

Ferme de la Sansonnière

Profile

The rather small area of the Coteaux-du-Layon is fertile terrain for winemakers with strong personalities. There are Sugar Mavens Patrick Beaudoin, Philippe Delesvaux, Jo Pithon and their archenemy, INAO director René Renou, a Bonnezeaux producer. Many of the most brilliant and eccentric winemakers are newcomers to the area and the profession. Mark Angéli is one of them, a chemistry student turned stonemason who embraced viticulture as a form of environmental protection, a firm believer in *bio-dynamie* and in the wines that can be made from this method of culture.

He bought his estate in 1990, with 7 hectares of Anjou, Coteaux-du-Layon and Bonnezeaux. These last two appellations, planted by law entirely in Chenin blanc, are supposed to yield richly sweet moëlleux or liquoreux wines every year. The AOC rules do not admit any demi-sec or sec wine, as it does in Vouvray and Montlouis. Anything below a moëlleux loses the names Coteaux-du-Layon or Bonnezeaux, has to be entirely sec and becomes an Anjou blanc, the lowliest of categories in the area and the least remunerative too. So, every year early in the picking season, winemakers have to gamble that the weather in September and October is going to concentrate the grapes' sugar through noble rot or passerillage, and that they'll be able to make sweet wines.

After years of making celebrated Bonnezeaux, Angéli decided several vintages ago to reverse course, and make great dry (or semi-dry) wines from most of his plots, even in Bonnezeaux. Thus was created his Anjou blanc "La Lune", which has the deep gold color of a sweet Chenin, and notes of dried, candied fruit on the nose; the mouth is rich, despite its minerality and lively acidity; the wine is totally dry, but with the weight and flavors of a moëlleux: in all, quite an astonishing feat of vinegrowing and winemaking.

His Anjou rosé, made from the local varietal Grolleau (or Groslot) gris, 20% Cabernet franc and 20% Gamay, is the opposite of what's expected from this usually unappealing category: the color is orangey-pink, the nose soft, ripe with red berry aromas, the mouth round, lively, fruity, and yes, there is a lot of residual sugar! Makes sense: it is made from botrytized grapes (all three varieties).

Other Anjou blancs, "les Fourchades", "Coteau du Houet", "les Blanderies VV" and "Vignes Françaises" are made in tiny quantities. Mark Angéli also produces apple juice and wholewheat flour.