La No□ 2010 Muscadet-C□tes de Grandlieu

3 Aug 2011 by Julia Harding MW
From €7, £11.50, $16.95.

La Noë is not the name of the producer, nor an obscure grape variety. It is the name of a 4-hectare vineyard in the extreme west of the Loire Valley, south west of Nantes, that was planted with vines as far back as 1694, according to local records.

It may not have been this vineyard that persuaded Eric Chevalier to come back to run his 20-hectare (now 28-ha) family property, Dom de l'Aujardière in Saint-Philbert de Grandlieu, in 2006, after a decade as head of the Vinival (later Grands Chais de France) winery in Touraine, but it is the one that he describes as 'un réel coup de coeur'. It's hard to translate this French expression but you could say it was the patch of land that won his heart.

La Noë 2010 Muscadet-Côtes de Grandlieu Sur Lie, the wine Eric Chevalier produces from the middle-aged vines (20-60 years old) in this sandy granitic vineyard - unusual in the region - surely won my heart and palate, even though it is a wine of real restraint. It is very pale, as you would expect from the Melon de Bourgogne grape variety in combination with the Atlantic environment of Muscadet, and the initial aromas are quite delicate - wet stones, citrus, a note of cedary freshness and the impression of creaminess to come. The effect of a slow fermentation using ambient yeasts and then seven months ageing on the yeast lees has given La Noë a marked and delicious creamy texture that beautifully complements the freshness and high tension delivered by crisp acidity. Subtle, refreshing, satifying and long.

Muscadet is typically recommended to accompany seafood or fish but Chevalier rightly says that this wine has the depth to be very good with cheeses such as Comté and Beaufort, as well as with its classic tablemates. (Incidentally, instead of putting the Muscadet-Côtes de Grandlieu on the front label, he describes it simply as from the Val de Loire, for more positive associations or simpler recognition, perhaps?)

In the UK, La Noë is available from Lea & Sandeman (online or via one of their four London shops) and Patrick Sandeman told me excitedly that it has just been listed at Heston Blumenthal's London restaurant Dinner. Kermit Lynch imports Eric Chevalier's wines into the US so they are quite widely available (eg from Thirst Wine Merchant in Brooklyn, the Wine House in Santa Monica and the San Francisco Trading Company). At the moment they are still selling the slightly richer and plumper yet still very mineral 2009 and expect to move on to the 2010 at the end of next month. In France, the 2009 (and, I hope, the 2010) can be found at www.verygood.fr (online or from their shop in Nantes). This wine should not be confused with Château de Noë, a completely unrelated Muscadet producer.

This is not the first time that Chevalier has featured on Purple pages. See here for Jancis's review of his Fié Gris, a wine of the week back in January.