



Dominic Rippon is author of *Dominic's France: The Cool Climate*, a narrative guidebook to the vineyards of northern France. He had a stint making wine in the Loire Valley before working as Senior Wine Buyer for a large UK importer. Dominic set up his own wine merchant business Strictly Wine in 2009. Contact him via [www.strictlywine.co.uk](http://www.strictlywine.co.uk)



## Freewheeling in Savoie

A *vélo électrique* proved an ideal way for **Dominic Rippon** to explore the exquisite hillside vineyards near Chambéry

On a bright summer's day I found myself at Chambéry Métropole *vélostation*, listening impatiently to the list of safety instructions; unable to concentrate on anything other than wondering which of the dozen contraptions on display would be mine for the day. There was one with the word 'Sporting' emblazoned on the side. It was worth asking.

I have used electric bicycles a few times, hitherto always with companions, and it divides the population into those who are unnerved by the whinny and tug of the motor, and those who relish the chance to re-find their inner ten-year-old self. I was in the latter camp as 'Sporting' and I lurched off towards the *veloroute* leading to the vineyards south-east of Chambéry.

As the suburbs thinned out and the hills began, the *vélo électrique* came to life; sensing the effort required, its motor propelled me uphill into the most southerly of Savoie's vineyards, eating up the kilometres without the need for regular oxygen breaks. I arrived in the village of Apremont sooner than anticipated, with a final shunt up the Coteau des Belettes to Jean-François Maréchal's family estate.

Apremont is one of 15 superior *cru* villages that are allowed to append their names to the Vin de Savoie AOP (the new *appellation d'origine protégée*). The Savoie-

Apremont *appellation* is for dry white wines, made mostly from the jacquère grape, which gives spritzy lemon-scented blends when grown on the village's clay-limestone soils.

"When I was 14," Jean-François exclaimed, "I already knew that I wanted to make wine in Apremont." So it was that he began planting vines on the higher slopes of his parents' farm. Today, he owns ten hectares of vineyard, shared between the jacquère, altesse and marsanne white grapes, with a little gamay and pinot noir for the production of rosé, and mondeuse for red.

Jean-François's cosy estate and *chambre d'hôte* perch majestically above the vines of Apremont and the valley beneath; the fashionable vineyards of Chignin and Chignin-Bergeron hug the lower slopes of the mountains to the east. After a bracing *apéritif*, I bade Jean-François farewell and whizzed downhill towards Lac de Saint-André, the bike's motor breaking my descent by stealing back some of the energy used for the earlier climb. I arrived at Restaurant Le Saint-André, on the lake's eastern shore, just in time for a fortifying *plat du jour*, washed down with a refreshing glass of gamay. Then I continued east towards Chignin.

The vineyards of Chignin are unmistakable, even from several kilometres, peppered as they are with the

PHOTOGRAPHS: DOMINIC RIPPON; CHARLIE FRASER-HOPWELL





ABOVE: Dominic on his *vélo électrique* in the Savoie vineyards: LEFT: Lac de Saint-André and Mont Granier

ruins of the village's medieval fortifications. This is a historic wine *commune* with a warm micro-climate; shielded by mountains from the cool northerly winds, farmers are able to grow almond and fig trees alongside their vines. Uniquely in Savoie, the village of Chignin boasts two separate *crus*: Chignin, for the production of dry white wines from the jacquère grape, and Chignin-Bergeron, for fuller-bodied, longer-lived whites made from the roussanne, more commonly found in the torrid conditions of the Rhône Valley.

"The roussanne grape has historic pedigree in our vineyards," Jean-François Quénard explained when I arrived at his Chignin estate. "These are south-west-facing slopes that drain well: perfect conditions for ripening the roussanne."

First on the tasting menu was his 'entry-level' Chignin, a notably richer, riper wine than the Apremont I had sampled earlier in the day. Next was a single-vineyard Chignin, 'Anne de la Biguerne', made from a parcel of gnarly old jacquère vines. Its flavours were intense, tight and mineral, with a delicious hint of white pepper spice.

When the Chignin-Bergerons were uncorked, the contrast with the previous two wines was remarkable: aromas of peach and passion fruit leapt from the glass; on the palate, the wine was lower in acidity than the more citrusy jacquère, but its silky richness filled every corner of my mouth.

After a tour of the Quénard estate, I kicked off back down the hill to rejoin the cycle path through the valley to Chambéry. The battery warning light began to flash and I settled into a leisurely, economic rhythm. As the late afternoon sun made silhouettes of the mountains above Apremont and locals returned from a day's lakeside languor, my thoughts were not only of the day's journey, but of when I might return to these alluring vineyards of Savoie. 🍷

#### ESTATE DETAILS

##### Domaine Quénard

Jean-Pierre & Jean-François, Le Villard, 73800 Chignin  
Tel: (Fr) 4 79 28 08 29, [www.jfquenard.com](http://www.jfquenard.com)

**Choice wine:** Chignin-Bergeron 'Cuvée Comme Avant'  
**Price at the estate:** €18

**Taste:** Vinified 'as in the olden days' in the large *demi-muid* barrels, this is a rich, fragrant wine with complex flavours of quince, honey and dried apricot

**Best drunk with:** Spicy Asian cuisine, pan-fried foie gras or local Tomme cheeses

**Visit Savoie:** [www.savoie-mont-blanc.com](http://www.savoie-mont-blanc.com)

**Vélo électrique hire:** [www.chambery-metropole.fr](http://www.chambery-metropole.fr)

## WINE

# Wines of the month

Master of Wine  
**Sally Easton**

gives us her pick of the best wines on the market this month. Whether you are after a midweek tippie or something special, she can help you to make the right choice



#### SNAP IT UP

##### Réserve de la Saurine Rouge 2011, Vin de Pays du Gard

This gives pretty much everything you would expect from a good-value and eminently drinkable southern Rhône blend of mostly grenache with carignan and syrah. Technical winemaking brings out the supple, sappy, juicy strawberry and red berry fruit, and keeps the few tannins light and smooth. There is a bit of gentle spiciness for added interest, helping to elevate this from innocuous quaffing to quite a respectable glass of wine.

£6.49, Marks and Spencer  
Tel: 0845 302 1234  
[www.marksandspencer.com](http://www.marksandspencer.com)

#### WEEKEND TREAT

##### Maison Albert Bichot, Domaine Long-Depaquit, Chablis 2011, Burgundy

There's a lot of chablis for the price in this bottle. Its nose is typically lean and oatmeal, with a magnolia fragrance. Up to eight months' maturation on the lees in stainless steel gives it that fresh-creamy note alongside the citrus core of lemon and ripe grapefruit. The palate is linear with tangible richness, the steeliness notwithstanding, and

the length is promising. This is a good example of a pretty classic chablis from one of the bigger vineyard owners in this wine region.

£13, Oddbins  
Tel: 0800 328 2323  
[www.oddbins.com](http://www.oddbins.com)

#### TIME TO CELEBRATE

##### Vincent Girardin, Saint-Aubin Premier Cru Les Perrières 2008, Burgundy

At the opposite stylistic end of Burgundy from the chablis comes this oak-fermented and matured wine from the frequently under-rated Saint-Aubin *appellation*, which lies in the valley just behind Puligny and Chassagne-Montrachet. Classic aromas of meal and white nuts with lemon toast fill the nose, and these are followed by a sweet, mouth-filling texture of well-balanced roasted nut and baked lemon flavours. This wine shows some real sophistication and is a tasty example of the good results that Girardin is achieving by reducing the impact of oak on his wines.

£25, Laithwaites  
Tel: 0845 194 7720  
[www.laithwaites.co.uk](http://www.laithwaites.co.uk)