

Domaine Bellivière

Profile

The AOC Jasnières and Coteaux-du-Loir were, until very recently, languishing; the vines had been all but wiped-out by the intense frost of 1956, and only a handful of tenacious owners held on to their vines, usually keeping the wine they made for their personal consumption, while making a living thanks to other agricultural revenues.

Located about 30 miles north of the city of Tours, these small AOC's (37 and 48 hectares respectively) are isolated at the edges of three provinces: Maine, Anjou and Touraine. They are also the most northern viticultural areas in the west of France (in the east, only Chablis, Champagne and Alsace are further north). Fortunately, the river Loir replicates some of the micro-climactic conditions of its big sister, the Loire (watch your French: *le* Loir, along with *la* Sarthe and *la* Mayenne, form *le* Maine, a tributary of *la* Loire which it joins in Angers).

In the 1970s, the winemaker Joël Gigou pioneered a renewal of Jasnières and Coteaux-du-Loir as viticultural areas. Eric Nicolas, a city kid without any roots in either the region or in agriculture, developed a passion for vines and wines, and after studying oenology, he looked in the Loire to acquire vineyards, mainly because he had met several passionate winemakers there.

Eric and his wife Christine found an estate with some vines, but mostly grazing fields, trees and grains. They nurtured the existing old vines and did a lot of planting, to get to their current 14 hectares, scattered over the territory of 6 villages (hence the name of their cuvée of Coteaux-du-Loir *Vieilles Vignes Éparses* or Scattered Old Vines). They now use *sélection massale* (cuttings from old vines) rather than clones, and plant at a density of 9,300 vines per hectare. They also planted an experimental plot where the density is 40,000 vines per hectare, to observe the development of the root system and the influence of terroir on botrytized grapes (one grape per vine).

In Jasnières, only white wine from Chenin Blanc is produced. *Les Rosiers* is sec, a blend of all terroirs, and in favorable years, Nicolas makes a moëlleux called *Discours de Tuf* and a late harvest called *Elixir de Tuf*.

In Coteaux-du-Loir, the white cuvées are *VV Éparses* (the vines are 50 to 80 years old), and *L'Effraie* (the Owl, a denizen of the farm), made with younger vines.

For his red, called *Le Rouge-Gorge* (the Finch), Nicolas is partial to Pineau d'Aunis, an old local varietal of great finesse. Nicolas has also replanted small parcels of Cabernet Franc and Côt (or Malbec), from which he produces two *Vin de France*: *Pollux* and *Castor*.