

DOMAINE DU PAVÉ, “DIFFÉRENT”

FRUIT

EARTH

BODY

TANNIN

ACID

LOIRE VALLEY, FRANCE 2017

One of the reasons blind tasting is valuable is because it levels the playing field. Reading a wine’s label embeds a whole set of expectations in your mind—a ‘placebo effect,’ of sorts, to which even the most experienced professional tasters are susceptible. –Ian Cauble, Master Sommelier

When I tasted today’s wine, blind, I saw it clearly for what it is: a racy, mineral white reminiscent of Premier Cru Chablis, with a nod to Pouilly-Fumé in there as well. It is immensely satisfying, mouthwatering, and sneakily powerful. Maybe I would have had the same exact reaction had I known beforehand that it was made from the obscure Tressallier grape in the remote Loire Valley appellation of Saint-Pourçain; it’s also possible I’d fixate on the unfamiliar grape and location of origin and, absent much context, deem it “interesting” and leave it at that. As you may have gathered by now, Domaine du Pavé’s 2017 “Différent” is more than just...uh...different. You may never have heard of Tressallier, or Saint-Pourçain, but if quality and value are your measuring sticks, this wine will be instantly familiar.

Our job, after all, is to make the big, sprawling wine world a little smaller—but Tressallier from Saint-Pourçain is about as far afield as one can reach. Also known as Sacy, the Tressallier grape is believed to have originated in the Yonne (the French *département* that is home to Chablis); it was prized for its high yields and crisp acidity, but it all but disappeared after the phylloxera epidemic in France at the end of the 19th century. Even in the Saint-Pourçain appellation, which is effectively the last bastion for Tressallier these days, the variety is only permitted as a “complementary” component in AOC-labeled wines. Varietal expressions of Tressallier—what few there are—are usually labeled as *vins de table*.

The Saint-Pourçain region runs along the west bank of the Allier River, which meets up with the Loire near Nevers; this is well south of Pouilly/Sancerre, in the “upper” reaches of the Loire Valley, which tends to be forgotten in discussions of the region’s wines. Domaine du Pavé is run by Julien Nebout, whose family estate, Domaine Nebout, has been a fixture in the region—and a champion of the Tressallier grape—for generations. The property is headquartered in the village of Saint-Pourçain-sur-Sioule, which, to give you a better sense of its situation, is about 150 kilometers due west of Mâcon (southern Burgundy). The region’s vineyards are mostly comprised of ‘alluvial’ sands and gravel (although there are some pockets of clay/limestone), with relatively high altitudes of 300-400 meters on average. The entire Saint-Pourçain region contains just 550 hectares of vineyards, of which Tressallier constitutes a minuscule percentage—I honestly can’t remember the last time I saw a varietal wine from this grape.

Domaine du Pavé's 2017 "Different" is a pure, unadorned expression of this resolutely local specialty. It is fermented on indigenous yeasts in stainless steel and aged briefly in tank on its lees before bottling, resulting in an electrifying wine that ignites the salivary response with each sip. In the glass, it's a pale yellow-gold with flecks of silver, with aromas of lemon pith, green peach, cider apples, crushed oyster shells, herbs, and freshly chopped nuts.

It is light- to medium-bodied with a hint of Aligoté-like creaminess and a whiff of Pouilly-Fumé-like smoke, but ultimately its closest analog is Premier Cru Chablis: the minerality and texture led me there when I blind-tasted it and will likely do the same for you. I'd suggest decanting this wine about 30 minutes before consuming at 45 degrees in all-purpose white stems; it would make a great apéritif wine alongside a few creamy cheeses (which will put its acid and minerality to work), or pair it with white-fleshed seafood of all types. This is a white for food if there ever was one—well worth a trip way outside the realm of the familiar. Cheers!



"Tressallier (a.k.a. Sacy) nearly became extinct after phylloxera, but it maintains a stronghold in the upper Loire Valley appellation of Saint-Pourçain, where a few committed producers continue to showcase it in 'varietal' bottlings. If you're a lover of racy, mineral-driven whites (like Chablis or Sancerre), this is one to add to your list!"

SOMM
SELECT

COUNTRY *France*

REGION *Loire Valley*

SUB-REGION *Saint-Pourçain*

VARIETAL *Tressallier (a.k.a Sacy) 100%*

ALCOHOL *12.5%*

OAK *None*

SOIL *Alluvial*

FARMING *Sustainable*

SERVICE TEMPERATURE *45°F*

GLASSWARE *All-Purpose Whites*

DRINKING WINDOW *Now-2024*

DECANTING *15-30 Minutes*

PAIRING [*Halibut w/ Lemon-Caper Sauce*](#)