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15 Top-Rated Loire Reds

New reviews of diverse red wines from the Loire Valley of France

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Tasting Highlights bring the best wines from our editors' most recent tastings to WineSpectator.com members.

With autumn here, vinous thoughts turn to red wine—wines to match with heartier fare. But that doesn't necessarily mean you have to choose from only big, powerful reds. There are lighter, fresher-styled versions from cool climates, such as France's Loire Valley, which marry well with food.

In the Loire, Cabernet Franc is the lead red grape, and in strong vintages like 2009, it delivers ripe cherry and currant fruit, while still keeping its tangy olive and tobacco profile. Both Domaine de Pallus and Couly-Dutheil check in here with outstanding Chinons.

There's plenty of diversity as well, with bottlings of Côt (the local name for Malbec), Gamay (better known as the lead grape in Beaujolais) and Pinot Noir, all delivering their textbook flavors, with light, racy, fresh acidity.

The Loire remains a treasure trove of value too: Most of the new releases reviewed here check in at just \$20 or less per bottle.

Whether you're grilling salmon on a cedar plank for two or baking cassoulet for 20, Loire reds are ideal food wines that deliver a change of pace.

DOMAINE DE PALLUS Chinon 2009 *Score: 92 | \$45*

A frankly toasty, modern style, with vanilla and coffee notes up front. Yet they soon give way, with ample cherry and currant confiture flavors emerging, followed by a graphite note that underlies the finish for balance. Lengthy, with fine definition and pure fruit in reserve. Best from 2012 through 2015. 50 cases imported. —*J.M.*

COULY-DUTHEIL Chinon Clos de l'Echo 2009 *Score: 91 | \$42*

Ripe and rounded, with delicious cassis, plum and blackberry fruit flavors guided by finely beaded acidity and a refreshing tobacco note on the finish, which has subtle persistence. Drink now through 2014. 250 cases imported. —*J.M.*

DOMAINE DE PALLUS Chinon Les Pensées de Pallus 2009 *Score: 91 | \$22*

Concentrated, with black currant, fig and crushed cherry fruit, but also racy, as a mouthwatering iron note cut through this, backed by lively tobacco, juniper and olive notes on the finish. Drink now through 2014. 1,200 cases imported. —*J.M.*

JEAN-FRANCOIS MÉRIEAU Malbec Touraine Cent Visages 2008 *Score: 90 | \$20*

Dark and brooding up front, with mulled plum, black currant and fig notes liberally laced with espresso, roasted game and charcoal. This has heft, but turns sleek through the finish, with well-embedded acidity. Should stretch out more with cellaring. Drink now through 2014. 500 cases imported. —*J.M.*

GUY SAGET Chinon Marie de Beauregard 2009 *Score: 90 | \$18*

Offers modern-style toast, with dark cocoa and graphite notes up front, but a core of sweet plum, cassis and bitter cherry notes, with smoldering tobacco and tapenade hints on the back end, keep this nicely grounded. Drink now through 2013. 600 cases imported. —*J.M.*

HENRY MARIONNET Touraine Première Vendange 2010 *Score: 89 | \$19*

Fresh and racy, with a lovely violet note running through the core of crushed cherry and blackberry fruit. The long, mineral-edged finish hangs on nicely. Gamay. Drink now. 30 cases imported. —*J.M.*

HENRY MARIONNET Gamay Touraine Domaine de la Charmoise 2010 *Score: 88 | \$15*

Ripe and direct, with a nice sappy edge to the currant and blackberry fruit, laced with lively spice notes. Mineral tang adds length on the finish. Drink now. 110 cases imported. —*J.M.*