Loire 2015 - the sticky fingers vintage

Following his initial report towards the end of picking in October 2015, wine broker Charles Sydney sent this finger-licking update written as the fermentations came to an end in late December, with his characteristically thirst-inducing photos. This one shows the free-run Chenin Blanc juice as the press is filled at Jérôme Billard's Domaine de la Noblaie.

Sticky fingers ... that's always a good sign.

During the harvest itself, it means the grapes are loaded with sugar - when you're picking your fingers go all tacky, the hairs on your forearm tangle and it takes ages to get the colour of grape juice out of your skin as both red and white grapes leave your fingers black.

Tasting now, when fermentations are just finishing, your fingers still get sticky. You pour the wine into your glass, and your fingers on the outside get sticky. That's weird, but hugely
gratifying in places such as the Layon, when it means you get to lick your fingers clean. That's a sort of second innings, a bit like supping beer from your moustache.

Vincent Lieubeau - liquid gold at La Fruitière, Muscadet

2015 in the Loire is a great vintage, with lovely ripeness with good growers everywhere and just that twist of acidity to keep things fresh. The only 'hic' is that yields are again lower than we'd like and growers need.

The reds and the Chenins are a nice step up on 2014 – itself one of the best Loire vintages.

The Cabernet Francs, Pinots and Malbecs have even more ripeness, have even more fruit, with maybe a touch lower acidity. To me that's brilliant as it means you won't need to wait for ever and a day for them to be ready, though a purist might say they won't keep quite as well as the 2014s ... like up to 10 years instead of 15.

Ripe Cabernet Franc - note the red stems - at Couly-Dutheuil

The Chenins are superstars. In Montlouis and Vouvray, there's finesse, ripeness and definition, nice degrees – and reasonable quantities of smart moelleux and even liqueureux picked in selective trie pickings at up to 21° potential alcohol. All with a splash of acidity to hold it all together.

In the Anjou, it's better still: hyper-smart dry whites and a plethora of stickies picked at degrees they could only dream of last year. Stéphane Branchereau picked his Quarts de Chaume at between 23 and 24° (even the 'straight' Chaume premier cru came in at over 21!), Alex Cady's
Sélection de Grains Nobles and Fesles' Bonnezeaux came in at just over 25° while Anne Guegniard's top picking in Quarts de Chaume came in at over 26°.

Alex Cady, Coteaux du Layon

That'll finish with something over 220 g/l natural residual sugar.

The realities in Muscadet and with the Sauvignons are slightly different – as can be expected in a year when Sancerre growers started picking at the same time as the guys in the Pays Nantais.

Those growers who know how to look after their vineyards and who understood the effects of drought and rain on different terroirs picked super, healthy grapes with a potential ripeness even beyond the 2014s, making wines with real concentration, depth and complexity, wines with a twist of acidity to keep the taste buds happy. Less dedicated growers paid the price by picking less ripe and sometimes less healthy grapes. We only work with the good growers!

Ripe, golden Melon de Bourgogne berries in Muscadet

So how does it hold up? If I were to let my emotions speak, I'd say that 2014 and 2015 make a magic pair, like 1989 and 1990 or 2002 and 2003. Except 2014 is better than 2002 ever was and 2015 has the acidity some eejits ['Irish and Scottish form of idiot] complained was missing in 2003.

If I were to speak more calmly, I'd say 2015 is a great vintage.

Enjoy!