

Moulin Touchais



By John Gilman - View from the cellar – October / November 2015

The Moulin Touchais estate was founded in 1787 by the Touchais family, who has continued to oversee the direction of this Anjou property for eight consecutive generations. The current head of the family estate is Jean-Marie Touchais, who succeeded his father Joseph as winemaker here in 1990. The family owns thirty-five hectares of vines within the appellation of Coteaux du Layon and an additional one hundred and fifteen hectares of Anjou, which were used for the production of simple reds, whites and rosés in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, but the production from which have been sold off to négociants since the passing of Joseph Touchais. From my earliest days in the wine trade, Moulin Touchais has been famous for their enormous cellar of older vintages and their availability on the market, so that when I was first starting out in the early 1980s, one could easily source old wines here from the top vintages of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, and indeed, the very first bottle of Moulin Touchais I ever had the pleasure to taste was the 1953. However, the practice of holding back their vintages of Coteaux du Layon only began during the tenure of Joseph Touchais and was a response to the very sluggish economic climate in the immediate wake of the second world war. Prior to the war, the domaine had offered its bottlings of Coteaux du Layon within a few years of the vintage, like all of their neighbors, but as the sweeter wines here were selling very sluggishly, Joseph Touchais decided to tuck the younger ones away in the cellar and start to offer more of the older wines. As he had built up a very good business selling less expensive dry wines, (in particular, his bottling of Rosé from the village of Tigné was extremely popular in this era) from the family's sizable vineyard holdings outside of Coteaux du Layon in the '40s and '50s, he had the cash flow wines that allowed him to age his Coteaux du Layon for many years before offering them on the market. From this period began the custom of aging each vintage of Moulin Touchais for a minimum of ten years in the cellar prior to its release and for retaining significant stocks of older vintages to offer the market at the same time. For example, the famed 1959 Moulin Touchais was still available from the estate up until 2006, and today, one can still order bottles of the 1985 or the 1971!



A beautiful fall day in the vineyards of Moulin Touchais.

The estate itself is based in the village of Doué-la-Fontaine, which is located just outside the eastern edge of the Coteaux du Layon appellation. The thirty-five hectares of vines that the domaine owns within the Coteaux du Layon AOC are found in the villages within the boundaries of the AOC on this end of Coteaux du Layon, and here the hillsides are not as steep as those that overlook the Layon River further west in the direction of Bonnezeaux and the domaine's parcels are also set back a bit from the waterside. This means that morning fogs off of the river are not particularly prevalent and the formation of botrytis in this section of Coteaux du Layon is not frequent, so that the Moulin Touchais wines will often get their sweetness as much from the concentration of sugars through dehydration and late picking as from noble rot, with only one or two vintages per decade showing a very significant glazing from botrytis. Consequently, the wines are not as high in residual sugar as many examples from further west in the appellation, hovering usually around ninety grams per liter in most vintages and possess a raciness and cut that is not always found in Coteaux du Layon. Moulin Touchais also takes the practice of picking between fifteen and twenty percent of their grapes each year on the early side, to give the finished wine a

great chassis of acidity for long-term cellaring, and then making four or five further passes through the vineyard later in the season, to collect desiccated or nobly rotten grapes to provide the sweetness for the finished wine. No vintage has been offered here before it has aged ten years in the cellars, and typically, the wines do not really start to show any signs of maturity until their twentieth birthday. The wines are fermented with indigenous yeasts in cement tanks, that are lined with either enamel or glass, and then bottled on the early side, in the spring following the harvest. The domaine will produce a Coteaux du Layon bottling in every vintage, and then wait the requisite ten years before deciding if the wine will be of sufficiently high quality to be released under the Moulin Touchais label, with vintages that are not deemed serious enough sold off to négociants in bulk. Within the fifteen kilometers of chalk tunnels under their winery in Doué-la-Fontaine lie well more than a million bottles of Moulin Touchais awaiting their initial ten years of aging or for orders to arrive for older bottles, and the Touchais family continues to recork, top off and affix new labels to every older vintage offered before it leaves the cellars, so this is one of the greatest sources in the world for pristine bottles of old vintage chenin blanc.