

Domaine de la Chevalerie, Bourgueil



Since 1640 this domaine has been in the Caslot family. Their house, office, and winery sit upon one of Touraine's largest, if not *the* largest, cellars — a great cavernous affair dug out between the 11th and 13th centuries to provide stone for the local village of Restigné. Patriarch Pierre Caslot commonly leads visitors to the door that opens to a long, plummeting flight of stairs. *Entrez*, he says, with an effortless wave, and chuckles: *le Paradis!* It's down there that he takes clients on tours, walking through vast chambers hewed out by hand. Here and there neat rows of bottles lay on the ground and barrels line the walls. It's down there too, in one dark corner or another, that Pierre will lead you through a tasting that might go back fifteen vintages. After each bottle is tasted, he smiles broadly, and stands the bottles with the others on the ground to form a long string of dead soldiers.

Today Pierre is aided by son and daughter team of Emmanuel and Stéphanie. These dynamic siblings have been instrumental in upgrading the winery equipment and converting the domaine to organic farming (their vineyards will be fully certified by harvest 2009). They work 81.5 acres of vines, of which 59 grow around the house and cellar and constitute the heart of the domaine. The other acreage is on top of the hill that marks the northern boundary of the appellation, and wine from that parcel is sold to *négociants*. The Loire itself marks the southern boundary of Bourgueil (and St-Nicolas-de-Bourgueil; there's no discernable difference between these adjacent appellations), and what lies in between is a very gently rising plateau composed of varying amounts of sand and gravel deposited by the Loire over the eons to mix with clay, anchored by limestone.

Chevalerie's home vineyards back up on the hillside, inland from the river. Here the soils are relatively heavy with clay and limestone, without much sand, making for robust Bourgueils. These vineyards are always harvested below 40 hectoliters per hectare (the legal permitted maximum yield is 55 hl/ha), and the wines are made with indigenous yeast, and bottled without fining or filtration. The wines are deliciously meaty, dense, age-worthy Loire Cabernet Franc.

The Wines:

- **Peu Muleau:** This is a 7.4-acre block with a name that refers to podiums because it grows highest of the four vineyards on the gently sloping hillside. It also has the most sand in its soil and makes the lightest wine (relatively; none of the domaine's wines are truly light in the sense of what in the Loire is called a *vin de soif*, or wine of thirst). First planted in the early 1970s, these vines average 30 years old.
- **Galichets:** A 25-acre vineyard planted on stony, sandy clay going down about one meter to limestone. Galichets was first planted in 1934, and today the vines average 35 to 40-years-old. This vineyard tends to make the domaine's fruitiest wine.
- **Chevalerie:** A 20-acre parcel planted on about two feet of clay overlying limestone. This was initially planted in 1922 and this site, like Busardières, supports older vines better than the above two parcels. Average vine age here is 50 to 55-years-old, and the wine typically has the intense, full fruit of Galichets but with more structure.
- **Busardières:** Another 7.4-acre block planted in a thin layer of clay soil (less than one foot thick) overlying limestone. Half of the vineyard was first planted in 1880; half in 1922, and the vines average 55 to 60-years old. This tends to be stonier and leaner than the above wines, with notable length and finesse.