

# Reds from the Loire valley

It's white wines may be among the best France has to offer, but it's worth spending a little time getting to know its reds, too

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**Domaine du Colombier Chinon, France 2012 (£7, Sainsbury's)** Although the region is best known for its whites made from sauvignon blanc and the stylistic chameleon chenin blanc, a number of red grapes are grown in the vineyards along the Loire valley. Recently I've enjoyed a plump beaujolais-like 2013 gamay from Robert Sérol in the southern Côte Roannaise; a silky, light 2011 pinot noir from Vincent Pinard in Sancerre in the region's centre, and a succulent 2011 take on the local grolleau from Clau de Nell in Anjou to the west. But the Loire's red star is undoubtedly cabernet franc, with Domaine du Colombier's Chinon a crisp, crunchy-fruited budget-friendly introduction.

**Château de Hureau Tuffe Saumur-Champigny 2012 (£14.35, Slurp)** What I like about Loire cabernet franc is its inherent lightness and freshness, both of which make it a versatile food-match. I'm thinking of salmon, as well as grilled meat. But with their distinctive mix of red fruit, graphite, floral fragrance, acidity and chalky tannic bite, and their generally low alcohol, the wines take well to being chilled and served with cold meats and cheese, too. Those closest to my personal ideal of cab franc are both from the Saumur-Champigny appellation: the raspberry-scented Domaine Filliatreau Classique 2013 and the perfectly modulated cherries of Château du Hureau's 2012.

**Charles Joguet Cuvee Terroir, Chinon France 2012 (£13.80, Tanners Wines)** Working at the northern limit of red-wine production, the Loire's cabernet franc growers have in the past struggled to get sufficiently ripe grapes, leading to an aggressive tang of green pepper and lack of substance. But while the wines are never going to be big blockbusters, I found little evidence of those herbaceous qualities in those I tasted. And even in difficult vintages, such as 2012 and 2013, the better growers, such as Charles Joguet, are capable of making complex, elegant wines such as Clos de la Dioterie 2012 as well as vibrant, limpid reds like Cuvée Terroir.

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