Domaine Merlin-Cherrier
Sancerre

The Wines

- *Sancerre blanc Avant-Première*: The classic wine from this producer reflects Bué's chalky terroir beautifully with its paradoxical generous precision (concentrated elegance might be a better way of saying this). Ferments are initiated with neutral organic yeast and élevage takes place in steel and concrete with lees stirring. First bottling is at nine months; last is at eighteen months. Minimal to no filtration and only a small dose of SO2. Production averages 6,000 cases in a normal year.

With vintage 2025, Agathe and Clément introduced the Avant-Première label to update their changes to the classic range since taking over from Agathe's father. *Avant-première* translates as preview, signifying an introduction to this young couples' range of wines.

- *Sancerre rouge Plan Séquence:* This comes from two parcels Thierry planted with his father in 1964 and 1988 (when he was very young and when he was not) with *sélection massale* vines from Irancy. The parcels total just under 4 acres in the heavy clays of Les Rimbardes, a site east of Bué near the border of Sancerre. The wine ferments spontaneously in a large oak upright, followed by élevage in that upright along with 300 and 600L barrels. Production averages 650 cases in a normal year.

With vintage 2024, Agathe and Clément introduced the Plan Séquence label to update their changes to this cuvée since taking over from Agathe's father. The name was inspired by cinematography, evoking a seamless process where every gesture counts. It's a nod toward the demanding, precise and respectful work they bring to Pinot Noir in an effort to elevate this cuvée.

- *Sancerre Chêne Marchand*: Chêne Marchand is one of the crown jewel vineyards of Sancerre and is the appellation's outstanding example of *Caillottes* terroir. If ever Sancerre were to classify its vineyards, Chêne is a certain candidate for grand cru status. The vineyard grows on the western plateau above Bué where the sun always shines if it is shining anywhere in the neighborhood, and this plateau has supported vines for many a century—possibly as far back as the Roman Occupation. There are higher hills immediately to the north in Bué where the *terres blanches* are; the mound-like Chêne Marchand comes off of them.

The name translates as *wood merchant* and one story has it that wine merchants conducted their business with growers under an oak tree that grew in the vineyard in the Middle Ages. Much more likely, it's a variation on Choix du Marchand, or choice of merchant, coming from the 18th and 19th centuries when the wine of Chêne Marchand was usually the top pick of the wines of Bué by that era's professionals. Chêne, by this account, refers to a path or route, a path that led discerning merchants to wine coming from Bué's most famous vineyard.

Agathe and Clément have two parcels in Chêne Marchand that total 0.84 hectares, or two acres (the entirety of Chêne is 30 hectares and makes up 10% of Bué's total surface of vines). The smaller parcel belonged to her great-grandfather, and was worn out by the time her father Thierry inherited it. He ripped up the diseased vines and planted various grasses and grains to replenish and aerate the soil, and he did this every year for an astonishing ten years. Today this parcel grows the domaine's best vines. Production averages 500 cases in a normal year.

The wine from these two parcels is fermented in steel and amphora, and élevage goes for around sixteen months with lees stirring. Bottled without filtration, it's an immensely elegant, long, and mineral Sancerre. In riper years, the wine can be exotic with notes of white flowers, hazelnuts, and honey; in leaner years the minerality and length carry the day.

- *Sancerre Grand Chemarin*: The domaine has long tended Sauvignon Blanc vines in the Grand Chemarin *lieu-dit*, but they had always gone into the classic cuvée. This changed in 2018 when Thierry held out a portion of the crop to vinify separately. The vines are divided among 4 parcels totaling 3 acres, with a third planted in 1990 and two-thirds in 2008.

  The site shares key similarities with Chêne Marchand, Bué's other emblematic vineyard: it's on a plateau, facing more or less south, and the soil is essentially *caillottes*. Grand Chemarin, however, has much thinner topsoil, and it's composed more of what they call *griottes*, or pebbles, rather than rocks. Plus, the plateau is notably higher than the Chêne Marchand hilltop, which it faces across the Bué hollow (Chêne's to the west; Chemarin's to the east, high above the Merlin household and cellar).

  Fermentation and élevage are different too: Grand Chemarin ferments spontaneously in drier years, and half is raised in 20HL foudre plus 228L barrels and vat. No filtration prior to bottling, which happens 18 months after aging. Production averages 600 cases in a normal year.