



CLUB MAGNUM

VINS ET EXPÉRIENCES

## DOMAINE FRANTZ CHAGNOLEAU



ONE OF THE MOST FASCINATING ASPECTS OF THE WINE WORLD IS THE RICH VARIETY OF CHARACTERS THAT ONE FINDS WITHIN IT, EACH WITH THEIR OWN STORY AND VISION.

In Burgundy, however, it is becoming increasingly rare to find someone today who has started their own domaine from scratch. With barriers to entry so high, it takes enormous commitment to even get started, let alone to find success.

So when you come across someone like Frantz Chagnoleau who has come from nothing to making some of the most exciting wines in the Mâconnais, it is hard not to sit up and take notice. Frantz comes from the Charentes-Maritimes on the Atlantic coast: not a region noted for its wines. He chose to study Oenology in neighbouring Bordeaux but having received his Diploma, this young man went East, to Burgundy, taking up a role with Olivier Merlin at La Roche-Vineuse. The year was 2004.

As his namesake, Merlin is one of the great, magical figures in the transformative rise of the Mâconnais and a committed advocate of organic and biodynamic farming. Frantz had found the perfect mentor, learning what it took to produce great wines in the vineyard and how to faithfully guide them through the cellar.

Fascinated by Burgundy's mosaic of climats, Frantz absorbed knowledge like a sponge, honing his skills until the point where the opportunity arose in 2009 to take on his own vineyard leases and thus begin to form his own domaine.

DOMAINE  
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Frantz's wife and business partner, Caroline Gon had also studied agronomy and oenology but like so many aspiring winemakers today, she elected to begin her career overseas, taking a position at Newton Vineyards in Napa Valley. Desiring a return to France some years later, she took up a position with Dominique Lafon at his newly founded estate in Milly-Lamartine. As for Frantz, the ability to work and learn alongside a towering figure was an incredible opportunity. Forming a dynamic team with Dominique, Caroline took on more responsibility, eventually fully in charge under Dominique's supervision before his retirement in 2021 and her decision to leave and work full time alongside Frantz.

Their base is in Pierreclos in the south-west of the Mâconnais, up in the hillier country near to Milly-Lamartine and across the TGV line from La Roche Vineuse. Pierreclos itself has a modest amount of vineyard, split roughly half between red and white, however Frantz and Caroline's holdings are spread over four other communes: Saint-Albain, Viré, Chasselas and Vergisson. In total they have assembled almost 7ha of vines in production, adapting each to the organic and biodynamic methods learned chez Merlin and Lafon and continue to keep their eyes open for opportunities to expand further. Indeed they have recently planted some more vines including some reds and some other white varieties including Aligoté and Savagnin.

The biggest cuvée is the excellent **Mâcon-Villages Clos Saint Pancras** from the commune of Saint-Albain which is to the east of Viré on an east-facing slope near a limestone quarry at around 240m. At 3.5ha, this is by some distance their largest parcel with a portion of the vines in their full ownership. It is a something of a sun-trap, with a tendency for early-ripening despite its exposure to the north wind that regularly blows down the Saône valley. However the wine that they have crafted here is really excellent, very much a 'Villages Plus' cuvée, offering far more than simple, fruity pleasure. Élevage is typically around 15% in smaller barrels, with the bulk of the cuvée raised in larger foudres.

Bottling is habitually completed within a year after harvest.

In Viré, we find one of the first parcels acquired in 2009 when the opportunity arose to take a small 0.73ha parcel of **Viré-Clessé Les Raspillières**. It is high on the slopes, east-facing and produced a lovely, open peach-scented wine that sees élevage in a mixture of demi-muids (600 lt) and larger foudres.

The appellation of Saint-Véran is somewhat hard to define, split as it is roughly 60% between the northerly sections around the communes of Davayé and Prissé and 40% in the southern communes of Chasselas, Leynes, Chânes and Saint-Vérand. Frantz and Caroline currently present five wines across the appellation, starting with **Saint-Véran Prélude** which is a blend of three parcels.





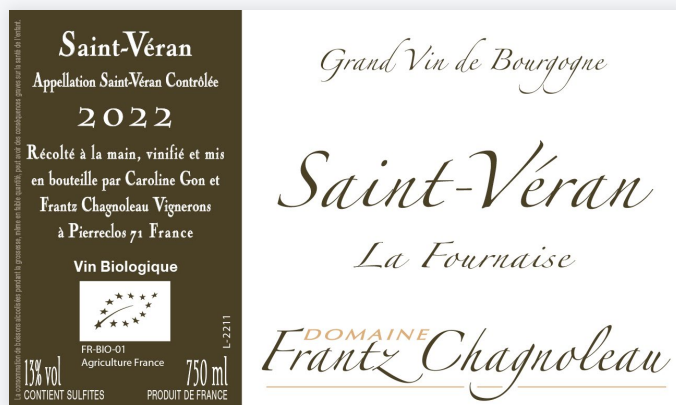
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A south-facing parcel in Prissé across from the Pouilly-Fuissé lieu-dit of Chantenay is combined with a second from a west-facing, later-ripening parcel in Chasselas and a third from an east-facing plot of 50 year-old vines in Prissé. Vinification mirrors the diverse source of the grapes, blending foudres, demi-muids and stainless steel. The final result shows their evident skill, with wonderful harmony achieved and even a little tension that points towards the rocky soils.

### **Saint-Véran Les Montchanins**

also comes from Prissé, a single 0.47ha parcel on clay-rich gentle slopes with vines planted in the mid-1970s.

It is a more serious, deeper style that keeps very well and for that reason is one of the few wines that will be bottled in magnum. Caroline thinks that it could be a candidate for 1er cru status, should Saint-Véran one day follow in the footsteps of Pouilly-Fuissé. Staying in Prissé, **Saint-Véran La Fournaise** is an east-facing parcel of 50 year-old vines on chalky white soils. It is a warm site and in order to open up the soils, they are working it by horse to avoid compaction. There is tension here too but also the suggestion of honey, blossoms and white flowers. Caroline considers it the most 'Chablisien' of their Saint-Vérans.



Moving to Chasselas in the southern sector, **Saint-Véran À La Côte** is a beautiful wine produced on south-facing predominately white soils with a little red tinge to them from the iron oxide. They own 0.24ha here in one parcel, again worked by horse. This is an intense wine that also benefits from a little patience in order to release notes of brioche and pastry. The domaine's oldest vines are to be in a west-facing parcel a little lower down the hill called **Saint-Véran La Roche**. There are 0.47ha of 80 year-old vines here and this vinous depth is apparent in little notes of iodine and minerals that sit alongside the glossy textures.

There are two Pouilly-Fuissé from Vergisson. The first, **Pouilly-Fuissé Pastoral** is a blend of two parcels vinified apart, one being a south-facing parcel in the village and the other a more sheltered, late-ripening site. The name chosen for the blend points towards a more playful, easy, ethereal character. In contrast, **Pouilly-Fuissé Madrigal** is rather stricter and more disciplined in style coming from two east-facing parcels with the tension of the rocks asserting itself more obviously.

It will be fascinating to follow the progress of Frantz and Caroline, particularly now that both are full-time at the Domaine. They have already achieved so much in a short amount of time but they remain ambitious and driven to do much more. In particular, their energy has started to lift the appellation of Saint-Véran, which had hitherto been rather plodding along. Just as Merlin and Lafon did for Frantz and Caroline, these two new champions will inspire others around them to farm more sustainably and to push for higher quality.

