Domaine Merlin-Cherrier
Sancerre



Thierry Merlin was the first producer we started life with as a company in 1997. A man of Bué who reveled in driving a WWII Willy's Jeep up and down the hills and dales of Sancerre, he was a remarkably consistent and committed grower up until the day he handed the reins over to his daughter Agathe in 2021.

Bué is a village packed full of growers in a pocket canyon, surrounded steeply on three sides by vines, a hamlet just to the west of the old, formerly fortified hilltop town of Sancerre. Once a Huguenot stronghold, Sancerre lorded over the Loire and was sacked in the 16th and again in the 17th century during the Wars of Religion. At its highest point still rises a 15th century tower, the last of Sancerre's fortifications, and if the name—Porte-César—of one of the original gates to the town is to be believed, Caesar and his legions were once here.

Bué and 13 other communes surround this venerable river guardian, and Bué is notable for having one of Sancerre's truly great vineyard sites: Chêne Marchand, arguably the finest example of caillottes terroir in the appellation. Caillottes, a.k.a. Oxfordian limestone, is one of two main soil types in Sancerre. The name refers to stones and it's a very stony, compact chalk without a lot of clay or marl that predominates in Bué. It's known for making younger drinking Sancerres, wines with broad aromatics and elegant profiles.

The other main soil type is terres blanches, or Kimmeridgian limestone, so named because in dry periods the soil can turn white from its intensely calcareous makeup. It's a younger soil type, full of clay marls, it's generally found higher on the hills, typically layered over caillottes, and it's concentrated along the western arc of the appellation. Terres blanches make for powerful, pointed wines that need a couple of years of bottle age to really show their stuff.

The third main soil type is silex, or flint, which is pretty much confined to a north-south fault line running right through the town of Sancerre.

Thierry's daughter Agathe took over the family domaine with her husband, Clément Rigot, after completing their winemaking and viticulture studies. They work thirty parcels totaling 32 acres (to be 30 come 2026, when a lease on a parcel runs out), all in Bué except for three just over the line in the commune of Sancerre and one to the south in Veaugues. Most are planted to Sauvignon; two, 4.5 acres' worth, are planted to Pinot Noir.

Among the first things they did was to invest in a new cooling system to better control the temperatures of all the tanks, a state of the art pump (admittedly a prosaic improvement, but this pump reduces oxygenation by up to 5x compared to older pumps), and new vessels: a 220hl foudre for the cuvée Grand Chemarin, a 20hl oak upright for the Pinot Noir ferments, amphora for the cuvée Chêne Marchand, plus new steel tanks and a concrete vat for extended aging of the classic white, and 300L barrels for the aging of rosé and red.

In 2023 they very much dialed back on extractions and pump-overs with the Pinot Noir, aiming to make a wine with much purer, brighter fruit and with more elegance.

In 2024 they moved to harvesting their two parcels of Pinot Noir along with the single-vineyard sites by hand and have continued the practice since. In the same year, they quit with all herbicide applications, began planting beneficial cover crops, and embarked on organic conversion. They began to extend their élevages across the board. Now, for the classic range, the white Sancerre ages 9-16 months depending on the bottling (there are several bottlings) while the red Sancerre is aged 18-24 months (again, depending on the bottling).

http://www.merlin-cherrier-sancerre.fr/index.html