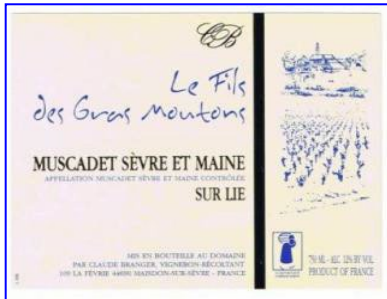


# Claude Branger

## Muscadet Sèvre et Maine



*The estate, led by Sébastien Branger, has a reputation for producing classic wines with a crystal-clear and pure style. I was impressed by Sébastien's deep knowledge and enthusiasm for viticulture during my visit. Each plot is meticulously tended, and the estate has been certified organic. The Le Fils des Gras Moutons cuvée is of exceptional value and deserves recognition as one of the top values in the region.*

–Yohan Castaing, The Wine Advocate, August 2023

*Claude Branger started with his father, working “derrière le cheval” on 7 hectares. He now owns 26.5 hectares of vines and his son, Sébastien, who arrived officially at the domaine in 2007, works right beside him. These conscientious winegrowers—they harvest by hand—never yielded to the sirens of doing things the easy way. They like ripe but very dry Muscadets.*

–La Revue du Vin de France, Les Meilleurs Vins de France 2019

Claude Branger is a tall, soft-spoken gentleman with silver hair. He dresses neatly and modestly, and there is about him, as there is about his wines, a clear sense of refinement. His grandfather created the wine domaine of Haute Févrie during the first World War. Following his father, Claude took over in the mid-1970s, and handed the reins to his son Sébastien in 2008. But Claude still works the vines and drives the tractor. Together these two farm close to 70 acres of vines in two adjacent parishes in the heart of the Muscadet Sèvre et Maine Appellation.

Among the small cadre of committed growers—and it remains a small cadre—the father and son team of Claude and Sébastien rank among the top. Claude was an early member of Terra Vitis, an organization that sets guidelines for sustainable farming and monitors its members' practices to ensure compliance. Subsequently, Sébastien embarked the domaine on the road to full-fledged organic farming. The first parcel received certification in 2015 and by 2019 all of the domaine's vines were fully certified.

Sébastien has introduced three new wines: a *méthode traditionnelle* sparkling wine made entirely from Melon, and two new crus. The *crus communaux* are the most exciting thing to come down the Muscadet pike in recent time and are meant to be the apex of the pyramid in Muscadet (the base being made up of generic Muscadet, and the middle being made up of the three sub-appellations of Sèvre et Maine, Côteaux de la Loire, and Côtes de Grandlieu). The INAO recognized the following crus in 2011:

- Gorges, based on clay and quartz; 29.6 acres delimited.
- Le Pallet, based on gabbro, gneiss, and orthogneiss (all metamorphic); 163 acres delimited and this has the largest surface because the vineyard area belongs to the local cooperative.
- Clisson, based on granite with quartz and mica; 49 acres delimited.

Four followed and official recognition came in 2019:

- Monnières-St Fiacre, based on gneiss; 32 acres delimited.
- Château-Thébaud, based on sandy granite; 27 acres delimited.
- Goulaine, gneiss and schist; 15 acres delimited.
- Mouzillon-Tillières, based on gabbro; 22 acres delimited

The following three were recognized in the years that followed soon thereafter:

- La Haye-Fouaissière, based on gneiss, orthogneiss, and amphibolites; 30 acres delimited.
- Vallet, based on schist and gabbro; 22 acres delimited.
- Champtoceaux, in Côteaux de la Loire and the only one of these ten not in Sèvre-et-Maine; 15 acres delimited.

Total surface for these *crus communaux* is 376 acres. An homogeneous soil base combined with the inherent quality of a given site are the main criteria, along with a ban on herbicides, lower maximum yields—45 hectoliters per hectare for a cru compared to 55 hl/ha for the sub-appellations—and a minimum ageing period on the lees (17 months for Le Pallet and 24 months for Gorges and Clisson, but in practice the aging period exceeds 24 months for most of these wines).

*It is increasingly rare to find wines that offer richness, glorious fruit and full-bodied voluptuousness in perfect consonance with taut, electric acidity, stunningly low alcohols (mostly 12–12.5%), mouth-watering minerality and bitterness, and compelling texture. These wines also age well, and also taste beautiful throughout the trajectory of their evolution. No ‘going through a shut-down phase’ adolescent issues here. To top it all, they are criminally good value.*

--Tamlyn Currin in April 2023 writing on the Crus Communaux in [jancisrobinson.com](http://jancisrobinson.com)

The Brangers have vines in Monnières-St Fiacre and in Château-Thébaud (above is a photo of Château Thébaud and its bedrock of granite, taken from the other side of the river Maine). The vines and the wines from both crus are treated identically, and what you get in the bottle is a clear reflection of the differing terroir.

The father and son team prunes its vines for low yields, harvests by hand (a rarity in this land of machine harvesting) and lets its wine rest on the lees until bottling, which is done without fining and with a light filtration—the classic *sur lie* technique. It’s this technique that gives good Muscadet wine its freshness and lift. Contrary to popular opinion, Melon is not, if allowed to ripen properly, naturally high in acid; it’s the lees contact and the resulting CO2 gas that give the wine its crisp spice and zest (acid Muscadet is usually the product of under ripe, high-yielding machine-harvested grapes).

Dutch traders introduced the Melon grape to the region from Burgundy in the 1600s. They wanted grapes for distilling, and the city of Nantes was within ready reach of their boats. An extreme winter in 1709 wiped out the red varieties then locally grown and thereafter Melon came to rule the roost. Today, there are four appellations in the region: the base appellation of Muscadet followed by the three sub-appellations. The Muscadet Sèvre et Maine appellation is the most varied and by far the largest (this AC produces more wine than any other in the Loire Valley). A generation ago, most of its wine was forgettable except that from a few dedicated growers such as Claude Branger. Nowadays, a revolution in quality is taking place. There are wines of revelation made here, wines that are soft yet shockingly vigorous, imbued with scents of bread, lemon freshness, and sea salt minerality—a palette of aromas that in the better renditions follows through with flavor intensity and length. This is wine of the north Atlantic coast, the product of Brittany’s great shelf of granite. Melon de Bourgogne is a white cousin to Gamay, and like Gamay it can be easy, it can be delicious, and it can surprise. For those of you who like white wine that falls on the austere side of the spectrum—and I mean that in the best of senses—wine that favors detailed verticality in place of opulence, then good Muscadet is one of the best white wine values in the world.