

In the idyllic town of Clisson on the River Sèvre, medieval France meets renaissance Italy. Its castle and 15th-century market hall are surrounded by terracotta roofs reminiscent of Tuscany, a legacy of early 19th-century sculptor François-Frédéric Lemot, who had studied in Rome and designed the neo-classical mansion [Domaine de la Garenne Lemot](#), now a museum and sculpture garden.



▲ The Italianate town of Clisson is just north of the Vendée in the Pays de la Loire. Photograph: Alamy



We only had a couple of hours in Clisson but it's a lovely spot. It's the last place on Earth you'd expect to come across a gathering of heavy metal fans, but visit in late June and you'll spot posses of leather-clad rockers descending on a site just outside the town for [Hellfest](#), a three-day hard rock extravaganza. Local winemakers take the chance to set up stalls and sell gallons of wine to 50,000 thirsty metalheads. It's such a fixture that there's a statue of Lemmy from Motörhead on a roundabout next to the site.

Among the winegrowers who profit from Hellfest are the Paquereau family of [Domaine de l'Épinay](#), who, unusually for the area, also produce red, rosé and sparkling wines as well as muscadet, the predominant grape of the Nantes area. We stopped for a tasting and to raise a glass to a region perfect for stepping back in time, whether it's on a small, sleepy island that's changed little in generations, or at a vast show with state-of-the-art special effects.

Article paru dans THE GUARDIAN en septembre 2019