



# WINE TOURISM MAG



SUMMER 2019

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SUMMER 2019

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

# THE DIGITAL AGE OF WINE MAGAZINE

Here we are finally ... the era of print media is at an end and the age of digital media is upon us. I am probably the biggest fan of traditional media; this beautiful recycled paper that gives chills when you stroke it. However, this age is over. It costs more than ever to print paper and, we'll tell you, it's not very ecological. The future is clearly digital. I believe the readers are ready to invest a small \$3.95 for an e-magazine. It does not seem like much, but 10 years ago consumers believed that knowledge and entertainment should be free. Wine Tourism Mag is launching first in the water with this new issue. We will stop giving our work and ask a small amount for our knowledge. I am sure our loyal readership will follow us in this wonderful adventure. The quality of the product will be enhanced and we'll be able to provide a lot of improvements.

I hope that one day, hopefully close, people will understand the pleasure of touching a paper magazine, but for the moment, please join us in our crazy wine adventure to create the next success of digital press.

## FEATURED BEST WINE TOURISM REGION

### THE DOURO VALLEY



## HIGHLIGHT ON THE DOURO VALLEY

Voted the best drive in the world, the stretch of river between Pinhao and Peso da Regua should certainly be on the top of your bucket list. The incredible landscapes and hillsides of the Douro valley have had the honor to be listed as UNESCO World heritage site since 2001 as well as cultural landscape. It recognizes the area around the Douro River where wine has been produced for the past two thousand years.

The cultural landscape recognize the human work and alteration in the very identity of the landscape. In this case, the terraced hillsides and their historic stone walls are part of the scenery and the history of the Douro.

## TERRACES

If you ever have a chance to visit the Douro valley ( you should) or if you've seen photos ( you should) you might have noticed the way all the very steep slopes have been worked and structured to allow vines to be planted. Those beautifully straight rows you see are called terraces. It's the nightmare of every winemaker, but also the most esteemed part of their vineyards. The truth is, it's incredibly difficult to build and maintain, but without them, vine growing would be absolutely impossible.

In past few decades, there's been a research on alternatives, one's that could maybe be mechanized and give better access. That means that when you look at the beautiful valley hills, you can find various styles of terraces and it is such a fascinating facet of the Port wine. These hand-built schist walls that keep everything in place, are built using no mortar whatsoever. There are so many different looks to these great walls of contour and stairways connecting terraces throughout the Douro region. Some were built high, some low and it's unimaginable how much labor went into the building of these structures in the Baixo Corgo, Cima Corgo and Douro Superior.

IT'S UNIMAGINABLE HOW MUCH  
LABOR WENT INTO THE BUILDING OF  
THESE SCHIST STRUCTURES





# THE QUINTAS

Hundreds of historic quintas are dotted along the course of the Douro river. These hard-working producers are the one that shaped not only the port & wine industry, but also the very shape of the land.

Every Time you sip a glass of Port, you automatically drink a piece of history. Of course, the thing probably spent decades in a cellar. The port industry itself is based on a respect for the hard labor needed to produce such premium products. I've often heard port producers laugh over our Canadian idea of "Work" which apparently seems like a world apart from what takes place in Douro terraces. This is the part that is often forgotten, all the hard work from harvest to bottling, and the many years that separates both. Most Famous port houses have been doing it for generations and still manage to surprise us, consumers, by the quality standards and outstanding precious port they make for us. The Port trade is dominated by its shippers. All of which, British or Portuguese, have a strong sense of identity.



## N 222

- Historically, the only way to reach the beauty of the Douro was by means of boat or train, which was incredibly time consuming. To make it to the Douro superior by boat, you could prepare the whole day for the journey. You'd bring your lunch, your wine and spend most of the day waiting in the various dams along the way.
- Hopefully, now there's another option. In about an hour and a half, the highway N222 will take you to where you want to be. You'll even cross the longest tunnel in Europe along the way.





# KENT'S SPARKLING WINES

BY BENOIT LEFÈVRE

Known as the 'Garden of England', Kent has for centuries been a recognized agricultural land for market gardening and orchards. But in recent years, Kent has been making headlines for the quality of its sparkling wines. If the culture of the vineyard goes back as far as at the time of the Roman occupation, the renaissance of the English vineyard is a very recent phenomenon. With such potential, prestigious Champagne houses such as Taittinger or Pommery decided to acquire land in the region to plant Chardonnay, Pinot Meunier and Pinot Noir, the emblematic grape varieties of Champagne. What are the sparkling wines of Kent really worth? Is the buzz justified? I decided to come up with my own idea during a recent stay in this lovely area just an hour and a half drive from London.

# GEOGRAPHICAL SITUATION, SOILS AND CLIMATE

Kent is a county in southeastern England that stretches from the mouth of the Thames to the English Channel. The Eurostar train that connects London to Paris crosses Kent to the port of Dover, not far from where the famous Channel Tunnel. If Dover is known worldwide through the tunnel, its huge white cliffs are just as much!

The chalky hills of the North Downs cross Kent from east to west and end in the English Channel with its impressive limestone cliffs. The subsoil of Kent shares the same geological identity as that of Champagne, with a large majority of chalk, marl and limestone.

England has a rather bad reputation level precipitation ... With the effects of global warming, several studies have shown that the current climate of Kent is comparable to that of Champagne twenty years ago!

Despite this, the climate is still the main challenge of the English winemaker as explained by Charlie Holland, oenologist of Gusbourne Estate, one of the most awarded sparkling wine producers in the region.

"The best sparkling wines come from the south of England: Kent to the southeast and West Sussex to the southwest. These two regions are the sunniest in the country, but also those that receive the least rainfall, so that meet the best conditions to produce wine. The climate is still a big challenge. Our vineyards face often difficult climatic conditions at key moments of vine growth, especially in the spring, during which time we need to be extra vigilant. Every year we adapt, we learn, and I think that we control more and more the environment in which the vine grows "

- Charlie Holland, oenologist, Gusbourne Estate



## CULTIVATED GRAPE VARIETIES

The oldest vines in the region date back to the 1960s. Biddenden Vineyards was a pioneer in the planting of vines and today is the oldest vineyard to operate commercially in Kent. Among the varieties present in Kent, there are mainly varieties of German origin such as reichensteiner, müller-thurgau, schönburger, huxelrebe, ortega and dornfelder.

A varietal that shows some potential and seems to have become perfectly acclimatized is bacchus, which is increasingly planted and used to produce dry white wines. However, the production of quality sparkling wines requires the use of noble grape varieties such as Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier. These are obviously the varieties that have been most widely planted in recent years.

Which producers to visit?

Kent now has more than 50 wineries on its territory. I had the opportunity to visit four during my stay:

### GUSBOURNE ESTATE

The heart stroke of my visit to Kent. In 2015, Gusbourne was awarded the coveted English Wine Producer of the Year title by the International Wine and Spirit Competition (IWSC). Their wines are of a purity and a breathtaking quality! The vines are barely fifteen years old so the potential is there to compete soon with the best Champagne houses! [gusbourne.com](http://gusbourne.com)

### HUSH HEATH ESTATE

Hush Heath has a vineyard of about fifteen hectares. The estate produces sparkling wines of exceptional quality. Their Balfour rosé wine was also served at the official events of the London Olympics. Today, wine is present on British Airways' first class wine list and the famous Orient Express train line! The estate also owns a large orchard and produces some of the best ciders I've had the opportunity to taste. The property is superb, so bring your picnic to enjoy this wonderful country setting.





## CHAPEL DOWN

One of Kent's leading wine producers, Chapel Down produces high quality sparkling wines. They also produce still wines, cider, beer and even brandy. [chapeldown.com](http://chapeldown.com)

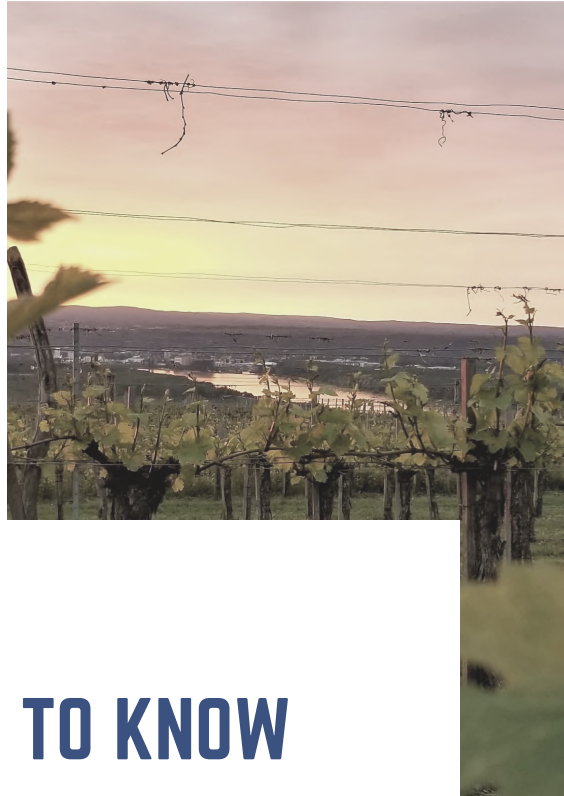


## BIDDENDEN VINEYARDS

My only disappointment, finally, only with regard to wines. Sparkling wines like still wines are mostly made from less noble grapes and contain, to my taste, too much residual sugar. You should know that the estate is primarily an orchard and has been producing cider for much longer than wine. Their apple products are much more interesting and their apple juices, especially those from native varieties of Kent, absolutely delicious. As for the welcome, it is very warm and the shop offers a very nice selection of local products of the soil: vinegars, chutneys, jams, honey, beer and even meat from neighboring farms. [biddendenvineyards.com](http://biddendenvineyards.com)



In conclusion, my first experience with Kent sparkling wines has been very positive. In fact, to be honest, I did not expect such a high level of quality. The potential is clearly there and the Champagne producers have understood this well by turning their eyes towards the lands of the Channel. The industry is still young, as are the vines, and with improving climatic conditions and a deeper knowledge of the terroir, English sparkling wines are promised a very bright future. Wine growing is expensive in England, and for the moment, sparkling wine producers do not really have cheap products to offer. It is therefore difficult for them to compete with the market shares of proseccos, cavas and other entry-level champagnes. On the other hand, their best wines do not have to be ashamed of the comparison and can blindly easily compete, or even surpass, certain products of the most prestigious Champagne houses. On my next visit to England, I will continue my exploration in nearby Kent County, Sussex County, which also seems to be producing sparkling wines using traditional high quality methods.



# 10 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT AUSTRIAN WINES

By Joanie metivier  
Photo: Michael Mcduff



# 1

## AUSTRIA IS AN HISTORIC WINE REGION

Dating back to the Celts who planted the first vines approximately 3000 years ago, Austria has a wine growing history that is rich in tradition. During the Middle Ages, monasteries (often called Stift...) situated along the Danube River played an invaluable role by introducing Pinot noir and Riesling grapes to the terroir. In fact, vineyards back then covered ten times the amount of soil that they do now. And just like the land of Austria, its wine industry has seen many peaks and valleys, overcoming plenty of obstacles to become one of the most prestigious producers of premium wine.

WINGRABE 13 WINZER

# 2

## UNIQUE LOCATION

Austria's wine regions are based along the eastern borders of the country. It can basically be separated in 3 big regions. The largest region, Niederösterreich, is known for high-quality whites, Grüner veltliner, and Riesling, grown on small hilly vineyards along the Danube river. Burgenland is known for its reds and Steiermark is known for fresh aromatic whites.

# 3

## THE DAC SYSTEM

With all the German names and different levels of appellation, it might appear complicated to distinguish the different regions. Since 2002, Specified DAC region have been instituted to make the whole system easier. There's now 13 official DAC winegrowing region.

WEINVIERTEL | MITTELBURGENLAND | TRAIENTAL | KREMSTAL | KAMPTAL | LEITHABERG | EISENBERG | NEUSIEDLERSEE | WIENER GEMISCHTER SATZ | ROSALIA | VULKANLAND STEIERMARK | SÜDSTEIERMARK | WESTEIERMARK

There's also 4 specified regions with focal varieties. Which means these places are known for specific varietal. Wachau for Grüner Veltliner and Riesling, Wagram for Grüner Veltliner and Roter Veltliner, Carnuntum for Zweigelt and Blaufränkisch, Thermenregion for Zierfandler, Rotgipfler, St. Laurent and Pinot Noir.

# 4

## ADAPTED WINE VARIETIES

In Austria, there are 26 white and 14 red grape varieties officially approved for the production of Qualitätswein (quality wine). The proportion of red wines by area planted has doubled over the past two decades and now represents one third of Austria's area under vines. White wine remains the majority of the production and the most recognized quality wine. There's some very good example of international grape varietal, such as Riesling or Pinot Noir, but the prized selection is within local, unique varietals. Grüner Veltliner alone accounts for a third of the production.

# 5

## SMALL REGION, SMALL PRODUCER

Austria only makes 1% of all the wine in the world. Easily put, the Austrian produce as much wine as they consume. About 75% of the production is consumed locally and the rest is mostly imported by their German cousin. Exportation is still one of the main focus for Austrian wine as they try to develop many more markets. They now export in 30 countries around the world, but only quality wines, there's no bulk exports whatsoever. The composition of the wine-producing industry has changed profoundly over the past 30 years, both in terms of size and number of producers. There's about 14 000 wine growers with an average of just over 3 ha per producer.

# 6

## CLIMATIC INFLUENCES

The climate is not as cold as you would think. Basically, Austria's winemaking land is affected by 4 different climatic influences: Continental Pannonian climate from the east, Moderate Atlantic climate from the west, Cool air from the north and Illyrian Mediterranean climate from the south. The most important factor to remember is the diurnal shift. The temperature swings between day and night, added to the rather long ripening period is the key to the fresh but rich style of Austrian wines. There is simply no other place on Earth where refreshing wines are so concentrated and substantial, or where the opulent wines exhibit such vibrant expression.

# 7

## THE SWEET AUSTRIAN SIDE

Austria's best sweet wines come from near the neusiedlersee area of burgenland. The neusiedlersee is a large shallow lake separating Austria from Hungary and benefits from outbreaks of noble rot, an essential component for the production of complex sweet wines. Austria's sweet side basically follows the German Prädikat levels with just a few differences for dried wines.

Spätlese

Auslese

Beerenauslese

Eiswein

Trockenbeerenauslese

Strohwein, Schilfwein: made from fully ripened, sweet grapes that have been dried on mats of straw (Stroh), or reeds (Schilf)

Ruster Ausbruch : Trockenbeerenauslesen produced in the Free City of Rust

# 8

## AUSTRIA HAS A GROWING SPARKLING PRODUCTION

Austrian sparkling wine production dates back to the 19th century. The bubbly wines sekt can now be found under a three tier classification system since 2015. The first level "Klassik" establishes stricter minimum requirements for Austrian sparkling wine of quality. Above all, it requires that the grapes must have their origins in one of Austria's federal states, as well as stipulating a minimum period of nine months spent on the lees. As of the second level "Reserve", Sekt must be produced according to the traditional method. The maturation period must be at least eighteen months. In the top category of Sekt "Große Reserve", the grapes may be harvested only from a single winegrowing community (such as Poysdorf, Langenlois, Gols or Gamlitz), whereby vineyard site designations become possible as well. After a minimum of thirty months bottle-fermentation and maturing on the lees, Sekt in this category may first be released to the market three years after the harvest.



## THE CITY OF VIENNA IS ACTUALLY A WINE REGION

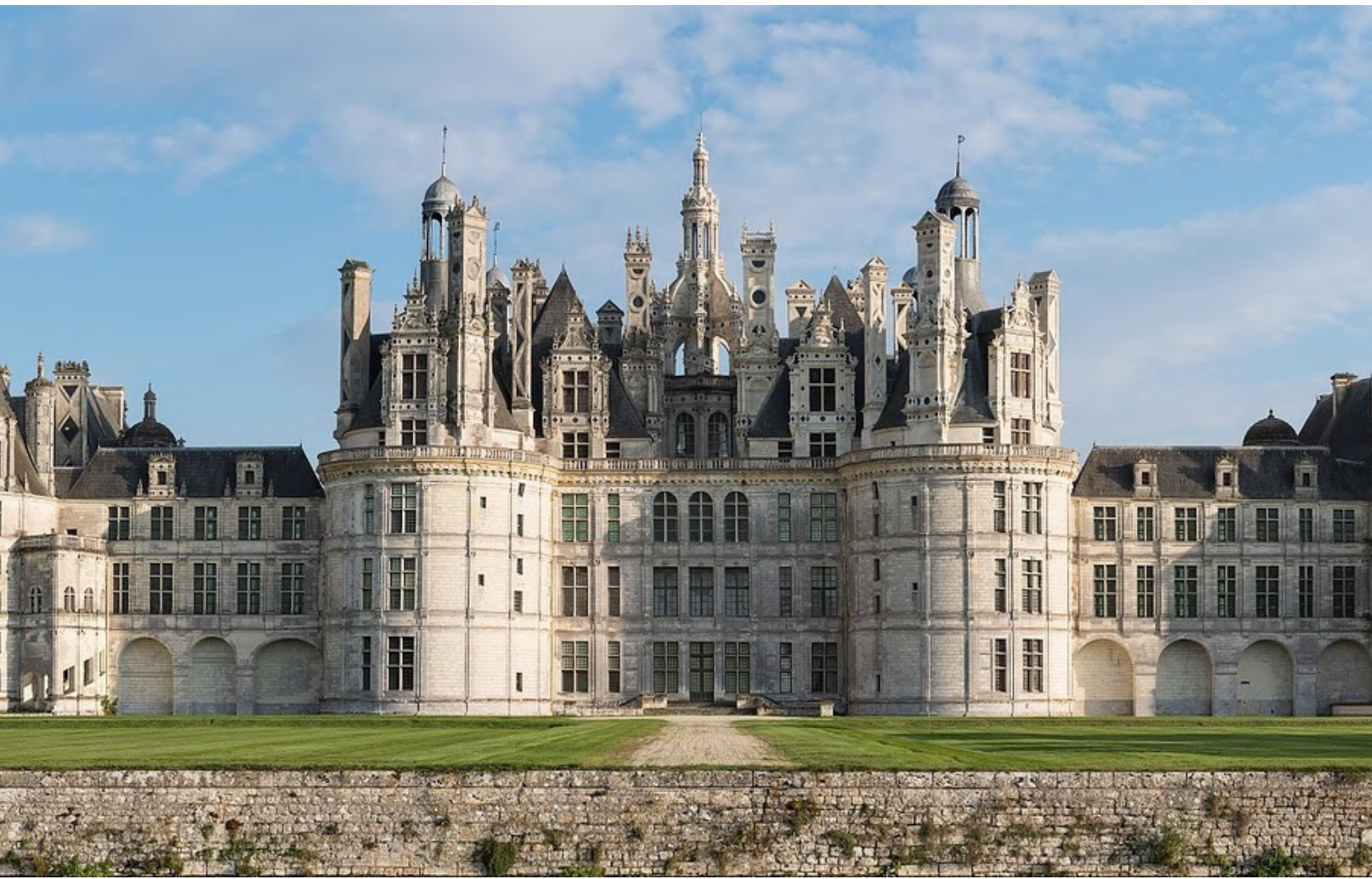
Within the capital city, you may find some historic vineyard, and not just some. There's actually 637 hectares of vines right beside the busy city. The production is mostly known for Gemichter Satz which is a classic field blend. There's 145 different wineries within Wien (Vienna).

# 10

## ÖSTERREICHISCHE TRADITIONSWEINGÜTER

There is a self-elected association called Österreichische Traditionsweingüter. Since 1992, a group of vine growers have set themselves the goal of classifying exceptional wine-growing sites in Austria. The terms Erste Lagen, roughly equivalent to a premier cru, or Grosse Lagen, equivalent to Grand Cru, are attributed to the very best vineyards exceptionally concerned with quality.





## **– The wines of Château de Chambord –** **A return to history with the help of Henry and Jean-Sebastien Marionnet of Domaine de la Charmoise.**

**By Claude Lalonde**

During my trip to the Loire at the beginning of the year, we had the pleasure of meeting Jean-Sébastien Marionnet owner of the Domaine de la Charmoise with his father Henry Marionnet. The Estate is located in Soings-en-Sologne about an hour from Tours in the beautiful Loire Valley and not far from the Château de Chambord.

What further distinguishes Domaine de la Charmoise from the others is what I call two qualitative factors that also involve a certain amount of risk. About 10% of the vines are Franc de Pied, that is to say non-grafted. It must be known that this terrible Phylloxera disease destroyed the entire European vineyard at the beginning of the last century and that vines were replanted on American rootstocks as the only solution.

Marionnet's vines haven't (partly) and are therefore more likely to be affected. However, it makes sparkling wines with a personality of their own.

In addition, several wines are made without Sulphur which can destabilize a wine if you do not know how to do it. It is certainly not the case at Domaine de la Charmoise. The wines are full of fruits, of a beautiful purity. It's incredible what it can do when done properly! Moreover, the Estate has been recognized as producer of the year 2019 by Bettane + Dessauve!

Finally and it's quite a story, Henry and Jean-Sébastien are consultants in the development of Château de Chambord wines that are made from the original vines from those that François 1er brought about 500 years ago. In fact, Henry and Jean-Sébastien have traced the origin of their old Romorantin vineyard, which they own on their estate and which is the great great granddaughter of this original vine. They offered cuttings of this vine to the Château from which the Château wines were made. With the wines produced from this vine, it is the continuity.

### Interview with Jean-Sébastien Marionnet

" We are lucky to have the oldest vine in France, which is 180 years old and belongs to a very small plot that we have. So, it's Romorantin grape and 10 years ago we did the cuttings that we multiplied in the nursery, without grafting them. After a year, the nursery gave them back and we planted them next to this very old plot (his mother). And so, we called her "La Pucelle de Romorantin", because she is the daughter of Provignage (the name of this old vineyard). It must be known that it was François 1er who nearly 500 years ago brought Romorantin to plant at the Château de Chambord. He brought about 85,000 vine plants from Beaune to make a white wine and it seems that it was Romorantin. So our vine is the great-granddaughter of this vine brought by this monarch.

"These vineyards were appraised to ensure their provenance. Romorantin is a direct son of Pinot Noir and Gouais Blanc as well as Chardonnay, Gamay and Melon de Bourgogne. There are, in fact, 13 descendants. As for wines from grafted and ungrafted vines, it was my father in 1992 who planted a hectare of Gamay. And the first vintage in 1995 we saw the difference between the grafted vine and the ungrafted vine. And tastefully everything was in favor of ungrafted vines. It was a real revolution. There is always the risk of Phylloxera but not here because we have sandy soil with clay. In Chambord, all Romorantin are Franc de Pied (4 ha from the cuttings of the old vine), one ha in Sauvignon and one ha in Hors Bois (Arbois) which makes 6 ha out of a total of 14 ha. The vines were gone in Chambord and it was the State that asked us for advice on the solutions to be undertaken. In fact, I am a consultant in this project".



# Travel idea - back in history

When you visit the Château de Chambord and have tasted the wines of the Castle, go for a walk to the Domaine de la Charmoise which is only 30 minutes away. You'll have the pleasure to taste wines from the ungrafted vines, to the ones made in whole bunches and vinified without sulphur such as Renaissance and Première Vendange. Do not miss the wines from the mother vine - Provignage et Pucelle de Romorantin. Have a nice trip!



# THE NEW HOSPITALITY SIDE OF PORTO

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## TOREL 1884 & THE BARTOLOMEU WINE BISTRO

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By Joanie Metivier.

Torel 1884 is a new Boutique Hotel in Porto that is meant to showcase the Wonders of the Age of Discovery. Every little décor item screams adventure and exoticism. This 3 months old destination is inspired by Portugal's maritime explorations during the 15th and 16th centuries. The hotel was conceived as a celebration of the cultural diversity that the Portuguese explorers encountered during their journeys to Africa, the Americas and Asia. It's really an insightful mix up.

The Bartolomeu Wine Bistro, which is named after the 15th-century Portuguese seafarer who was the first European to sail around Africa's southernmost point, also follows the same vibes.

In addition, in this particular ambiance, you may choose from a stellar wine selection of Portuguese vintages from small producers, and a delectable menu of snacks such as Portuguese cheeses & Charcuteries, tartars & other delicate small plates. In addition to the Portuguese fresh products, there's also a French influence, thus the Bistro side of the place. We could say the best of both worlds in some way, even if it might be more than two worlds colliding, in fact. Get me Portuguese cheeses and I'm pretty much in heaven, so this was the perfect, relaxed lunch for me.



IF YOU ARE TO ORDER ANYTHING, TAKE THE CHEESE AND CHARCUTERIE BOARDS. JUST LOOK AT THAT THING! THE HOMEMADE PUMPKIN COMPOTE AND THE FRESHLY GRATED PINK PEPPER ARE JUST A PROOF OF ALL THE ATTENTION THAT WENT INTO THIS. ALSO, DO YOU KNOW HOW RARE AND EXPANSIVE PISTACHIOS ARE IN PORTO? NOTHING IS SPARED FOR QUALITY, YET THE PRICES ARE EXTREMELY AFFORDABLE.

# THE NEW HOSPITALITY SIDE OF PORTO

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## TOREL AVANT-GARDE & THE DIGBY RESTAURANT

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By Joanie Metivier



Torel Avantgarde is an Award-winning five-star art boutique hotel in the centre of Porto. Completely Innovative in term of style, it succeeded in also keeping its Portuguese roots, especially at the excellent restaurant of the hotel, the Digby restaurant. Fresh Portuguese food, great Portuguese wine and most importantly, a great view over the Douro, it's really what you need, right? Each of our 47 rooms and suites is dedicated to an AvantGarde artist and designed individually. This is truly the kind of new hotel that stands out of standards big chains. Spectacular and unique, in my opinion is better than the conventional and boring you often get. The is the beauty of such a place. It makes you feel special in every way.



The restaurant is named after Sir Kenelm Digby, an English Courtier & diplomat, credited as the inventor of the modern glass wine bottle. His bottles and his technique has made them stronger and more stable, saving countless amount of precious wine spillage from breaking. The restaurant itself is not as flashy as the hotel. The neutral tones and linear design showcase the quality of materials and even the courteous service. The food features big Portuguese flavors in dishes such as monkfish or Mushroom based dishes, but they're also refined and diverse.

PORTUGUESE CUISINE IS MOSTLY KNOWN FOR THEIR DELICIOUS SEAFOODS, FISHES AND OF COURSE BACALHAU, BUT THEY ALSO HAVE SOME OUTSTANDING VEGETABLES SUCH AS MUSHROOMS. THESE MUSHROOM CROQUETTE TRULY SHOWED THE TASTE POTENTIAL.

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# WHERE TO SLEEP IN CHAMPAGNE?

BY BENOIT LEFÈVRE

During my last stay in Champagne, I had the chance to travel around the region and visit many producers, from large Champagne houses to small independent winemakers. In short, a lot of road and a very busy tasting program for almost a week! My biggest wish, once my days were over, was to relax in the best hotels to extend the experience and enjoy a spa, the gastronomic offer or the comfort of the rooms. I took the opportunity to stay in luxury establishments. Here are my recommendations if you plan a stay in Champagne and want to make yourself happy.

## L'ASSIETTE CHAMPENOISE

If you only have to choose one place, it's the Assiette Champenoise. A member of the prestigious Relais & Châteaux network, this luxury hotel and three Michelin-star restaurant, headed by chef Arnaud Lallement, is located in Tinquieux, just a few kilometers from Reims. The establishment has 33 rooms and suites. During my visit to the Assiette champenoise, I had the chance to live a unique gastronomic experience by opting for their Emotion menu: 9 services, each accompanied by a glass of champagne (all exceptional wines). [assiettechampenoise.com](http://assiettechampenoise.com)









## CHÂTEAU DE SACY

Located in Sacy, just fifteen minutes from the city center of Reims, this old bourgeois villa has been completely renovated and converted into a luxury hotel. The rooms and suites offer breathtaking views of the mountain of Reims, the surrounding vineyards and the village of Sacy. I was fortunate to stay in a beautiful suite. The spa is the perfect place to relax with a last glass of champagne after a day of tastings! [chateaudesacy-reims.fr](http://chateaudesacy-reims.fr)

## CHÂTEAU ÉTOGES

Have you ever slept in a castle? This is the experience you could live in this castle built in the seventeenth century, listed as a historical monument. Twenty minutes from Epernay, this 4-star hotel has 28 rooms, a spa, an 18-hectare park, and a gourmet restaurant. The breakfast is excellent and you can of course accompany it with a good glass of champagne! [chateau-etoges.com](http://chateau-etoges.com)





## LES AVISÉS

The hotel-restaurant Les Avisés belongs to the famous Anselme Selosse, probably one of the most adored vine growers of Champagne. Reservation is required to eat at the restaurant. If you have the chance to stay in one of the 10 rooms, you will have the privilege to attend the visit of the cellar as well as a tasting champagnes domain animated by Anselme Selosse himself. An unforgettable privilege and experience! [selosse-lesavisés.com](http://selosse-lesavisés.com)

## THE CRAYÈRES

This 5-star hotel and restaurant with two Michelin stars is a must in Reims. Luxury, refinement, wine cellar and champagnes to turn the head of any amateur. [lescraieres.com](http://lescraieres.com)

## HOSTELLERIE LA BRIQUETERIE

Located four kilometers from the center of Epernay, this 5-star hotel is a member of the Relais & Châteaux network. Gourmet restaurant, spa, swimming pool, jacuzzi, everything is brought together so that you can rest in the greatest comfort. [labriqueterie.fr](http://labriqueterie.fr)

## ROYAL CHAMPAGNE AND SPA

This establishment which includes a hotel, a restaurant and a spa on the mountain of Reims, about ten minutes of Épernay, was not opened at the time of my passage in Champagne. So try it on a next visit! [royalchampagne.com](http://royalchampagne.com)



**VINO NOBILE FROM  
TUSCANY!**

**DISCOVER THE NOBLE  
WINE!**

BY CLAUDE LALONDE

I recently went to Tuscany in the Montepulciano region which is located about 90 minutes south of Florence and 2 hours from Rome in the heart of the production zone of the famous Vino Nobile! It was at the invitation of the Unione Italia Vini and the Consorzio del Vino Nobile di Montepulciano that I went for 10 days to visit this beautiful region as well as several producers. The setting was one of the most important viticulture wine fairs in Italy "Enovitis in Campo" which took place in Montepulciano at the Trerose vineyard which is part of the Bertani Group.

The region is among the most beautiful in Tuscany and possibly of all Italy. For 10 days I was able to admire the landscapes of this region consisting of beautiful undulating hills (which go up to about 600 meters altitude), valleys that extend as far as the eye can see and beautiful forests that still look well protected and preserved (no extreme deforestation as found in Barolo). What a sight! Vineyards everywhere, beautiful olive groves and nice roads bordered by tall cypresses. You can't take a bad picture of Tuscany!!

I stayed in Chianciano Terme which is a small medieval village about 15-20 minutes drive from Montepulciano which is mostly known for its spas, relaxation pools fed with a mineral rich water and its hotels. In fact in this area, all villages are pretty much close by. However, it is imperative to have a car because public transport is quite rare. There are many small villages to visit along with many wine producers.

Montepulciano and Montalcino are a must and you should devote half a day to visit each.

Make sure to visit the Fortezza along with the Enoteca while in Montepulciano. Should you have another day or two some great destinations are Pienza, San Quirico d'Orcia, Bagno Vignoni, Citta della Pieve, San Casciano dei Bagni and Cortona which is a bit further.

You should also take a few days to stay in Rome as I did and visit the Vatican, the Colosseum, the Trevi Fountain, the Spanish steps and the Borghese Gallery & Museum along with its beautiful gardens. You'll need at least 2 days to properly visits these landmark





## HISTORY OF VINO NOBILE

They have been making wine in the area for some time. In fact, the oldest documented reference to the wine of Montepulciano is from 789: the cleric Arnipert offered the church of San Silvestro or San Salvatore at Lanciniano on Mt Amiata, a plot of land cultivated with vineyards in the estate of the castle of Policiano. Later, Repetti mentions a document in 1350 (in his “Historical and Geographical dictionary of Tuscany”) which drew up the terms for trade and exportation of Vino Nobile di Montepulciano.

But it was really in 1980 that Vino Nobile took off as it was among the first of a very few Italian regions to receive the top DOCG status . In addition to this, the Rosso di Montepulciano DOC was created to define the terms of yield per hectare, alcohol content and ageing, although the production zone remains the same. Individual producers were given the option to join one of these two DOCs according to the aspect of their land, the seasonal weather trend and all the other elements which may affect the suitability of the grapes used for the production of one or the other of these wines. Montepulciano’s glorious past and its links to the local terroir, its history and the Vino Nobile remain essential elements in order to guarantee present and future quality and authenticity to all that this “noble land” can yield.

## PRODUCTION ZONE

The production area is limited to a small portion of land in the municipal area that is specifically adapted to viticulture. There are 1,300 hectares of vineyards registered for the Vino Nobile di Montepulciano and around 550 for the Rosso di Montepulciano. This represents a production of about 8 million bottles per year, 85% of which is in Vino Nobile and 15% in the Riserva. This zone is subdivided into 4 sub-regions (north, south, east and west) all determined among others according to their soil typicity.

## REGULATIONS OF PRODUCTION

The wines must be made from the Sangiovese grape (called « Prugnolo Gentile » in Montepulciano) with a minimum of 70% and it can be assembled with up to 30% by other varieties authorized for the Tuscany region. These varieties include a fairly wide range of grape varieties, including for example Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, as well as Mammolo and Cannaiolo. The eight vineyards I visited all used 85% or more of Prugnolo Gentile in their Vino Nobile with some using up to 100% of Prugnolo.

The maximum yield allowed per hectare is 80 quintals with an effective wine yield of 70%.The wine can only be sold after aging for two years for Vino Nobile (including a minimum of 12 months in oak casks) and three years for Riserva (including 6 months in bottle). It must be approved after passing a series of tests including organoleptic tests conducted by a ministerial council. Vinification and aging must take place in the municipal area of Montepulciano.

## THE VINO NOBILE CONSORTIUM OF MONTEPULCIANO

### – CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES –

The Consorzio del Vino Nobile di Montepulciano was founded in 1965 with the aim of protecting and promoting the image of Vino Nobile di Montepulciano (and later the Rosso di Montepulciano and Vin Santo) in Italy and in the rest of the world. There are currently around 270 members in the consortium (including 78 bottlers) representing nearly all the vineyards.

I had the chance to meet Andrea Rossi the new president of the Consorzio since last May. Suffice to say that together with his team, he faces some important challenges including but not limited to the following:

There is some confusion in the minds of consumers as to the brand identity of Vino Nobile. This confusion stems from the fact that Montepulciano is a village, that it is also a varietal (grape variety) and that another appellation Montepulciano d'Abruzzo promotes it based on its origin. Few people know that Vino Nobile comes from Tuscany and is made from Sangiovese (Prugnolo Gentile). Moreover, they do not really know that it is a DOCG the highest level of designation.

While the appellations Chianti and Brunello were most active in the 1980s to the present day, Vino Nobile's was kind of inward looking during this time and as a result, it lost some ground over other wine regions. The Consorzio must therefore reclaim lost ground and this is what Mr. Rossi intends to do. The appellation allows a minimum of 70% Sangiovese with 30% other varieties authorized by the Tuscany appellation. This includes as I mentioned, several international grape varieties such as Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. Many vineyards use these international grape varieties while others only use Sangiovese and other native grapes. This creates quite different styles between wines and can confuse the identity of what a Vino Nobile is.

Another consequence is the price variations between the various Vino Nobile on the market that come from the fact that the winemaking process can vary from one vineyard to another. See for yourself from the wines that are available at the LCBO with prices that range between \$14.00 and \$100.00.

Finally, soil types vary considerably from one subregion to another. In order to increase the quality of the wines, the Consorzio will be pushing for a greater understanding of soils and terroirs by wine growers and encourages them to optimize the quality by planting the appropriate grape varieties in the best soils.

It is therefore necessary for the new Consorzio to close ranks and ensure a common vision between the various players. Among other things, it is analyzing the impact of a potential increase in the percentage of Prugnolo Gentile in wines in order to increase quality and standardization. As for the identity of the Vino Nobile, the consorzio wishes to focus on the name Vino Nobile on bottling and communication. It has just recently officialized the fact that will add the mention that the wine comes from Tuscany in order to differentiate it from the Montepulciano d'Abruzzo which, as the name mentions, comes from Abruzzo. By adding the Tuscan origin on the bottle and its communication, the consorzio will more clearly define the quality of Vino Nobile

