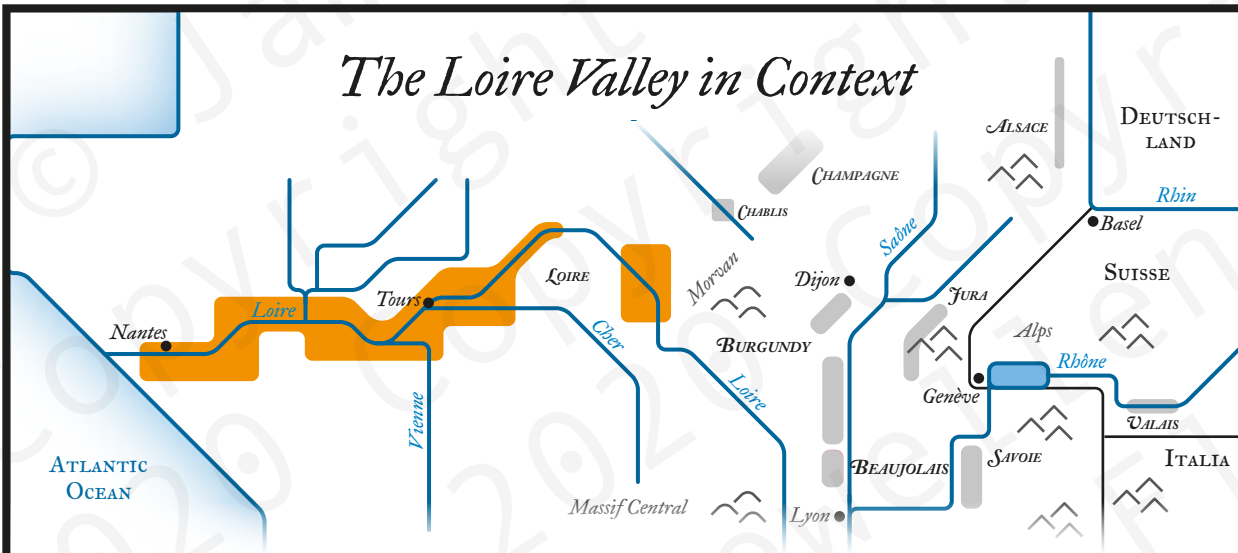
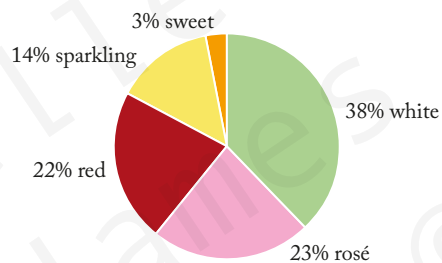


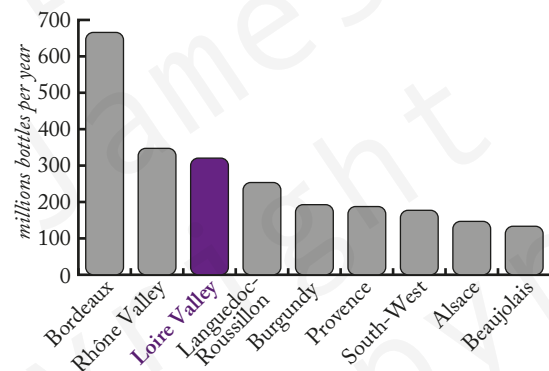
## The Loire Valley in Context



Loire Valley AOP wine production by style



Production of AOP wine in major French regions



### Grape varieties

#### Melon de Bourgogne

The grape of Muscadet, producing dry, light-bodied wines with modest alcohol. Lees ageing brings texture and a subtle nuttiness.

#### Sauvignon Blanc

Produces high-acid, aromatic, dry wines with distinctive grassy and gooseberry notes. The majority of production is in the Centre-Loire and Touraine.

#### Chenin Blanc

Extremely versatile variety, found in Anjou-Saumur and Touraine, producing wines with high acidity and notes of apple and quince. Sweetness levels range from dry to luscious and it botrytises well. Also used to make sparkling wine.

#### Cabernet Franc

The most-planted variety in the Loire. Used for dry, serious red

wines with high acidity and fine tannins. Fresh berry notes are often accompanied by a herbal character, especially in cooler years. Also a major rosé variety.

#### Pinot Noir

Made into a light-bodied, savoury red with delicate tannins, and clean berry notes. Grown mostly in the Centre-Loire but also used for rosé and sparkling.

### Climate

Cool and humid, with a climate that transitions from maritime at the coast to semi-continental in the Centre-Loire. Viticulture is extremely marginal; under-ripe grapes, hail, frost and rot are all challenges.

### Soils

Granite and schist in the west. Clays and limestone (*tuffeau*) from Saumur through to Touraine. Flint is found in the Centre-Loire and there are alluvial soils throughout the Loire Valley.

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# INTRODUCTION TO THE WINES & APPELLATIONS of the LOIRE VALLEY



The Loire – France’s longest river – rises in the Massif Central in central France, flows north for nearly 400 km, then turns west near Orléans and continues for another 500 km to its estuary near Nantes. The majority of wine production occurs along this east-west corridor with vineyards along the banks of the Loire and its various tributaries. There are four regions which are stylistically, geologically and climatically distinct; from west to east: *Nantais*, *Anjou-Saumur*, *Touraine* and *Centre-Loire*.

The climate is **cool** and viticulture is extremely marginal. The prevailing winds come from the west – chilly, wet breezes off the Atlantic. The strength of these diminishes as they travel further inland; thus, the climate in the Nantais is **maritime**; in the Centre-Loire it is becoming **continental**. On the whole, the region is very **humid**: unwanted **rot** is a challenge for viticulture, but **botrytis** flourishes in some appellations, leading to luxurious sweet wines. **Frost** and **hail** are particular risks in the east. In such a marginal climate, winemakers need to keep their options open and most adapt production to suit the vintage. In a cooler year, red grape growers might switch to making more rosé whilst a greater proportion of white grapes might go to making sparkling wine rather than still.

Soils are highly varied throughout the region. The west has primarily ancient igneous and

metamorphic soils, especially granite and a dark schist known as Anjou noir. Sedimentary soils – clays and limestone – are found from Saumur eastwards, particularly the famous *tuffeau* limestone, which has been quarried as a building material for millennia. Tuffeau comes in two hues: *blanc* (white), which is chalkier and firmer, and *jaune* (yellow), which is softer with a higher sand content. **Flint** (*silex*) plays a significant role in the soils of Pouilly and Sancerre, and there are **alluvial sands** and **gravels** throughout the valley.

Wine styles are also diverse, although they tend to be **monovarietal** throughout the valley. Dry white wines are favoured at both western and eastern extremities of the valley: Melon de Bourgogne in the Nantais and Sauvignon Blanc in the Centre-Loire. The best wines of Muscadet must spend a period of time *sur lie* – resting on the expired yeasts – before bottling. Chenin Blanc flourishes in the middle regions, whether in the guise of a full-bodied dry white from Savennières, a botrytised sweet wine from the Layon or anything in between from Vouvray. These parts are also home to serious, dry reds, primarily from Cabernet Franc – occasionally blended with Cabernet Sauvignon – and significant volumes of rosé and traditional method sparkling. Pinot Noir is also planted in the Centre-Loire, which is significantly closer to Burgundy than it is to the Nantais.

