

## Louis Métaireau

### Muscadet

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*With artistic panache, Louis Métaireau, one of the most energetic and vociferous winemakers of the Nantais region, provided a much needed focus for a group of producers in the austere, rain-swept and relatively flat region along the Atlantic coast of Brittany known as "le Pays Nantais."* With a mission to improve quality, and improve the purity and personality of his region's wines, Métaireau formed a cohesive group of other "artisanale" vigneronns under the title "Les Vignerons d'Art." Although Louis owned only 2 ha of Muscadet vineyards, his activities extended far beyond his own plot.

#### Domaine du Grand Mouton

In 1972, the group purchased Domaine du Grand Mouton, a massive vineyard which, at 27 ha, dwarfed Métaireau's own. The origin of the name "Mouton" does refer to the animal (sheep), but rather to "mothon," ancient French for the word "mound," and was chosen for the elevated position of the vineyard. Louis Métaireau's daughter, Marie-Luce, joined him at the Domaine in 1982 and his interests are now overseen by his daughter and her husband, Jean-Francois Guilbaud. He also comes from a wine-growing family in the same area, on the other side of the river. In 1988, they began repurchasing Grand Mouton from the group, piece by piece. Their goal has been to buy back properties which once belonged to both of their families, and they are making significant headway. All told, they have 30 hectares of vines planted between Sèvre and Maine.

#### The World Discovers Muscadet

Originally planted with red grape varieties by the Romans, Dutch Brandy producers and traders persuaded the Nantes locals to switch to a white

replacement. After the terrible winter of 1709, Louis XIV ordered the replanting of the frozen Loire valley vineyards with the hardy Melon de Bourgogne, a musky-flavored Burgundian varietal and offshoot of the Beaujolais Gamay. The perfect fruit for this region, which extends mainly south east of Nantes, near the mouth of the Loire River, the Muscadet Blanc, as the locals renamed it, is a tough grape that can withstand frost and thrives under limited sun.

As the standard of living in France improved at the end of WWII, so too, did the Muscadet's popularity. An excellent accompaniment to fish dishes, which were also becoming more affordable and available, Muscadet was sought out all over the country. The region was dominated by winegrowers who maintained their small family vineyards dedicated to one grape variety: Muscadet. However, by the 1960s, the producers from the Department of Sèvre-et-Maine, home to the large 30,000-acre appellation, were over producing, lessening overall quality.

#### Artistic Winemaking Techniques

With a mission to improve quality, and improve the purity and personality to his wines, Métaireau, and his group of other "artisanale" growers, decided to use the technique of leaving the fermented wine "sur lie." While most whites are decanted off the lees as soon as fermentation is complete in the fall, Métaireau cools their wines in concrete vats to 5° C to precipitate the lees to the bottom of the vat. The wines then stay on the lees throughout the winter, and each vintage is bottled without first being racked, which preserves a small amount of carbon dioxide in the wine. The longer the wine stays in contact with the lees, the richer its depth and flavor.

