrels. Parcels were vinified separately, and as a child I remember customers coming by, tasting barrique by barrique. And when you came to visit my dad, you came to taste different terroirs... Muscadet is a big place and while some of our neighbors worked this way, it was still relatively few. Today we are lucky in that we sell the entirety of our production directly from the estate, so we can permit ourselves to make as many cuvées as we do.

Today, there is a new generation that is interested by their village, by the geology, the pedology of the vines. We have so many soils and sub-soils here. It's a really beautiful region to make wine in. And Melon is a grape that really captures the minerality of a soil.

What about in the cellar?

We make white wine, and there are very few manipulations we have to worry about. With Melon de Bourgogne, you want healthy, clean grapes coming to the cellar. We spend 15 days hand harvesting from each parcel on 24 h of vines. I have nothing to hide: the rest are machine harvested, because the economic realities of Muscadet don't favor hand harvested, terroir driven bottling (**editor's note:** this is because prices must compete with their neighbors. Read Joe's article [Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée](#) for a more in depth exploration of this topic).

The grapes are slow pressed, whole-cluster and vinified parcel by parcel. We do a 36 hour débourage to get rid of the gross lees. Alcoholic fermentation averages between 3 to 6 weeks depending on the parcel. The Muscadet is known for making wine *sur lies*, which means we don't rack the wine after alcoholic fermentation. This creates an exchange between the clear juice and the dead yeasts and minerals. The aging on the lees lasts from winter through Spring, at which time they are typically bottled.

Can you talk about the unique characteristics of the "Terre de Pierre" plot?

Nantes is really at the very edge of France, and we are very close to the Atlantic Ocean. We are located on the very old Armorican massif, which is composed of metamorphic rocks like schist and gneiss as well as rock from magmatic eruption such as granite. We've always been fascinated by the diversity of our terroir, and we were lucky enough to acquire an exceptional plot on a lieu-dit called "Butte de la Roche". We called our plot "Terre de Pierre", and it's unique due to its serpentine soils. This serpentine forms the hill itself, and actually comes from terrestrial crusts that broke off during a period of tectonic movement; these crusts eventually made their way to the surface, and

form this very hill. In the 500 million years it took for this to happen, the serpentine became altered. So we have all this silicious, irony serpentine that is okra red.

Some geologists from the University of Nantes came to test it and told us we must do our best to preserve this site. They even declared it a geological landmark!

What do you like to drink?

You have to be curious. Right now we're at the *Salon des Vins de la Loire*, and we all know all the great wines the region has to offer. I'm a big fan of Alsatian wine: it's a place that's also really about minerality, and you find the same qualities on old Melon that I get with Riesling.

Otherwise, every wine has its story. You can't have preconceptions with wine. Every vintage is different and every time you taste it, the circumstances are different as well. Keep that in mind!

Wines



Muscadet-Sèvre et Maine "Pierre de la Grange":

Soil: micaschist and gneiss

Grape: Melon de Bourgogne

Exposition: full south

Vines: 45+ years

Vinification: Pressed by hand and pneumatic press.

Cold clarification of grape juice, then temperature controlled fermentation at 20° for four weeks. The wine then stays on its lees (sur lie) for seven months until it is bottled.

Aging: Bottled in the spring.



Muscadet-Sèvre et Maine "Pierres Blanches":

Soil: Schist

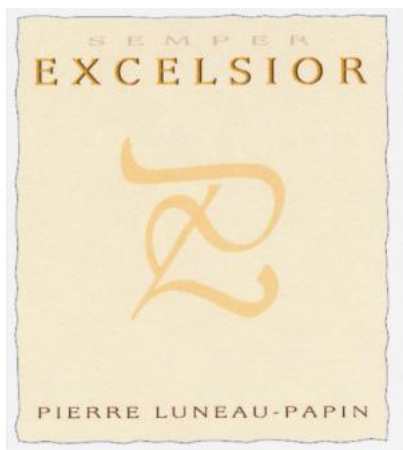
Grape: Melon de Bourgogne

Exposition: South West

Vines: Old vines of more 55 years old.

Name of vineyard "Les Pierres Blanches"

Vinification: Grapes picked by hand, pressed in a pneumatic press. Cold clarification of grape juice, then temperature controlled fermentation at 20° for several weeks using only indigenous yeasts. The wine is moved by gravity to underground vats lined with glass tiles. These vats are very typical of the Nantes region. The wine stays on its lees (Sur Lie) for nine months until it is bottled.



A.O.C Muscadet Sèvre & Maine "Excelsior":

Soil: Michaschist on schist

Grape: Melon de Bourgogne

Exposition: Full south

Vines: Single parcel of 75 year old "sélection massale" vines.

Vinification: Grapes crushed by a pneumatic press. Must is transferred by gravity into small underground tanks covered with glass tiles. Slow alcoholic fermentation for several weeks thermo-regulated at 20 °C. Left on the lees for 36 months with regular bâtonnage.



A.O.C Muscadet Sèvre & Maine "Clos Des Allées":

Soil: Michaschist

Grape: Melon de Bourgogne

Exposition: Full south

Vines: 45+ year old vines

Vinification: Grapes are crushed by pneumatic press. Débourbage and vinification thermo-regulated at 20°C. Fermentation and aging on the lees for 7 months in small underground tanks covered with glass tiles. Bottled in the spring.



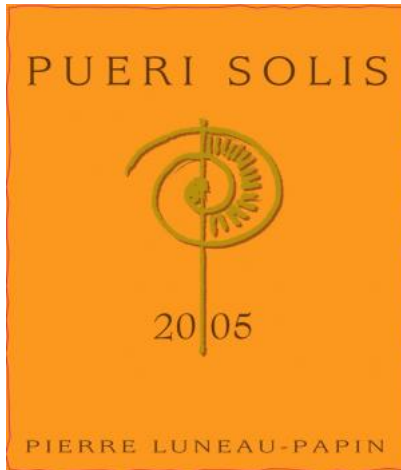
A.O.C Muscadet Sèvre & Maine "Le L D'Or":

Soil: Granite and gneiss

Grape: Melon de Bourgogne

Vines: 45+ years old

Vinification: Aged on the lees 9 to 11 months before bottling. Regular bâtonnage after fermentation for suspension of the lees. No racking before bottling.



A.O.C Muscadet Sèvre & Maine "Pueri Solis":

Soil: schist and micaschist

Grape: Melon de Bourgogne

Vines: 45+ years old

Exposition: South west

Vinification: Grapes are crushed by pneumatic press. Cold débouillage then slow fermentation thermo-regulated at 20°C. Aged 42 months on the lees with regular bâtonnage in small underground tanks covered with glass tiles.



A.O.C Muscadet Sèvre & Maine "Terre de Pierre":

Soil: Decomposed serpentinite. This terroir is a geographical landmark; its' magmatic origin dates back to more than 500 million years.

Grape: Melon de Bourgogne

Vines: 37 years old

Vinification: Grapes are crushed by pneumatic press. Must is transferred by gravity into underground tanks covered in glass tiles. Wine ferments and ages on the lees for 12 months. Regular bâtonnage, then aged in wood vats without racking for 8 months.