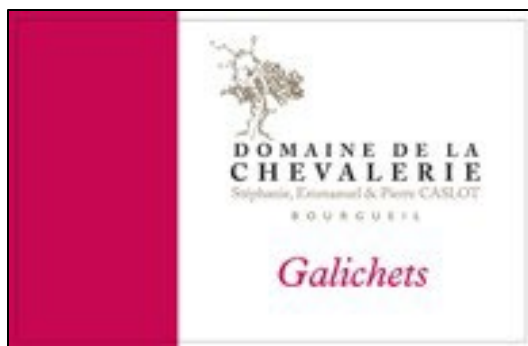


# Domaine de la Chevalerie (biodynamic) Bourgueil



*This little-known domaine makes some of the best Cabernet Franc wines in the world.*

–Rajat Parr & Jordan Mackay, The Sommelier's Atlas of Taste (2018)



Since 1640 this domaine has been in the Caslot family. Their house, office, and winery sit upon one of Touraine's largest cellars —a great cavernous affair dug out between the 11th and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries to provide stone for the local village of Restigné. On my first visit to the domaine well over two decades ago, Pierre Caslot the reigning patriarch led me to a door that opened to a flight of stairs plummeting to the depths. "Entrez," he laughed: "le Paradis!" It's down there that he would take 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 would conduct tastings that might go back fifteen vintages. In 2014, he left this world, and the Loire lost one of its great *bon vivants*.

In the early 2000s, his son Emmanuel and daughter Stéphanie joined Pierre in running the domaine. The primary task he gave them was to take the domaine on an organic footing. He himself had quit using herbicides in the previous decade, but he wanted to go 100% in with organics for all of their vineyards. Thus in 2008 Chevalerie received its first certification, and in 2012 it received Demeter certification for biodynamic farming.

In 2018 these dynamic siblings were joined by their younger sister Laurie. Today they farm 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 the high end of the terrace, abutting the ridge that marks the northern boundary of the appellation, and wine from that parcel is sold to *négociants*. They also rent parcels from two acclaimed limestone sites: Grand Mont to the west, and Bretèche to the east.

The Loire itself marks the southern boundary of Bourgueil and of the adjacent appellation of St-Nicolas-de- Bourgueil. What lies in between the river and ridge is a broad fan of a sloping terrace. This is the appellation ground and it's composed of varying amounts of sand and gravel deposited by the Loire over the eons to mix with clay, anchored by varying degrees of limestone.

Across the Loire are its other two great red appellations. Southeast is Chinon; southwest is Saumur. Chinon tends to be warmer and drier than Bourgueil, particularly in Chinon's eastern zone around Cravant, where growers typically harvest a week and a half earlier. Saumur has similar rainfall to Bourgueil but is also warmer and normally harvests earlier. In very general terms, Chinon makes the softest wine, Bourgueil and St-Nicolas-de-Bourgueil the most structured (there's little discernable difference between these two right bank appellations), and Saumur's wine tends to have a distinctly darker fruit profile.

Chevalerie's home vineyards grow on the upper end of the terrace, far inland from the river. Here the soils are relatively heavy with clay and limestone, without much sand, making for mouth-filling Bourgueils. These vineyards are always harvested below 40 hectoliters per hectare (the legal permitted maximum yield is 55 hl/ha). The grapes are harvested by hand into small crates, sorted twice and de-stemmed but not crushed; the grapes go into vat whole to be fermented with indigenous yeast before aging in vat or in older 400 or 500Lbarrels for roughly eight months--a relatively short élevage to keep the focus on the intrinsic fruit. They are almost always bottled without fining or filtration. These are deliciously meaty, dense, and astonishingly age-worthy Loire Cabernet Francs.

<http://www.domainedelachevalerie.fr/>