



# Viré-Clessé

## Beyond the Textbook Series

This series explores how key wine styles and grape varieties from around the world are evolving beyond their classic textbook definitions.

### Viré-Clessé

The appellation achieved recognition in 1998 and was launched a year later. It is the first appellation Village to be formed from outstanding terroirs within the AOC Mâcon Villages. Viré and Clessé are two communes in southern Bourgogne lying between Tournus and Mâcon.

The appellation consists of two hill-slopes running North-South between the valleys of the Bourbonne and the Mouge. The rocks are fossiliferous Bajocien limestones and Jurassic strata of marly-limestone. Other soils at the foot of the slopes are clays containing sandstone pebbles known as 'chailles'. They are well-drained and East-facing. Also found here are soils containing white limestone pebbles typical of the Mâconnais and known as 'cray'.

### 1. Viré-Clessé 'Vielles Vignes' 2022, Christophe Cordier

Combining the domaine and its negociant arm, Christophe Cordier presides over 30-odd hectares over a number of village appellations in the greater Mâconnais, including Pouilly-Fuissé. An impressively high-tech winery includes a gravity bottling facility and a raft of high-quality large French oak casks which are coopered off-site but toasted under Christophe's supervision. A new cellar built in the village of Fuissé completed for the 2012 harvest has been fitted out with more large foudres for fermenting and storing wine, as well as more space for 500, 350 and 228 litre barrels which will allow Christophe to extend the ageing of wines like Mâcon Milly, a wine from a cool spot that benefits from extra time in wood on its lees to develop and open out the flavours and aromas.

Cordier's Viré-Clessé is made from 40-year-old vines from village of Viré, with grapes bought in from a mixture of winegrowers, some of which practise biodynamic viticulture. Using 300lt barrels, 10% of which are new, the lees are also stirred for added body.

<https://www.domainecordier.com/en/>

## 2. Domaine Guillemot-Michel, Viré-Clessé Quintaine 2022

This tiny biodynamic six-hectare estate, next to the village of Clessé in southern Burgundy, has been owned and run by Pierrette and Marc Guillemot since 1985.

The small biodynamic vineyard is planted on the clay and limestone slopes between Mâcon and Tournus, and benefits from the Quintaine commune's excellent microclimate, with high temperatures from its sunny exposure being moderated by the nearby river Saône. The vines, which have an average age of 50 years and produce low yields of 40-50hl/ha, are planted to a density of 7-8,000 vines/ha, through the middle of which run herb beds that house insects needed to fight off common vine pests. The grapes are all harvested by hand.

No oak is used in the winery; the grapes are just pressed gently, in whole bunches, using the pneumatic press, and then fermented in epoxy-lined cement tanks using only natural yeasts and with no chaptalisation before ageing on their lees until being bottled in the spring.

Just one wine is made – it was known as Bourgogne Les Raverettes, but after some local politics and changes to classification requirements, it has been allowed to be called Viré-Clessé since 2010. The grapes are harvested ripe, about 13.5%, and the resulting wine is rich and powerful but not top heavy. It sometimes is slightly honeyed in character.

<https://www.domaineguillemotmichel.net/en>

## 3. Viré-Clessé 'Cuvée Tradition E.J. Thevenet', Domaine de la Bongran 2012

Based in the village of Quintaine – a hamlet between Viré and Clessé, by Jean Thévenet and his son Gautier. They pick later than many of their neighbours, producing a richer style of Chardonnay. The wines are naturally generous and full-bodied, but with incredible concentration and amazing freshness.

The “dry” Cuvée E.J. Thévenet (previously known as Cuvée Tradition) has a touch of residual sugar (normally between 2 and 4g/l). This meant that for several years that the wine had to be declassified to Mâcon-Villages, as Viré-Clessé was – until 2003 – only permitted to have up to 2g/l residual sugar.

They use a Coquard press to gently extract the juice and keep the fruit's delicate aromatics. The must then ferments incredibly slowly with indigenous yeasts, taking up to two years. The wine stays on its fine lees, giving the wines a viscous texture, while the white marl soil lends them minerality and acidity. Despite the wines' richness, there's no oak at all here, with only stainless steel tanks in the winery.

The estate produces two other wines: the Cuvée Levroulée is an off-dry style (typically with around 18g/l residual sugar), only made in exceptional years with part-botrytised Chardonnay; the Cuvée Botrytis is a stunning sweet wine, made with botrytised fruit when the vintage conditions allow it.

<http://www.bongran.com/>

## WSG Lives

We have just had a great webinar on this appellation from Robin Kick MW. You can find it on the studio page here:

- <https://www.winescholarguild.com/studio#/item/3446/vire-clesse-robin-kick-mw>

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