

How can the prejudice against muscadet be overcome? The answer is simple: drink it. But choose carefully, invest in quality (even the poshest is exceptional value for money) and consider it in partnership with far more than a plate of oysters.

Chantal Lieubeau, whose husband and son are responsible for the wine I recommended last week (Sainsbury's Taste the Difference muscadet) and a range of other bottles which stretch up to the very fine cru communaux standard, has the right approach.

Twice each year there's a big and happy tasting event at the Lieubeau winery just south of Nantes, where the family's wines are paired with a six-course menu of dishes as demanding as pumpkin and mussel soup, green asparagus and avocado tartare, or chicken seasoned with curry and ginger served on leaves of rice paper with seasonal vegetables.

It's an effective and very popular way, says Lieubeau, of showing off the different styles of muscadet and proving their versatility.

Here, Doug Wregg of eclectic wine importer Les Caves de Pyrène is doing something similar. He's the wine man in the team behind the new Loire-themed restaurant the Green Man & French Horn in St Martin's Lane, Covent Garden (an initiative which complements the much-enjoyed Terroirs just a short stroll away).

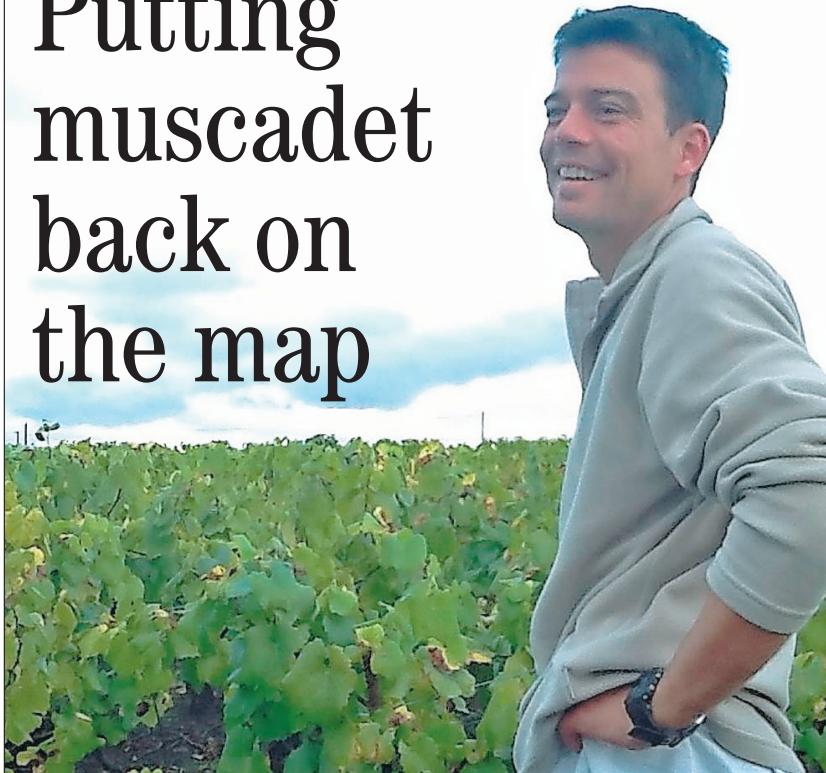
Varied soils

Wines from two more of the muscadet Sèvre-et-Maine growers I visited last month are on the new restaurant's list, ready to pair with a menu which follows the Loire from source to mouth. And you can buy them and others from Domaines Jo Landron or Luneau-Papin direct from Les Caves (01483 554750 or shop@lescaves.co.uk).

Jo Landron now farms all his vines biodynamically, but with none of the beyond-belief evangelism of some extremist practitioners. "I think that is why this year I have had such quality," he says simply. His understanding of the varied soils of his different plots is quite remarkable, and as a geology teacher he's inspirational. A bag of rock fragments now sits on my kitchen table, to illustrate terroir to muscadet virgins.

Tasting his wines expands the lesson. You couldn't ask for a more pleasurable

Putting muscadet back on the map



■ Jeremie Huchet, guardian of the 98-year-old vines

one, from stony, crisp, tingly fruited Amphibolite Nature 2011 (£13) to impressively complex, richer Le Fief du Breuil 2010 (£15.50) where the appellation's characteristic freshness lingers on and on.

Terroir rules too at Luneau-Papin, where Pierre-Marie Luneau is the ninth generation to tend the vineyards. The family's approach has changed little over the years, avoiding the mass use of chemicals which characterised the latter part of the 20th century, tilling the soil traditionally and harvesting by hand.

Here, the bottles opened went back to 1999, the great L d'Or from vines whose roots dig deep into granite and gneiss – a muscadet which ages spectacularly well. The current vintage – 2002, still with years of life – is £19.50 at Les Caves, where the Luneau-Papin choice begins with bright and enjoyable Folle Blanche 2011, £9.50. Another wine for ageing is the magnificent

cru communal Excelsior from Goulaine schist (2007, £16.75).

Last stop on my brief tour was to meet the 98-year-old vines of Clos les Montys, another schist-based vineyard above Goulaine marsh. Despite the rain, vigneron Jeremie Huchet was smiling. The grapes were safely gathered, and 2012 would be "a great, great vintage – sensational". The fine, stoney Montys cuvée is one which sadly doesn't yet reach the UK, but there's a happy introduction in Domaine de la Templerie at the Wine Society (2010, £5.75).

Just hope that more of Huchet's wines follow it here, the sea-salty La Breteche, for example, or the long-lived cru Chateau-Thebaud. I drank the 2002 vintage with some of his winemaker neighbours in the cellar where it matures so deliciously. There were murmurs of approval all round.

Charming, handsome and food's good too

Behind Briciole's attractive exterior lies high-quality cuisine and cheerful service

Adandy. Do I consider myself to be a dandy? What do you think about it? Would you say I'm a dandy? I only ask because over the past few weeks, by way of publicising my new novel (entitled *England's Lane*, since you press me) I have done quite a few interviews for various papers and magazines, and this singular word has arisen more than once. Maybe I am a dandy – who's to say? I certainly must seem so when compared with how the majority of younger men choose to disport themselves. While women increasingly are making the effort, the chaps seem to me to have been tricked out for decades in the same closely mown and chopped-up hair, T-shirts bearing witless slogans and jarring iconography, ill-fitting trousers and unspeakable shoes. Even within an older age bracket, the only men who wear suits and ties are obliged to (estate agents, accountants, Kray-type hitmen) and because they resent this obligation, the suits and ties are very largely horrible for the reason that they would far prefer to be in polo shirts, V-necks and button-downs (all with silly logos), chinos, loafers and carrying, God help us, 'man-bags' – along with anything else that will transform them into one great fluffy happy weekend down-time and blandly vanilla bundle of smartly casual mess.

So imagine my delight when my old friend

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