

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

July-August 2012

Number Forty

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View From the Cellar is published bi-monthly by John Gilman, who is solely responsible for its content. Electronic subscriptions are available for \$120 per year (\$220 for two years), available at www.viewfromthecellar.com. Inquiries may also be emailed to john@viewfromthecellar.com. Copyright 2012 by John B. Gilman, all rights reserved. Content may be utilized by members of the wine trade and/or media as long as either [View From the Cellar](http://www.viewfromthecellar.com) or John Gilman are fully credited.

THE ANNUAL CHAMPAGNE AND SPARKLING WINE REPORT



Reims beautifully-restored Gothic cathedral- one of the non-bubbly attractions the city has to offer.

I managed to spend two days tasting in Reims during my month-long swing through Europe this spring, hoping to catch up with a few of the Grandes Marques that I had not visited before and a few of whose wines I do not always see with any regularity here in New York. I would have loved to have had more time in Champagne on this trip, as it is a great place to visit and there are so many cellars worth visiting and tasting at these days. Correctly assuming that my first visits to these estates would include long cellar tours and introductory presentations about winemaking philosophies and the like, I did not pack the schedule as densely here as I would normally do in other regions, so my cellar visits were restricted to stops at Louis Roederer, Lanson, Gosset, Henriot, and of course, another stopover at Krug. I had left a slot open for a visit to Charles Heidsieck and Piper-Heidsieck as well (as both properties are really making superb wines right now), but scheduling conflicts with the maison forced a postponement of that visit, so I had to content myself with these five visits. It was a great opportunity to recharge the batteries a bit after long tasting stretches already on the trip in Burgundy and Germany, prior to tackling the Bordeaux *En Primeur* festivities, and I dearly wished I had scheduled a few more days here during the trip. I found myself craving Champagne every day in Bordeaux after my stopover in Reims, as it was the perfect palate repair wine after long, hard days slogging through

the young and very tannic 2011 clarets. Happily, most places I stayed at on the Bordeaux leg of the trip were already aware of how well Champagne goes after arduous days of tasting and had their cellars well-stocked for tannin-fatigued journalists.

I have listed the cellar visits I made during this couple of days in the region first in the article that follows, with the houses listed in the order that they were visited on this trip. I have omitted my visit to Krug from this itinerary, as I have already written a pretty comprehensive piece on the history of this great estate a few issues ago. I arrived back in the states after the dozen days spent in Bordeaux at the end of the trip ready to get started writing about Champagne, but had a few other pieces to finish up first and have had to push my annual piece on the beautiful wines of the region back to this issue as a result. However, the editorial schedule at least allowed me to work through samples of new releases here in the US market in a more leisurely fashion than has been the case in the last couple of years, as I started collecting samples in April and have had the opportunity to taste most of the wines covered below in smaller tastings over a longer period of time, which has allowed many of the wines to unfold nicely with aeration and show more character than they may have done in larger tastings conducted at a far brisker pace to meet deadlines (I know, when have I ever let missing a deadline impose on my tasting schedule?). What I noticed is that there were an awful lot of high scoring bubbly in my lineups for tastings over the last couple of months, which I would argue suggests that the renaissance in Champagne continues unabated and that the quality here has never been better than it is today- something that obviously cannot be said about all the major wine-producing regions scattered around the globe, as it seems to me that there are an awful lot of winemakers that are utterly adrift stylistically these days. But, the Champagne region is on a serious hot streak and one can only hope that this is the tip of the iceberg and things will only continue to improve here.

In the last few months, I have read an interesting series of articles in [The World of Fine Wine](#) on the Champagne region by Robert Walters, who makes some interesting points about the historical genesis of the Champagne region as a source for sparkling wine and the rather minor role that *terroir* has traditionally played in this region that has historically been dominated by négociant houses. While many of his points are well-taken, his conclusion that Champagne is by far the most manipulated and unnatural wine of the world- at least outside of the hands of the most committed small, grower-récoltant producers such as Anselme Selosse of Champagne Jacques Selosse- strikes me as a bit myopic and unsupported by the facts. While Champagne- as it has been produced by the Grandes Marques since Champagne's real birth as a sparkling wine *par excellence* in the latter half of the nineteenth century and its ascension to the throne as the world's preeminent sparkling wine in the twentieth- has been indeed a wine that emphasized blending different wines and championing brands over *terroir*, this is far from unique to Champagne, and this phenomenon can be seen replicated in several other of the wine world's most prestigious regions. One does not have to be much of a wine historian to see the immediate parallels with the historical evolution of Champagne and that of Bordeaux- again a region where blending and brand identity have been the cornerstones of the *Bordelais'* success over the same historical time frame. This is particularly true with the grand châteaux on the Left Bank in Bordeaux, though the *Bordelais* have been better than most Grandes Marques at purchasing their vineyard land, rather than relying on contracts with independent grape growers to supply the raw materials. But, beyond the question of outright vineyard ownership, the parallels between the

evolution of Champagne and Bordeaux are quite striking and Monsieur Walters' failure to recognize the similarities between these two regions calls into question his conclusions about Champagne's uniqueness as a manipulated wine devoid of *terroir* outside a small circle of recent growers-récoltants. Beyond the obvious similarities with Bordeaux, the Champenois' reliance on blending and purchasing grapes or juice from small growers also mirrors strongly pre-war Burgundy, when négociants there also had great control over the market and many were far from hesitant to practice the art of blending.

Today, it seems to me to be quite fashionable to blast Champagne for its lack of reliance on viticultural excellence to act as the crucible of great wine production- which, in fact, is the crux of Monsieur Walters' argument against the inclusion of Champagne as a "truly great wine" as it has been crafted over the last century by the large merchants of the region. While I would be the last one to defend the viticultural practices that have been standard operating procedure in the Champagne region in the last half century- the vineyards can often look like a lunar landscape in the winter and it does not take a doctorate in biology to sense that this is far from the healthiest vine-growing region in the world- Champagne is far from singular in this regard and to cite the *Champenois* as the worst proponents of industrialized grape growing is simply inaccurate. The reality is that the awakening of a true viticultural awareness is only a very recent historical phenomenon (not to mention, far from universal) and a great many other regions are as much interested in paying lip service to the concepts of organic or holistic approaches to viticulture as they are actually committed to making wholesale adjustments to their grape growing regimens. Walk around in some of the most famous vineyards in Bordeaux or California these days and one will see that the *Champenois* have clearly not cornered the market on industrialized agricultural approaches to grape growing, and only twenty years ago, this was equally true in Burgundy as well. One needs to recognize that the viticultural pendulum is only now beginning to swing back towards a healthier respect for nature and *terroir* and not crucify the big business regions such as Champagne and Bordeaux for their failure to embrace this hopeful trend with more alacrity. But, given the very obvious fact that "great wine" has been made in many regions around the globe with less than ideal viticultural practices over the last century should be sufficient to stifle any condemnation of the ultimate quality of Champagne based primarily on its less than ideal viticultural practices. Is there room for viticultural improvement in Champagne- you are damn right there is! This is self-evident. But, one needs to recognize that positive movement is very much afoot now in the vineyards of Champagne and a decade or so down the road, the *Champenois* (and hopefully, the *Bordelais* as well) will have begun to catch up with the more enlightened viticultural practices that are starting to so firmly take root in regions such as Burgundy and the Loire Valley.

Monsieur Walters writes that we should all concur that Champagne is the "most heavily manipulated of all prestige wines", and that for "most Champagne, much of the wine's aroma, flavor and texture come from the winemaking process, rather than from the grapes themselves." Again, the singularity of Champagne in this regard is not particularly evident to someone who tastes regularly wines as disparate as Georges Duboeuf's Beaujolais Nouveau, Right Bank masterpieces from the likes of Stephan Derenoncourt's consultancy or any of the vast ocean of California Cult cabernets. But, beyond the very obvious fact that the global wine world today is awash in heavily manipulated wines, one really has to question the assumption that this broad and damning brush stroke is really applicable to "most Champagne". I suppose if one simply

wants to look at the statistics and count millions of bottles, there is a greater quantity of plonk such as Veuve Clicquot Yellow Label or even poorer fare out there than there are superb wines of character in Champagne, but I would strongly argue that in terms of serious addresses, where Champagne is being produced today that finds its flavors and aromatics elsewhere than in the magic shopping bag of winemaking additives, that the numbers are greater than they have ever been and that these numbers are growing with each passing year. And this phenomenon is not solely to be found in the surging number of high class Grower-Récoltants, but is also to be found under the large and ample architecture of many of the most famous Grandes Marques as well. Rather than damn Champagne, as Robert Walters does, it strikes me as far more interesting to simply imagine a Champagne landscape where healthier vineyard practices and more restrained yields are the norm, rather than the exception, and how this change will positively affect the overall quality of “most Champagne”. For, it seems very clear to me that those changes in the vineyards are now very much on their way in this region and it will not be long in the coming.

The other chief objection Monsieur Walters has to Champagne as a “great wine” is its history as a blended wine, arguing (perhaps with some historical accuracy) that blending has been championed in this region as a means to make a virtue of necessity for the négociants that have long dominated the market. While of course there is some truth to this proposition, it also presupposes that a non-blended wine is by definition superior to a blended wine- the assumption being that the underlying *terroir* can speak most clearly through a non-blended wine. As readers are already well aware, I am a rather strident proponent of *terroir*, but I am not sure that I would by definition rank non-blended wines above blended wines. There are plenty of examples of non-blended wines that show absolutely no *terroir*, and many blended wines which, if not speaking to a specific *terroir* per se, do strongly speak of their place of origin in the wine cosmos. Take for instance Château Haut-Brion- a blended wine par excellence (at least up until the very recent past, I am getting a little worried about what is going on here in the last few vintages!) that has been sourced from different vineyard plots over the centuries and produced from different blends of grapes as fashionable tastes have changed over the years, and yet it is pretty hard not to come down on the side of blended wines being equally compelling to non-blended wines if Haut-Brion is the example we choose to look at. It just strikes me as simplistic to damn Champagne for its history as a blended wine, as there are some consistently brilliant bubbliques that are produced from a wide variety of grape varietals and village sources in the Champagne region- Krug Grande Cuvée immediately comes to mind as the paradigm of a prodigiously great, blended wine- and one needs to take a bit more time for reflection about the relative merits of blending versus non-blending in Champagne before coming to such a broad brush stroke of a judgment. Certainly a blended Champagne, from different vineyards and even sub-regions of Champagne has a very different character than a single vineyard, single varietal Champagne, but is it really self-evident that one style is superior to the other? I think not and would be happy to cite examples *ad nauseum* to that effect if it were really necessary.

What is abundantly clear in 2012 is that change is on the move in Champagne as a whole and the quality of wines here is rising with each passing year. While some marketing departments in some of the biggest houses are still stuck in the “luxury goods” mentality of the recent past (and there are certainly still more than a few Grandes Marques that continue to seemingly assume that proper brand management is preferable to producing higher quality wines- the bad example set by Veuve Clicquot in the last couple of decades is only the most

obvious manifestation of this trend- does anyone besides me remember how truly superb the wines were at Clicquot before they became so pervasive in the global market?), the momentum is unmistakable in the Champagne region for wines of ever better quality at all levels of the bottling hierarchy, and each year that finds me preparing this report finds more new producers impressing in my tastings and more “old school” houses finding their way back from the wilderness of marketing and back into the fold of producing high quality wines. Just witness the dramatic surge upwards in quality at a house like Piper-Heidsieck in the last several years- in my opinion, once one of the biggest offenders of putting the vast majority of their efforts into the marketing of the brand, rather than focusing on the quality of the wines- and now, quickly becoming one of the strongest of the Grandes Marques and getting better and better with each passing vintage. Success stories such as Piper’s (perhaps more a reality with the wines today than with the perception of the marketplace, but that will come as a bit more distance is placed between the rather indifferent wines of the ‘80s and ‘90s here and the reality of the truly superb wines crafted by the house today) are ample evidence that there is plenty of excitement and progress being made across the board in Champagne- not just in the small cellars of the top Grower-Récoltants.

Not that I have lost any enthusiasm for top Grower Champagne, which I find getting stronger and stronger with each passing vintage as well. This is a story of the water level climbing across the region in Champagne and virtually everybody’s boat is rising with the tide. It is just a moment of great opportunity for lovers of Champagne, as there has never been so many outstanding and varied possibilities to add to the cellar and grace the table. To go back again to Robert Walters’ series in The World of Fine Wine, he seems to equate the top Grower Champagne bottlings with top Burgundy, but fails to make the equally logical connection between the Grandes Marques and top Châteaux in Bordeaux. It seems to me that there is room for excellence on both models in the world of Champagne, and we can find great pleasure as wine lovers both with the very specific characteristics of individual *terroir*-based wines and with the exemplary complexity found in superbly blended bubbly as well. Champagne is far from a zero-sum game, and if one tastes with an open mind, it is very easy to appreciate that both non-blended and blended wines in the region are surging upwards in quality at the right addresses. For that is the key- as it is in any fine wine region- to recognize that one masters the intricacies of *terroir* only after one has found the right producer, and while having access to the best vineyard sites is priceless, this does not mean that everyone who has vines in the greatest *terroirs* really has any clue of how to make great wine there. Monsieur Walters frequently cites Burgundy and its *terroir*-based classifications as his paradigm, but he neatly overlooks just how much crappy Burgundy is still made from some of the most exalted pieces of earth in that region, as all Chambertin soil may be created equal (though this is debatable as well), but not all Chambertin producers are created equally. Champagne is no different than any of these other fine wine regions, find out who is making the best wines and then you have the keys to the kingdom at your disposal. How they do this is as much a matter of personal vision (or economic possibility) as anything else, and some will do so from great single vineyard bottlings and others will do it by skillfully blending from a multi-colored palette of region and grape variations to create their masterpieces- one approach is not better than the other, simply different.

In any event, the following wines have all been tasted in the last few months. The report starts with short estate profiles of the Grandes Marques whom I visited in my quick stopover in Champagne on my way to Bordeaux. For these producers, I have listed all the wines that I have

tasted from the houses together in their respective sections, even if some of the wines remarked upon were tasted here in New York either prior to or subsequent to my visit to Reims. Following the short domaine profiles, I have listed the notes here by type of wine, starting with non-Champagne Sparkling Wines, then Extra Brut and Brut Zero bottlings and their thematic variations, Sec and Demi-Sec Cuvées, Non-Vintage Blanc de Blancs, Non-Vintage Blanc de Noirs, Non-Vintage Brut, Non-Vintage Brut Rosé, Vintage-Dated Blanc de Blanc, Blended Vintage-Dated Bottlings and Vintage-Dated Rosés. I have not included any Spanish Cava in this issue, as I intend to write an article in the next issue that will focus more fully on this superb category of sparkling wine- hoping to share some of the insights I gained on my recent trip to Catalunya on just how good Cava can be from the right producer. Within each subset, the wines are list alphabetically by producer. As the notes will attest, there is an awful lot of beautifully made Champagne and Sparkling Wine out there right now and the market has never had such an abundance of riches as it does at the present time. Now, is indeed the time to be building up the Champagne corner of one's cellar!

Before launching into this lengthy report, I should take a moment to discuss the developing issue of disclosing disgorgement dates on non-vintage bottlings of Champagne. A few wine writers- most notably, Antonio Galloni of [The Wine Advocate](#), have taken a stance that they will not review wines that do not include the date of disgorgement somewhere on the bottle. While I am very much in favor of knowing the date of disgorgement for a particular bottle in my cellar or the sample in front of me, I also completely understand the reluctance of some houses and importers to include this information on the label, as their position is that this will effectively be perceived as an "expiration date" for a certain cuvée by some segments of the consumer market, and it will create difficulties with an older disgorgement date if two different ones are in a market at the same time. For those who are opposed to printing the date of disgorgement on a label for this reason, I think that their fears are quite well-founded and it is not inconceivable that consumers might eventually gravitate solely towards the most recent disgorgement date on bubbly if this information was to be printed on all labels somewhere in the fine print. While knowing the date of disgorgement is indeed very useful, it is really for exactly the opposite reason that less-informed consumers might intuit- that the most recent disgorgement date has to be the most desirable. In fact, the further out the bottle is removed from the date of disgorgement, the better the wine is going to show, at least over the first several years of the wine's availability in the market. For example, If I could pick between a bottle of Bollinger "Speciale Cuvée" non-vintage Brut disgorged in 2009 and one in 2012, I would not hesitate to select the one from 2009, but I suspect that the average consumer would gravitate towards the later-disgorged wine thinking that it would be "fresher" and therefore in some manner "superior". In point of fact, one of the primary reasons to know a date of disgorgement for a particular cuvée is simply to know that it has had the requisite time in bottle to recover after this procedure and snap back into proper balance, as wines tasted too soon after *degorgement* will often seem uncharacteristically sweet on the palate, from not having fully absorbed the *dosage* into the structure of the wine- which in my experience will generally take three or four months out from the *degorgement*.

Not having the date of disgorgement disclosed somewhere on the label is of course a problem if one is trying to ascertain if the bottle sitting on the shelf or on the list of one's wine merchant is the same one that was reviewed in a certain publication, and perhaps "lot numbers"

would be an acceptable way to help identify particular bottlings (such as Jacquesson has adopted for its non-vintage Brut bottlings) for those interested in such things and which would still allow the less well-informed consumers to buy Champagne without having to search out the cuvées that have not passed their “expiration dates”. But, it seems unequivocally too soon in the market today to demand that all producers print the date of disgorgement on the back label of each bottling or risk banishment from certain circles of the wine journalistic universe. Perhaps down the road, when the average consumer of Champagne has a far better understanding of the region and the methods that produce the wines they are contemplating purchasing, then disgorgement dates will be a welcome addition to the information on the back label. But, until educational efforts are undertaken and prove to have some significant traction in the minds of Champagne consumers, it strikes me that an alternative approach such as “lot numbers” would be the most sensible compromise to this question. In the notes that follow, I have tried to provide either dates of disgorgement or lot numbers for wines, where they were either provided by suppliers in their technical background sheets or where they appeared on the back labels. But, I did not insist on this information and do not have this data for every bottle tasted of non-vintage wine.

Before (finally) getting to the meat of this article, I wanted to highlight a couple more top quality Grower Champagnes that were new to me this year (or where the light finally went on and I recognized fully the quality of the wines in question!) and whose wines are certainly of sufficiently beautiful quality to have been included in last year’s list of my favorite Grower-Récoltants. (For new subscribers who have not seen last year’s Champagne feature, you can see the full article in the database under Issue 34 or email me and I can send you the article with the list of my top Grower Champagnes). These superb growers include:

Bérêche et Fils (Ludes- Montagne de Reims)

A small house located in the same village as Ployez-Jacquemart, the Bérêche family owns 9.5 hectares of vineyards throughout the Vallée de Marne and is currently run by the two brothers, Raphaël and Vincent Bérêche, who joined their father, Jean-Pierre in 2004 and 2008 respectively. The family first began estate bottling wines in the early 1950s and stopped selling production off to Grandes Marques in the late 1970s. Today they produce roughly 85,000 bottles per year. The wines are fermented in a combination of older Burgundy casks and stainless steel and do not undergo malolactic fermentation. I only tasted their non-vintage Brut, which was quite simply outstanding and I hope to taste the whole range of their wines in the coming months.

Pierre Brigandat et Fils (Channes- Côte des Bar)

Bertrand Brigandat is the *vigneron* currently in charge of this small family domaine in the Côte des Bar. The Brigandat family exploits 7.5 hectares of vines here, but continues to sell off some of their production to the Grandes Marques. I only tasted a superb example of their Brut NV for this report, but it was of sufficiently impressive enough quality to make me want to taste through the whole range in the near-future. This was a very impressive non-vintage Brut and a great value that is well worth seeking out.

Guy de Chassey (Louvois- Montagne de Reims)

The small estate of Guy de Chassey is located in the grand cru village of Louvois, which lies just to the north of Bouzy and Tauxières-Mutry on the Montagne de Reims. The family owns

9.5 hectares of vines scattered between these three villages, with the plantations split to one quarter chardonnay and three-quarters pinot noir. The family dates its history back to 1804 in the region, when Isidore Ridoux began exploiting vineyards in the area. The house takes its current name from Guy de Chassey, who ran the domaine from the early 1950s until his passing in the early 1990s. Today, the house is run by the sister and brother team of Ingrid and Vincent de Chassey. The wines do not go through malolactic fermentation. I was very impressed with the current releases from this small domaine and I should have included them in last year's list of favorite Grower-Récoltants.

Michel Lorient (Festigny- Vallée de la Marne)

The Lorient family can trace its history as *vignerons* in Festigny back to 1675, but given the lower prices grapes here in the Marne Valley fetched in the 1930s, the Lorient family began estate bottling some of their production at this time. The scion of the family at this time was Germain Lorient, whose son, Henri Lorient and his wife Jeanne began to bottle the entire production from the family's four hectares of vineyards in the early 1950s. Michel Lorient, their son, took over direction of the domaine in 1979 and was joined by his daughter in 2008. Today, the estate encompasses seven hectares of vines, primarily in Festigny and several surrounding villages. Festigny, on the south bank of the Marne is pinot meunier territory and this is primarily what the Lorient family grows, with eighty percent of their production dedicated to this grape and the family making some absolutely stunning wines from this variety. These are some of the most elegant and seamless Grower Champagnes that I have had the pleasure to taste and are well worth searching out in the market.

Moutard Père et Fils or Moutard-Diligent (Buxeuil- Côte des Bars)

The families of Moutard and Diligent can trace their history as *vignerons* here in the Côte de Bars back to 1642. The family first began to produce and sell Champagne in bottle at the start of the twentieth century. Their non-vintage Brut bottlings are aged three years on the lees prior to disgorgement and preparation for the market, with their vintage bottlings often aging far longer prior to *degorgement*. The wines do not undergo malolactic fermentation and are generally fermented and raised in stainless steel. The current release of their Brut NV, which is called "Grande Cuvée" was absolutely stunning and a superb value. Their absolutely stunning non-vintage Brut Rosé is produced by the *saignée* method and is barrel-fermented.

Houses Visited in March of This Year:

Champagne Lanson (Reims)

I had been so impressed with the new releases from Champagne Lanson that I tasted here in New York in January that I made a point of stopping by for a visit at the domaine in Reims on my way from Germany to Bordeaux on my spring trip in the region. While Lanson has been a consistently fine source for age-worthy, non-malolactic Champagne for many generations, with the house tracing its origins back to 1760 and the creation of a Champagne firm by François Delamotte in that year, I have a firm belief that the change in ownership here in the last half dozen years has produced the possibility for a step up in precision and ultimate quality in all the wines produced here from the very good baseline of quality that the house has displayed for many years. The sense of tradition at Lanson runs deep, as the distinctive red cross, moniker of the Order of the Knights of Malta, continues to grace every bottle of Lanson produced here

today- having become the official company logo for this house back in 1798. However, the name of Lanson Père et Fils did not grace the labels of the wines from this house until 1837, as the Delamotte family had partnered with the Lanson family a few years earlier to take advantage of the large vineyard holdings of the Lansons at that time and eventually the house became known as Lanson. Champagne Lanson was owned by the Lanson family for several generations, but in 1976 they decided to sell the estate off and since 2006 it has been part of the group now called Lanson BCC (Boizel Chanoine Champagne), which is the second largest Champagne group behind LVMH. Amongst the other houses that Lanson BCC owns are Philipponnat, De Venoge and Besserat de Bellefon, but there is little doubt that Lanson is the flagship of this quality-oriented group. One of BCC's founders, Philippe Baijot has managed the house since 2006.

Champagne Lanson is probably one of the best-known houses in the region for its full range of bottlings that do not undergo any malolactic fermentation. While I do not really have a preference between non-malo bubbly and those which undergo malolactic fermentation, there is little doubt that I do admire the ability of non-malo Champagne to age long and gracefully in the cellar, and as I am a much bigger fan of mature Champagne at the table, I have a bit of a warm spot in my heart for non-malo producers. Lanson is certainly one of the leading producers in Champagne for non-malo wines and they have long emphasized structured wines built to last. My timing was not ideal for my visit to the house in Reims, as during the Bordeaux leg of my month-long trip through Europe (which started immediately upon my departure from Champagne), Lanson was planning a series of special tastings of very old vintages in the US to celebrate the ability of the house's wines to cellar long and gracefully. While I would have loved to have had the opportunity to taste some of these very old vintages that the estate was showing here in America, I did have the pleasure to spend an afternoon with Georges Blanck, Lanson's Production Director and Assistant Chef de Cave, as well as the house's longtime winemaker, Jean-Paul Gandon. Monsieur Gandon has been part of the Lanson team since 1972, first acting as Vineyard Manager for the house and then adding the responsibilities of Chef de Cave in 1986.

While Lanson is steeped in tradition, it has introduced a number of new cuvées in the last several years. Probably the most important is its new "Extra Age" non-vintage Brut, which was first introduced to the market in 2009. This fine cuvée is given a minimum of five years aging on the lees prior to disgorgement, allowing the non-malo style championed by Lanson to soften and blossom beautifully prior to the wine's arrival around the world. This additional aging gives the wine time to blossom, adding depth, richness and complexity to a wine that is still characterized by the snappy backbone of good acids. I was extremely impressed by the quality of this bottling and find it a superb addition to the Lanson lineup. The success of the Extra Age Brut NV has led to the creation of both an Extra Age Brut Rosé, which was first released in 2011 and starting in April of this year, an Extra Age Blanc de Blancs Brut NV. The house has also added to its lineup of Tête de Cuvées in recent times, augmenting its flagship bottling of Lanson "Noble Cuvée" (first released in the 1979 vintage) with a Noble Cuvée Blanc de Blancs bottling in 1984 and a Noble Cuvée Rosé in 2004. The Lanson roster is soon to be augmented by another new cuvée, a single vineyard bottling of Clos Lanson which hails from a one hectare vineyard planted entirely to chardonnay that sits above the three stories of cellars right outside the main house in the center of Reims. The 2006 vintage will be the first release of Clos Lanson, which is still currently resting on its lees in the Lanson cellars. Lanson's long-time Cellar Master, Jean-Paul Gandon will make the ultimate decision about when the 2006 Clos Lanson will be released, but it is likely

that either in late 2013 or early 2014 will be the first arrival of this new single vineyard wine into the market. I had hoped to have a preview taste of the 2006 Clos Lanson during my visit (as Monsieur Gandon and his team taste the wine with some frequency to check on its evolution and consider its eventual date of release), but it remains a wrapped present under the Christmas tree and we will have to wait for its eventual release to unwrap it and taste the first vintage.



The main entrance to Champagne Lanson on the Rue de Courlancy in Reims.

Another innovation at Lanson in recent times is the house has joined the small number of other producers who are beginning to put the date of disgorgement on the label of all of their wines. Of course, I did not know this when I tasted the lineup of their wines at the end of January, so I do not have disgorgement dates for those bottlings! This is a most welcome new policy at Lanson and one that I hope more Champagne houses will follow in the near future. What one has to keep in mind is that the date of disgorgement is not necessarily useful in terms of knowing how the wine will show in terms of absolute quality, as both recently disgorged old wines and old wines that have been disgorged decades earlier can both be sublime, but rather for consumers to know if a wine has only been very recently disgorged, as Champagne most unequivocally requires some time to recover its equilibrium after “degorgement” and it is important to know if a particular wine really could do with a few more months in the cellar to come back into balance prior to opening. When one tastes a very recently disgorged wine, often the dosage will seem un-integrated in the body of the wine and the bottle will taste unnaturally

sweet as a result. A few months later, this anomaly disappears again as the wine snaps back into balance, and it would be very useful to be able to check the disgorgement dates on the back labels to avoid wasting good bottles that are in this transitory phase post-disgorgement. Probably Lanson has hastened to add disgorgement dates to all of its bottlings due to the fact that it has for some years now offered older vintages for sale, under its “Vintage Collection” series, with all of these older vintages resting in magnums in the cellars and only disgorged as the house receives orders for them- with the date of “degorgement” printed on the back label. I had the pleasure to taste the 1996, 1990 and 1985 Vintage Collection bottlings during my visit to Champagne Lanson. Most of the notes on the other following wines were tasted either in New York in January of this year or during my visit to the cellars at the end of March, with one or two noteworthy exceptions. As the notes below will attest, Lanson has quietly been one of the finest sources for very long-lived bottlings for many, many years, but the wines they are crafting today are to my palate even superior to the fine wines of yesteryear here, and this is a Champagne house that needs to be on the radar of more lovers of cellar-worthy bubbly.

Lanson “Black Label” Brut NV (Disgorged October 2011)

The flagship “Black Label” non-vintage Brut from Lanson is as good today as I can ever recall this bottling being in the past. The deep, complex and very classy nose offers up a fine mélange of tart orange, apple, stony minerality, gentle leesiness and a dollop of spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and quite crisp, with admirable complexity, fine focus, very elegant *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the zesty and beautifully balanced finish. Being a non-malo house, the Lanson Brut NV seems to have more reserve wines included in the current cuvée to buffer the bouncy acidity and add depth and dimension to the wine. Lovely non-vintage Brut. 2014-2035+. **91+**.

Lanson “Extra Age” Brut NV (Grand Cru) Disgorged December 2011

This is a relatively new cuvée from Lanson that has been aged fully for five years in the cellar prior to release and hails exclusively from grand cru vineyards. The wine is a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay. Extra Age is always a blend of at least three different vintages, with this current release based on wines from the 2000, 2002 and 2004 vintages. Given the house style which eschews malolactic fermentation, this new bottling is a very logical extension of the Lanson line and the wine is outstanding, jumping from the glass in a complex and very beautiful blend of green apple, tart orange, wheat toast, smoky overtones and a beautifully complex base of stony minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and broad-shouldered, with superb mid-palate depth, crisp acids, very refined *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the wide open and zesty finish. Fine, fine juice. 2012-2030. **93**.

Lanson “Extra Age” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Grand Cru)

The newest addition to the Extra Age lineup is this superb Blanc de Blancs, which is a blend of the 2002, 2003 and 2005 vintages. The wine is deep, pure and superb, offering up a complex bouquet of pears, lemon, brioche, white flowers and a lovely base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with excellent focus and balance, lovely mid-palate depth, refined, frothy *mousse* and beautiful length and grip on the very elegant finish. This is a very fine bottle of Blanc de Blancs that will drink well from the outset, but like all Lanson wines, will have no difficulties aging long and gracefully. 2012-2035. **93+**.

Lanson “Extra Age” Rosé Brut NV (Grand Cru) Disgorged December 2011

I did not note when this wine was disgorged (I know, sloppy of me!), but I did at least observe that is made from a blend of sixty-five percent pinot noir, thirty-five percent chardonnay,

with the vintages that the base wines hailing from being the 2002, 2004 and 2005. The wine is outstanding, jumping from the glass in a nascently complex aromatic blend of melon, tart orange, bread dough and lovely smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very classy, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent soil signature, crisp acids, pinpoint bubbles and fine focus on the very long and elegant finish. Fine, fine juice here. 2012-2030. **93.**

2002 Lanson “Gold Label” Brut Millésime

The 2002 Lanson Gold Label is comprised of a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir, sourced from some of the very best villages for each grape on the Montagne de Reims and the Côte des Blancs. It is aged a minimum of five years on the lees prior to disgorgement. The 2002 Gold Label is stunning, as the ripeness of the vintage beautifully dovetails with the non-malo style of Lanson and the wine offers up a deep and very pure bouquet of apple, tangerine, lovely minerality, brioche, smoke and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with superb focus and grip, very elegant, pinpoint bubbles, fine cut and outstanding length on the classy finish. This is really a superb bottle in the making. 2012-2040+. **93.**

2000 Lanson “Noble Cuvée” Brut (Grand Cru)

Lanson’s Tête de Cuvée is comprised of a blend of seventy percent chardonnay (from the villages of Avize and Cramant) and thirty percent pinot noir, hailing from the villages of Bouzy and Verzenay. The 2000 is outstanding, offering up a deep, young and very, very promising bouquet of lemon, pink grapefruit, bread dough, complex minerality and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a rock solid core of fruit, very elegant *mousse*, superb focus and balance and a very, very long, refined and youthful finish. This was aged seven years on the lees, prior to disgorgement and a bit of further bottle age to allow for recovery from the *degorgement*. A superb example of the vintage that still needs a bit more time in the cellar to really blossom and come into its own. 2014-2045. **93+.**

1999 Lanson “Noble Cuvée” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Grand Cru)

The 1999 Lanson “Noble Cuvée” Blanc de Blancs is a lovely wine that is still a bit tightly-knit and in search of a few years of cellaring. The bouquet is deep and bright, but still youthfully primary in its mélange of apple, white peach, brioche, smoky tones, complex, limestone minerality, citrus peel and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly racy, with a fine core of fruit, lovely *mousse*, crisp acids and fine length and grip on the focused and still blossoming finish. Give this lovely wine two or three more years in the cellar to really start to drink well and a good, solid decade to reach its apogee. 2014-2035+. **92+.**

1996 Lanson “Vintage Collection” Brut Millésime (served from magnum)

The 1996 Lanson Vintage Collection was disgorged in March of 2011. This is a very fine and still youthful example of this great vintage, delivering a deep and classy nose of lemon peel, brioche, excellent minerality, smoke and a primary, almost briny topnote that will no doubt turn to scents of *fleur de sel* with sufficient bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and racy, with a fine core of fruit, bright, but, very well-integrated acids, elegant *mousse* and lovely focus and grip on the long and classy finish. I would still keep this wine in the cellar for a few more years to really let it come into its apogee of peak drinkability. 2015-2040+. **94.**

1990 Lanson “Vintage Collection” Brut Millésime (served from magnum)

The 1990 Lanson vintage bottling was aged six years on its lees prior to disgorgement. In true Lanson style, the wine is just starting to reach its plateau of maturity at age twenty-two,

offering up a deep, complex and classy bouquet of apple, tart orange, *pain grille*, stony minerality, a touch of sea salts, gentle notes of honeycomb and a nice dollop of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and rock solid at the core, with a fine signature of soil, bright acids, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and blossoming finish. This is a beautiful example of the vintage that has decades of life ahead of it! 2012-2035+. **94.**

1988 Lanson “Gold Label” Brut Millésime

The 1988 vintage started out life a little lean in comparison to the riper 1989s and 1990s that followed, but the wines have aged quite well and this is a vintage that has now entered its peak of maturity and is drinking very well indeed. The 1988 Lanson Brut Millésime offers up a deep and complex nose of apple, nutskins, warm bread, stony minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows off the complexity of bottle age, with good acids, still quite vigorous *mousse* and fine length and grip on the finish. This is a very good bottle of bubbly at its prime, but my gut instincts tell me that the house of Lanson is crafting even finer wines today than was the case back in the late 1980s and today’s rendition of the Brut Millésime may hit even higher points at a similar age. 2012-2035. **91.**

1985 Lanson “Vintage Collection” Brut Millésime (served from magnum)

The 1985 Lanson Vintage Collection is at a beautiful place in its evolution and is a stellar glass of bubbly. The deep, complex and perfectly mature nose offers up scents of apple, orange peel, honeycomb, a delicate touch of *champignon*, gentle leesiness, smoke, brioche and lovely minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite zesty, with very good mid-palate depth, refined bubbles, bright acids and excellent mineral drive on the long and focused finish. A lovely, lovely wine. 2012-2030+. **93+.**

1981 Lanson Brut Millésime (Disgorged in 1986)

Krug, Henriot and Lanson were some of the only houses to declare a 1981 vintage, as these estates chose to make a strict selection and bottle a vintage from this year, rather than simply wait for the release of the riper and flashier 1982 vintage. This decision has turned out well, as all three houses made superb wines in 1981 that are now drinking beautifully. The Lanson 1981 was produced from a blend of fifty-four percent pinot noir and forty-six percent chardonnay and made in small quantities. The wine is drinking beautifully at age thirty-one, offering up a refined and *à point* nose of pear, tangerine, brioche, a touch of honeycomb, lovely soil nuances and a bit of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and at its apogee, with a fine core, excellent focus and balance, plenty of *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the very complex and racy finish. The precision of the 1981 vintage is very much in evidence here on both the nose and palate, and it having been disgorged all the way back in 1986 is a pretty strong argument that recent disgorgement is hardly a necessity for a wine to age long and gracefully. This has years and years of life still in it. 2012-2025. **93.**

1979 Lanson Brut Millésime (served from magnum)

The non-malo style of Lanson really is best after the wines are aged for several years, as this nicely evolved magnum of the 1979 Brut Millésime eloquently attests. The deep and *à point* bouquet offers up a complex mélange of desiccated apples, wheat toast, orange peel, a beautiful base of soil tones and an exotic hint of cotton candy in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively fresh and snappy at age thirty-two, with fine focus and balance, sound *mousse*, and a very long, focused and well-proportioned finish. My only complaint with this particular magnum is that there is a touch of residual sweetness poking out on this wine that seems to indicate a bit more *dosage* than the wine was able to seamlessly

incorporate over the course of its life (this could also be the cause of that touch of cotton candy in the nose), and it now is a bit of a distraction on the backend and keeps the score down just a touch. Was this from an era where cuvées earmarked for the US market were getting a bit higher *dosage*? The '79 Lanson Brut Millésime has plenty of life still ahead of it in magnum and is a very good, but not a great example from this fine house. 2011-2020+. **88.**

Champagne Gosset (Épernay)

Champagne Gosset is the oldest house in the region, having just celebrated its 425th Anniversary in 2009. The house was founded in 1584 by Pierre Gosset, with subsequent generations of the Gosset family running the house until fairly recently. In 1994, the Cointreau family purchased Champagne Gosset, as the founding family had deemed it necessary to sell the house to address inheritance taxes in the wake of a generational change at the head of the family business. For much of Gosset's history, the house was based in the small city of Ay, in the heart of pinot noir country, but in 2009 the Cointreau family purchased a fine new facility for the house in the heart of Épernay, which had previously been owned by Laurent-Perrier. This new facility is infinitely larger than the original Gosset cellars and cuverie in Ay, which the firm had long outgrown, as since the acquisition of Gosset by the Cointreau family in 1994, Champagne Gosset had increased sales from 500,000 bottles per year to one million bottles per year. The new facility is expansive, with very deep, old cellars and a storage capacity of 2.5 million bottles. Combined with the cellars in Ay, Champagne Gosset now has ample room to store its wines prior to their release into the market.

Gosset is one of my favorite Champagne houses, and interestingly, like Champagne Lanson, this is a house that tends to eschew putting its wines through malolactic fermentation. Once upon a time, Gosset was a very large vineyard owner in Champagne, but the Napoleonic Code's draconian inheritance taxes had ensured that previous generations at the head of Gosset had been forced to sell off almost all of their vineyard patrimony to make tax payments in the wake of the head of the family passing away. Today, Gosset owns a single hectare of vines in the village of Chouilly in the Côte des Blancs and relies on a series of long-term contracts with growers to meet its needs. Given that the house purchases widely over the vignobles of Champagne, Gosset chooses to bring its contracted production in as freshly-pressed must, rather than risk moving truckloads of grapes around the congested streets of Champagne during harvest time. The house has even gone so far as to purchase state of the art presses for growers who could not afford these, to ensure that their grapes are pressed quickly and efficiently by the growers themselves, before Gosset's staff comes by to pick up the juice and transport it either to their Ay or Épernay cellars.

Gosset's house style, with virtually no malolactic, crafts wines that are racy and age beautifully, but of course, they start out life a bit more tightly-knit and snappy and need to be aged a longer time prior to release than wines that go through malo. As a result, all cuvées here are aged a minimum of three years prior to disgorgement and preparation for release in the market and the firm generally has between its two cellars, five years' worth of bottle stocks aging at any one time. As I noted above, Gosset's wines are almost all non-malo, but in recent years the firm has begun to include just a bit of wine that has gone through malolactic fermentation in their basic non-vintage Brut bottling, the Brut Excellence. This is quite logical, as this cuvée is meant to be drunk upon release (though, like all Gosset wines, it ages quite well

in my experience), and just a bit of malo in the blend makes the wine a bit more accessible at age three or four, when the wine is in the market. All the remainder of the Gosset bottlings are aged a minimum of five years prior to disgorgement and preparation for release in the market, and none of the other bottlings sees any malo in their base wines. As many fans of the house will already be aware, only the Gosset Brut Excellence cuvée is bottled in what we would today consider traditional Champagne bottles, as all the other Gosset cuvées are bottled in the beautiful, antique-styled bottles that harken back to the earliest days of the house and have become emblematic of Champagne Gosset. These beautiful, more bulbous bottles of course require different handling, so that all of the different cuvées in the antique bottles must be hand-riddled, rather than done so by machine. This is not the most cost-effective approach to Champagne production in the modern age, but happily, the Cointreau family has continued this great tradition of bottling most Gosset cuvées in this emblematic and beautiful bottle.



Gosset's Directeur International, Philippe Manfredini in the beautiful new tasting room in Épernay.

My visit to the Gosset cellars in Épernay in March was quite enjoyable, but not quite as productive as I might have hoped, as it was arranged for me to join a party of Gosset's top clients from the trade in the United Kingdom, who had begun their tour the evening before and had tasted several of the Gosset cuvées over dinner, so that they were not included in our tasting the following morning. However, I was able during the tasting to sample a new and superb addition to the Gosset lineup, their brand new Gosset Grand Blanc de Blancs Brut NV, which

was just released in the fall of 2011 and fills out this level of the Gosset portfolio, which had previously included the Grande Réserve Brut NV and the Grande Rosé Brut NV. Like all of the wines in the Grande Réserve level, the Grand Blanc de Blancs is aged a minimum of four years on the lees before disgorgement and preparation for release. It is a stunning new wine and I heartily recommend it to Gosset lovers who may not as of yet crossed paths with this new cuvée. The bottling I tasted was to be the second release of this fine cuvée and is really an exceptional bottle of Blanc de Blancs. As some Champagne lovers may already be aware, Champagne Gosset was one of the earliest houses to offer a Brut Rosé bottling and they make one of the finest in all of Champagne. Currently, the volume of Rosé sales from the house ranges from fifteen to eighteen percent of the domaine's annual production, making this by far one of the most important suppliers of Brut Rosé in the Champagne market. Their typically quite delicately salmon colored Grande Rosé Brut is made by blending in six to seven percent of still pinot noir each year into the cuvée, which is comprised generally of about 58 percent chardonnay and 35 percent pinot noir to augment the still wine. The vast majority of Gosset's Rosé production is in this cuvée, with a small amount of Cuvée Celebris Extra Brut Rosé also produced in exceptional vintages. Gosset is a house that typically likes to use minimal dosage for their various cuvées, with all of their Brut bottlings ranging from seven to eight grams per liter of dosage, while all of their Tête de Cuvée bottlings, the Cuvées Celebris, are actually Extra Bruts and have a dosage of around three grams per liter.

Gosset Brut Excellence NV

As noted above, this is the only bottling at Gosset that sees any percentage of the blend go through malolactic fermentation, and this is also noteworthy in that it includes a bit of pinot meunier in the *cépages*, as most Gosset wines are strictly blends of pinot noir and chardonnay. The Brut Excellence is aged two and a half years on its lees prior to disgorgement, and I think the wine has gotten more approachable out of the blocks now that a small percentage of wine that has gone through malo is included. The current release is quite nice, offering up scents of pear, lemon zest, bread dough, chalky minerality and a gentle floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and wide open, with fine focus and complexity, fairly gentle acids this year, and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. I am used to just a bit more acid backbone to this bottling, and the slightly softer style of this new release is the only reason that my score is a bit lower than usual, as the wine is certainly admirably complex. 2012-2018. **88.**

Gosset Grande Blanc de Blancs Brut NV

This the second release of this superb new bottling, which I was very, very impressed with its quality and style. This is aged four years on its lees, and the new release is a blend of the 2005, 2006 and 2007 vintages. The nose is deep, complex and very, very elegant, delivering a suave mélange of pears, lemon blossoms, delicious apples, chalky minerality, citrus peel and bread dough. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite youthful and racy, with superb mid-palate depth, lovely focus, very elegant *mousse*, impeccable balance and a very long, laser-like finish. This is very high class Blanc de Blancs and a most welcome new addition to the Gosset lineup. 2014-2030+. **93.**

Gosset Grande Réserve Brut NV

The new release of Gosset's Grande Réserve is a blend of forty-three percent pinot noir, forty-two percent chardonnay and a whopping fifteen percent pinot meunier, which is quite high for this bottling. This has been aged five years on the lees prior to disgorgement, and offers up a deep, nascently toasty and very classy nose of apple, tart orange, lovely minerality, bread dough

and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with impressive complexity beginning to build. The *mousse* here is refined and delicate, the acids give the wine plenty of *nervosité* and the finish is very long and focused. This is a terrific wine, but I would definitely give it a year in the cellar to really let it blossom. 2013-2035+. **93.**

Gosset Grande Rosé Brut NV

Prior to my visit to the house in March, I had no idea that Rosé bubbly played such a large role in Gosset's yearly sales, but I guess I should have known, as this has consistently been a house specialty and people are not dumb! The current release of the Grande Rosé is another superb wine, wafting from the glass in a youthfully complex and classy blend of blood orange, a touch of melon, orange zest, stony minerality and bread dough. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a fine core of fruit, utterly refined *mousse*, lovely focus and excellent length and grip on the poised and still quite primary finish. This will be even better with a year or two in the cellar, though it is already quite tasty in its youth. 2012-2025. **93.**

Gosset Cuvée Celebris Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut

The non-vintage Cuvée Celebris Blanc de Blancs is a stunning wine in the making, which offers up superb drinking right now, but which promises even great brilliance with a bit more bottle age. The deep and very complex nose offers up a superb blend of apple, orange zest, brioche, a magically complex base of chalky soil tones, hints of pastry cream, orange zest and a gentle touch of leesiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and stunningly well-balanced, with a great core of fruit, superb complexity, crisp acids and outstanding grip on the extremely long and laser-like finish. This is a brilliant bottle of wine. 2012-2030+. **94+.**

1996 Gosset Grande Millésime Brut

My sample of the 2000 Grande Millésime from Gosset was corked (one of only two bottles out of how many Champagne samples I worked through for this report!), but the last bottle out of my cellar of the 1996 Grande Millésime was absolutely smoking and a beautiful example of the vintage. In fact, it showed so well that I wondered if the '96 Cuvée Celebris reported on below was somehow not one hundred percent representative. In any case, the 1996 Grande Millésime is a beautiful wine that is just now entering its apogee of maturity and soars from the glass in a fine and complex mélange of apple, peach, hazelnut, warm bread, a beautiful base of minerality, orange zest and hints of custard and fresh nutmeg in the upper register. On the palate the wine is very pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with racy acids, very elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the beautifully focused and classy finish. This is a stellar example of the vintage! 2012-2030+. **93+.**

1996 Gosset Cuvée Celebris Extra Brut

Given how beautifully my batch of Gosset 1996 Grande Millésime had evolved in the cellar (at one point I owned well more than a case of this wine), I wondered if this particular bottle of the 1996 Cuvée Celebris was a bit more advanced than it should have been, based both on the '96 Grande Millésime and on how racy this wine had been when I last crossed paths with it. This bottle of the '96 Cuvée Celebris is still a lovely drink, but fully mature (which seems to me to come across as a bit advanced in the context of the very snappy 1996 vintage), offering up a deep and complex nose of toasted wheat bread, baked apples, a touch of almond, citrus peel and a lovely base of complex minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and wide open, with a fine core, refined *mousse*, and a long, complex and well-balanced finish. I have no issue with this lovely wine, other than the fact that I would have expected it to have aged longer and evolved at a more glacial pace, given the style of the vintage in general. Given that the '96 Grande Millésime is further behind in its development than this bottle, I have to assume that

there are younger and better examples of the 1996 Cuvée Celebris out there and this was just a forward bottle. 2012-2018. 92?

Maison Louis Roederer (Reims)

This was my first visit to the venerable house of Louis Roederer in the center of Reims. I have always liked the wines from this producer, but had not been able to review them for a few years, as the New York representatives of the house's importer were tough to get a hold of for some reason. So, I reached out for the domaine directly when I knew I was going to be in Champagne for a few days at the end of March, hoping to get to know the people here a bit better. The house's staff was more than gracious with their time during my visit and very kind to include me on the short list of tasters invited for a vertical Cristal tasting back here in New York a few months after my trip, so I went from having a dearth of notes on recent releases from Maison Louis Roederer to having a very rich and varied level of experience with these fine wines in a very short span of time. Believe me, I am not complaining! The Roederer wines these days are outstanding across the board and I am very happy to once again be able to review them in depth in this article. The house of Louis Roederer is quite different from many other of the Grandes Marques these days in that the family firm has been able to maintain its vineyard patrimony far better than many other of their compatriots, so whereas houses such Gosset and Henriot, for example, effectively own no meaningful hectares of vineyards today, Maison Louis Roederer owns fully two hundred and thirty hectares of vines- enough to meet seventy percent of their present day needs! It seems to me that this has nicely insulated the house from some of the dislocations in the grape markets in Champagne that occurred a decade ago and keeps Louis Roederer a bit aloof from the concerns occasionally evident at other houses of how the ongoing process of more small growers expanding the production of their own wines and selling less grapes out into the market might affect their future grape supply chain.

Maison Louis Roederer was founded in 1776- which should make this America's favorite Champagne house, no, as we share birthdays? It is a one of the greatest of the Grandes Marques, with a very clear-cut house style that is brought about by its retention of great stocks of reserve wines to maintain a consistent style through vintage variations, and a long-standing policy of barrel aging of their "vins clairs" and reserve wines. In fact, in many ways, Louis Roederer's cellaring policy is the exact inverse of Champagne Krug- at least in terms of how they choose to utilize their older oak casks. As readers will recall, all wines at Krug are barrel-fermented in small, older oak casks, and then transferred to stainless steel tanks for aging. At Louis Roederer, the vast majority of their "vins clairs" are fermented in stainless steel tanks, but they are then aged in old oak casks- most of which are very large foudres that range from twenty to fifty years of age. Of course, in many ways the comparison stops here, as Louis Roederer has far larger production than Krug and they currently sell 3.8 million bottles of bubbly per year, which is the kind of volume that allows the family firm to go out when the opportunity presents itself and buy a Bordeaux château to diversify their business- in this case, the Super Second Growth of Château Pichon-Lalande, which in 2006 came into the Louis Roederer fold.

Of the two hundred and thirty hectares of vineyards presently owned by Maison Louis Roederer, eighty-four hectares are in the Côtes des Blancs (principally in Avize), sixty-eight hectares are in the Marne Valley (where most Roederer Rosé bottlings find their origins) and sixty-five hectares are on the Montagne de Reims, which is where the firm purchased its first plot

of vines in 1845 in the superb grand cru village of Verzenay. Interestingly, of all these vineyards, only two hectares are planted with pinot meunier. All of the pinot noir vineyards owned by Louis Roederer are replanted when the time comes by selection massale, ensuring that there is consistency of genetic material in the vineyards and aromatic and flavor contributions from the pinot noir in the blend. Roederer is also admirable in its far greater reliance on old vines than is typical in Champagne, as the house will generally not consider replanting its vineyards until a parcel starts to approach sixty years of age (in many vineyards, twenty-five years of age is considered too old and replanting takes place). As I noted in the introductory remarks, the last fifty years of Champagne's viticultural practices are now just beginning to be looked at more closely by vineyard owners in the region, and profound changes are afoot, with one of the absolute leaders in this regard being Maison Louis Roederer. Starting in 2000, the house began experimenting with organic viticultural methods and have been very happy with the results, so that today fully fifty-two hectares of their vineyards are now farmed under organic principals or are in the transition towards biodynamique farming. There is little doubt that Louis Roederer in the not too distant future will be farming all two hundred and thirty hectares under organic and biodynamique methods- which will represent a huge step forward for the region as a whole, as it is hard to imagine that other vineyard owners will not follow the lead of this prestigious Grande Marque in the near future.

Today, the winemaking at Louis Roederer is in the very capable hands of Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon, who has been Cellar Master here for many years. Monsieur Lécaillon is a very thoughtful and talented winemaker, and the wines at Maison Roederer are as fine under his tenure as they have ever been in the illustrious history of this fine property. The traditional Roederer house style of fermentation in stainless steel tanks, followed by elevage in very large, old oak foudres has been, of course, generally continued under Monsieur Lécaillon's watch, but he has been willing to adopt small changes as opportunity has allowed in the last several years if they would improve the quality of a particular cuvée. There are now some lots of "vins clairs" that are barrel-fermented (always in older wood) these days, rather than everything being initially fermented in stainless steel, and certain wines are now also subjected to battonage if this is deemed beneficial for the wine in question in this vintage, and if this will add to the potential for even finer Champagne as a result. As Jean-Baptiste observed, "the idea is not to change the style of the wines here, but rather to be intellectually curious enough to try different methods on an experimental basis and see if this will give us a richer palette of blending possibilities with the vins clairs- we were quite pleased with the experimental lots we have done with battonage in the past and it gives us more flexibility now in certain vintages to maintain a classic house style." He is also very agnostic when it comes to allowing the vins clairs to go through malolactic fermentation- except in the case of lots destined for Cristal- allowing some wines in some vintages to go through malo, while other lots do not. The overriding principal is to provide the widest variety of potential still wines to bring complexity and consistency to the various cuvées each year. The use of battonage (which readers will know I am generally not a big fan of in most wines) also allows the flagship bottling of non-vintage "Brut Premier" to have a bit more early accessibility from this practice, which of course is a market necessity, given the fact that the vast majority of the bottles of this cuvée are drunk up within the first year after release.

The hallmark of all the bottlings from Louis Roederer is the influence of the aging of their large stocks of reserve wines in their army of large, old oak foudres, which adds a very real

house signature to all of the Roederer wines. Even the basic non-vintage Brut bottling of “Brut Premier” typically will contain at least four different vintages in the blend each year, with the current vintage’s base wines augmented by a minimum of six to ten percent reserve wines taken from at least three older vintages which have been aged in the giant old foudres in the Roederer cellars (the most recent release of Brut Premier contains fully thirty percent reserve wines). These old oak foudres do not provide any overt signs of oak- no butter or vanilla in the aromatics of flavors for example- but, texturally, they rather dramatically provide a very different characteristic to the wines from this fine house. I cannot pinpoint it precisely, but it is as if the equally vibrant and piercing acids found in the Roederer wines are more “rounded” by the addition of reserve wines aged in these great old foudres, and the underlying soil expressions of the various wines in the blend are delivered in a very different manner than from wines stored in stainless steel. Again, the contrasting style here with the wines of Krug (where the old wood is used for the fermentations, rather than the elevation of the reserve wines) is fascinating. Ironically, Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon and Olivier Krug have been very good friends since school days and remain very close today.



Louis Roederer’s Cellar Master, Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon.

While the entire range at Louis Roederer is outstanding, there is little doubt that the house is best known for its Tête de Cuvée bottling of Cristal, which was first produced at the behest of the Czar of Russia in 1876 and is well-known for its thick, clear and punt-less bottle.

Apparently, the Czar preferred the clear glass, crystal bottle and lack of punt to ensure that the wine would be served without any hidden weapons or bombs, as things were starting to get a bit dicey in St. Petersburg in the late nineteenth century for the ruling Romanoff family. The Russian royal family and aristocracy was Louis Roederer's most important clientele prior to the Russian Revolution in 1917, so it is no surprise that the house happily acceded to the Czar's requests for a special cuvée in 1876, which became Cristal and was Champagne's very first Tête de Cuvée bottling. This was originally produced exclusively for the drinking pleasure of the Russian court. Today, Cristal is always produced exclusively from the house's own vineyards, from parcels with a very high limestone content in the soils and with a minimum of twenty-five to thirty year-old vines. Typically the blend will be between fifty and sixty percent pinot noir, with the balance comprised of chardonnay, as no pinot meunier ever finds its way into Cristal. The pinot noir will always hail from the house's finest parcels in the villages of Verzenay, Beaumont-sur-Vesle and Verzy (for their northeasterly exposition and racier structures) on the Montagne de Reims, as well as Ay and Mareuil-sur-Ay (for a bit more opulence in the fruit expression from these southerly exposed villages), and the chardonnay from their top parcels in the communes of Avize, Mesnil sur Oger, Cramant and Oger. While Maison Roederer is rather agnostic about malolactic fermentations in general for their wines, they generally try to avoid this for any of the base wines that are going to be earmarked for the Cristal bottling, as this is emphatically a wine that is designed to be aged in the cellar and the snappier acids of no malo are preferred for this cuvée. One of the fairly recent exceptions to the non-malo norm for Cristal was the 1988 vintage, which did go through malolactic fermentation. As is currently the case with other Louis Roederer bottlings, Cristal occasionally will contain a percentage of the blend that has gone through battonage to add a bit more mid-palate richness to the young wine. All of the house's stocks of each vintage of Cristal go through disgorgement at the same time (typically after five years of aging on the lees), as the Roederer cellar team is far from enthusiastic about producing "later disgorged" versions of this fine wine. Each vintage of Cristal is then aged an additional eight months in the cellar after the disgorgement to allow the wine to recover, prior to be sent to market.

Cristal is emphatically a wine meant to be aged after its release, with most vintages not really reaching their peaks of drinkability until they are at least twenty years of age, and as the very fine 1977 served at the tasting here in New York emphasized, they can age far, far longer than this. While Cristal is the oldest Cuvée Prestige produced in Champagne, the Cristal Rosé bottling is a far more recent addition to the Louis Roederer lineup. It was first produced in the 1974 vintage, and like all of the Roederer Rosé bottlings, it is made by the "saignée method" after a bit of skin contact for the pinot noir during a one week-long "cold soak", pre-fermentation maceration, rather than the addition of any still red wine later in the blending process. This style of Rosé at Maison Roederer produces some of the lightest colored Brut Rosés here as one is likely to find in Champagne- in fact, the Cristal Rosé is probably the palest of all the Rosé bottlings on the market, along with that of Champagne Krug. Cristal Rosé is typically a blend of seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay (though this can of course range according to vintage characteristics- for instance the 2004 is a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay), with all of the pinot noir hailing each year from a two hectare parcel of fifty-five year old vines in the village of Ay. These old pinot vines are cropped around forty hectoliters per hectare- draconian yields by Champagne standards. The chardonnay for the Cristal Rosé comes from another old plot of vines in the village of Mesnil sur

Oger. Interestingly, the two varietals are fermented together to make Cristal Rosé, rather than fermented on their own and blended together after fermentation. The parcel of old vines in Aÿ for this bottling have been farmed under biodynamique principals now for five years. It too is a very long-lived wine that deserves extended cellaring to really blossom and come into its own.

The following Louis Roederer wines were primarily tasted either at the cellars at the end of March or during the Cristal vertical tasting held here in New York in June. The purpose of the New York event was to highlight some of the so-called “lesser vintages” of Cristal and see how they were evolving in the cellar, so that none of the vintages with top reputations early on were served amongst the regular Cristal bottlings for this event. However, the house did pull a few great vintages of Cristal Rosé from the cellars to finish off this fine tasting. As the notes will show, while the overall quality of each and every cuvée from Louis Roederer is outstanding, I am not yet sure how big of a fan I am of using battonage on some of the vins clairs here. That this technique delivers a bit more mid-palate depth out of the blocks is quite unmistakable in the wines that I tasted, and this is fine for those who are determined to drink their Champagne on the young side. But, I have a nagging doubt in the back of my mind about the use of even a small percentage of battonage in some of these wines and whether or not this might sacrifice a bit of precision on both the nose and the palate in the wines- particularly over periods of extended cellaring. I do not have any evidence that this is indeed the case- but, would find it fascinating to taste older releases of Brut Premier and some of the other Roederer cuvées which have had some battonage utilized, and compare their evolutions to bottlings where no battonage was used. But, as the notes below will attest, Maison Louis Roederer is one Grande Marque that is currently at the very top of its game and producing absolutely stellar wines.

Louis Roederer Brut Premier NV

The current release of Brut Premier is very fine indeed, with an overt “leesy” character on the nose (perhaps from a bit of *battonage*) and lovely depth and length on the palate. This cuvée this year is comprised of fully thirty percent reserve wines. The complex bouquet definitely shows some of this reserve wine character in its classy mélange of apple, lemon zest, lovely notes of wheat toast, stony minerality, a touch of heather and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and toasty, with lovely complexity, fine mid-palate depth, elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the finish. Fine juice. 2012-2020+. **90.**

2007 Louis Roederer Brut Rosé

Like all of the Roederer Rosé bottlings, this wine is made by a one week cold soak of whole berries, prior to crushing, rather than from still red wine. Seventy percent of the blend is made up of pinot noir, with the remaining thirty percent chardonnay from vineyards in Chouilly, which Jean-Baptiste likes for the cut and brightness that it brings to this cuvée. The color is a lovely, poached salmon color. The 2007 Roederer Brut Rosé is an excellent wine, offering up a vibrant and complex nose of blood orange, *fraises du bois*, chalky minerality, bread dough, smoky notes and citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and classy, with lovely focus and complexity, refined *mousse*, and a fine grip on the very long, soil-driven and frothy finish. This is a lovely wine that is still quite young and I would be very happy to tuck this away for at least another six to eight years in the cellar and really allow it to blossom. I would not be surprised at all to still see in drinking beautifully at age twenty-five or older! 2012-2025+. **92.**

2005 Louis Roederer Brut Millésime

The 2005 Brut Millésime is comprised of seventy-percent pinot noir (all hailing from the grand cru village of Verzenay) and thirty percent chardonnay, with forty percent of the *vins clairs* this year having been barrel-fermented for this cuvée. This a very fine and very young wine, wafting from the glass in a minerally mélange of apple, quince, stony minerality, a touch of wheat toast, citrus peel and leesy tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and minerally, with frothy *mousse*, fine focus, lovely mid-palate depth and excellent length and grip on the piercing finish. This will need at least a few years in the cellar to really blossom and start to hit on all cylinders. Excellent wine. 2016-2040. **92+**.

2005 Louis Roederer Blanc de Blancs Brut

While the 2005 Brut Millésime could really benefit from a few years of cellaring to blossom, the 2005 Blanc de Blancs is superb right out of the blocks and my pick for the vintage-dated current release for prompt consumption. The deep and very classy nose jumps from the glass in a blend of pear, apple, chalky minerality, bread dough, white flowers and a very gentle topnote of leesiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and elegant, with a fine core of fruit, beautiful, ethereal *mousse*, zesty acids and very fine length and grip on the focused and complex finish. This is made with Cramant pressure of 18 grams per liter of gas, which adds to its lightness of step and dancing quality on the palate. Fine, fine juice. 2012-2025. **92**.

Louis Roederer Cristal

2005 Louis Roederer Cristal Brut

2005 was a warm vintage in Champagne and very strong in particular for chardonnay. The pinot noir in general in this vintage was a bit more spotty in quality, as the summer was rather wet. The '05 Cristal is a blend of fifty-five percent pinot noir and forty-five percent chardonnay, with twenty percent of the cuvée raised in older barrels and subject to a once a week *battonage*. This is a lovely wine that will offer up more immediate accessibility than the more tightly-knit 2004, as it offers up a deep and very complex nose of apple, orange peel, a touch of white peach, complex, chalky minerality, bread dough and a very discreet base of toastiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with brisk acids, excellent focus and grip, utterly refined *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the very classy and impressively open finish. I am usually a staunch proponent of aging Cristal, but the 2005 is one vintage that I would have no problems drinking from an early age. Like all Cristal vintages, it will, of course, have no difficulties aging long and gracefully as well. 2012-2030+. **95**.

2004 Louis Roederer Cristal Brut

The 2004 Cristal strikes me as an absolute classic in the making that will only really show its complete potential with extended bottle age. This was a warm vintage that produced beautifully ripe, but not overripe grapes and a very fine harvest season that allowed grapes to be collected in optimal condition throughout the different Champagne sub-regions. Twenty to twenty-five percent of the 2004 Cristal was barrel-fermented, with some *battonage* used for a percentage of the cuvée. The nose on the '04 is deep and utterly refined, wafting from the glass in a blend of apple, pear, brioche, a lovely touch of orange zest, a beautifully complex base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully-balanced, with a lovely sense of reserve, superb mid-palate depth, zesty, pinpoint bubbles, crisp acids and laser-like focus on the nascently complex and stunning length and grip on the dancing finish. One can certainly drink the 2004 Cristal today with great enjoyment, but the real fireworks here are not

going to start until this wine has rested quietly in the cellar for another decade! A stunning Cristal. 2015-2040. **96+**.

1997 Louis Roederer Cristal Brut

The 1997 vintage in Champagne was characterized by damp and cool conditions through August, but September was scorching. The resulting grapes were very high in malic acidity according to Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon, but no malo in the Cristal base wines this year. The 1997 Cristal is a very pretty wine for current drinking, offering up a reasonably mature, transparent and classy nose of apple, lemon zest, a touch of smokiness, chalky soil tones, fresh almonds and a whisper of honeycomb. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and *à point*, with good, but not great depth, refined *mousse* and very good length and grip on the complex finish. One gets used to the rock solid cores of most vintages of Cristal, and while this is far from *fluide*, there is still a touch less depth here than in most recent vintages of this fine cuvée. 2012-2022. **92**.

1993 Louis Roederer Cristal Brut

The 1993 Cristal is a very good bottle of bubbly, but the vagaries of the vintage here have produced a wine that does not deliver the same seamless elegance customary in most years of Cristal. The fully mature nose is just a touch four-square, but deep and vibrant in its mélange of honeyed apples, wheat toast, gentle leesy tones, lovely minerality and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and slightly angular, with good complexity and quite refined *mousse*, but with only solid length and grip on the finish. This has a bit more mid-palate stuffing than the '97 Cristal, but I prefer the more refined and classic profile of the '97 over this slightly blunter 1993. Not a bad drink, but not a great Cristal by any measure. 2012-2020. **89**.

1977 Louis Roederer Cristal Brut

1977 was a very late harvest, as the grapes struggled to ripen all season long and full ripeness did not really arrive until the second half of October in this year. I am sure that a very strict selection and the customary low yields in the vineyards earmarked for Cristal were the keys to this wine's success, which is actually really quite excellent. The deep, complex and beautifully mature nose wafts from the glass in a mix of apple, brioche, honeycomb, orange peel, a touch of fresh nutmeg and a lovely base of limestone soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with superb complexity, lovely mid-palate depth, excellent focus and grip, still very vigorous *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the wide open, fully mature and dancing finish. This is a vintage of Cristal that is now at its absolute zenith of peak maturity, and while it is not the greatest of vintages for this wine, it is an utterly complete and satisfying bottle of Cristal for relatively near-to-mid-term drinking, as there is still plenty of life in the 1977 Cristal! A superb success for the vintage. 2012-2025. **93**.

Louis Roederer Cristal Rosé

2005 Louis Roederer Cristal Rosé Brut

The 2005 Cristal Rosé is quite typical in its very pale salmon color. The wine offers up a simply superb and refined nose of peach, gentle melon tones, stony limestone, bread dough, orange peel, smoky overtones, bread dough and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully bracing, with a rock solid core of fruit, great mineral drive, refined *mousse* and outstanding focus and cut on the exquisitely balanced and youthfully tensile finish. This is a superb wine that is built to age and really should not be touched for at least another three or four years. Its true apogee will be around age twenty. 2015-2035+. **96**.



Some of the great old foudres used for aging reserve wines in Champagne Louis Roederer's cellars.

1996 Louis Roederer Cristal Rosé Brut

The 1996 vintage of Cristal Rosé is absolutely brilliant and about as profound a glass of Brut Rosé as I can recall tasting. The ripe and classic style of the 1996 vintage, coupled with quite high acidity has combined to produce a magical Cristal Rosé, soaring from the glass in a celestial blend of white peach, rye toast, a touch of cranberry, chalky minerality, gentle smokiness and bread dough. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and racy, with brilliant mid-palate depth, stunning complexity, snappy acids, utterly refined and ethereal *mousse* and profound length and grip on the laser-like finish that is just beginning to reach its apogee of peak drinkability. This is a work of art of uncommon beauty. The 1996 Cristal Rosé is now drinking superbly well and will continue to dazzle for at least the next couple of decades. Sheer brilliance! 2012-2035+. **98.**

1988 Louis Roederer Cristal Rosé Brut

The 1988 Cristal Rosé is another absolutely superb bottle of wine at its zenith of maturity. The deep and utterly refined nose wafts from the glass in a mature and vibrant mélange of white cherries, apple, rye bread, chalky minerality, gentle smokiness, orange peel and a touch of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure and vibrant, with beautiful focus and complexity, lovely, zesty acids, vigorous *mousse* and a very long, very classy and *à point* finish. The 1988 Cristal Rosé is at its apogee of peak drinkability and is a great glass of bubbly, but still has plenty of life in it. 2012-2030. **95.**

Champagne Henriot (Reims)

The Champagne house of Henriot officially celebrated its two hundredth anniversary in 2008, though it seems quite likely that the Henriot family was active in the Champagne trade prior to 1808. The wars which swept through the region in the eighteenth century destroyed any pre-1808 records that the family might have kept, so whether or not the family was involved in the Champagne trade earlier, it was officially two hundred years celebrated four years ago. The Henriot family Champagne house now traces its origins back to 1808, when Apolline Henriot, the widow of Nicolas Simon Henriot, decided to take her family's vineyards in Bouzy and create a new Champagne house. Therefore, like Bollinger and Veuve Clicquot, Champagne Henriot has had a leading role in the history of the domaine played by a strong woman after her husband's passing; in fact, the Champagne was first sold under the Veuve Henriot Ainé label.

The house of Henriot has been perhaps most famous in the last several years for their expansion beyond the region of Champagne, as the Henriot family bought and utterly resurrected the fine Chablis estate of William Fèvre in the latter half of the 1990s, and also owns today the famed négociant house of Bouchard Père et Fils in Beaune. However, this resurrection of top estates that had fallen on hard times is nothing new for Joseph Henriot, for he has been quite active in this regard throughout his career. Having succeeded to the head of Champagne Henriot in 1962, after his father's sudden and untimely passing a few years earlier, Joseph has a remarkably active career in the wine trade. After settling in at Champagne Henriot, he purchased the then struggling house of Charles Heidsieck in 1975, and greatly improved their wines and position in the market during his ownership of this house. It was perhaps fitting that the Henriot family would purchase Charles Heidsieck, as Ernest Henriot (the grandson of Veuve Apolline Henriot) had founded the house of Charles Heidsieck with his brother-in-law, Charles Camille Heidsieck in 1857, and been a partner in the house until 1875. Joseph Henriot ran Charles Heidsieck from 1975 until 1985, when the Champagne house of Veuve Clicquot asked him to take the position of President of Veuve Clicquot. He held this position until 1994, when Moët-Hennessy merged with Clicquot's corporate parent, Louis Vuitton. The Henriot purchases of Bouchard Père et Fils in Beaune and Domaine William Fèvre in Chablis soon followed Joseph Henriot's departure from Veuve Clicquot.

Champagne Henriot once had a fairly large portfolio of vineyard land, but during Joseph Henriot's tenure at Veuve Clicquot, the vineyards were sold to Louis Vuitton. However, the house of Henriot retains a twenty-five year lease of exclusivity on these vineyards, so that this grape source remains a key supply component for the estate. While Henriot continues to own some of its own vineyard land in the Champagne district beyond the vineyards sold to Louis Vuitton, the vast majority of their grape supplies are now taken care of under long-term contracts with vineyard owners. As the Henriot team is quick to point out, their approach to these contracts is quite different from most in Champagne, as the Henriots offer their own vineyard management team to oversee the vineyards throughout the entire season, so that if the vineyard owner prefers to spend the summer on the Côte d'Azur rather than in the vineyards, the house of Henriot is perfectly positioned to manage the vineyard work directly and simply send a check to the owner at the end of the season. This approach gives Champagne Henriot the ability to much more directly control the quality of the grapes they use, while not tying down a significant chunk of the firm's working capital by purchasing vineyard land in Champagne, which is a rather formidable proposition these days. Like many of their peers, Champagne

Henriot has the grapes that they have contracted for crushed at the grower's facilities after picking and then has the must transferred from the grower to their cuverie in Reims within twenty-four hours. One can imagine how crowded the roads are from the outlying villages where the vineyards lie into Reims during the harvest, and as many Champagne principals will point out, it would be sheer madness to try and transport grapes in from the vineyards to the cellars during this time of year. As the house of Henriot likes to emphasize chardonnay in many of their bottlings, a sizeable portion of their vineyard sources are from the Côte des Blancs, with grapes coming from the villages of Mesnil, Cramant, Chouilly, Oger, Vertus and Avize. In fact, Champagne Henriot chooses to use little (if any) pinot meunier in most of their cuvées, preferring to rely primarily on pinot noir and chardonnay.

One of the most admirable aspects of the Henriot philosophy is their continued willingness to age all of their wines sufficiently in the cellar prior to release, with only the basic non-vintage Brut Souverain ever exiting the cellars before it has seen fully three years of bottle age. The non-vintage Blanc de Blancs bottling at Henriot is aged anywhere from three to five years prior to release, their vintage bottlings from five to eight years and the Henriot Tête de Cuvée, Cuvée des Enchanteleurs, is kept in the cellars at least eight years from the vintage, and often longer prior to being released. The two flagship bottlings here, the Brut de Souverain and the Blanc de Blancs NV also see ten percent of each year's production held back to serve as a starter for the following years cuvées. To the minds of Joseph Henriot and his team, now led by Champagne Henriot's Directeur Général, Thierry Mure, and Cellar Master, Laurent Fresnet, properly aging Champagne prior to releasing it is especially important when chardonnay is relied on heavily in the cuvée, as this grape needs more bottle age before it really begins to show at its best in a Champagne context. Interestingly, given that the Henriot house style is generally for elegant middleweights that emphasize purity and refinement, all of the Henriot wines go through one hundred percent malolactic fermentation. The house also prefers to opt for a relatively low level dosage, as the Henriots feel that a wine with a lower dosage will age more gracefully over the long-term. Fermentation at Champagne Henriot is done in stainless steel tanks, and has been since the first half of the twentieth century. This is a rather ironic, as the name of the Henriot Tête de Cuvée, Cuvée des Enchanteleurs, actually hails back to the old cellar workers who used to move around the barrels when aging the wines in wood was utilized at the house, as the enchanteleurs were the gentlemen who performed this task. The tradition at Henriot was to allow the enchanteleurs to also make their own proposed blend during the blending process the spring following the harvest of the various parcels that are vinified separately, and very often the blend put together by the enchanteleurs would prove to be the best in the cellar.

The Henriot house style is for very refined and elegant middleweights. This is true both for their rosés and their regular bottlings, and up and down the hierarchy of their various cuvées. The wines are extremely complex and elegant in the bouquet, and clearly aromatic refinement is one of the focal points of Champagne Henriot. However, the one exception to this more ethereal style of Champagne is their Tête de Cuvée, the Cuvée des Enchanteleurs, which is often a very broad-shouldered and powerfully-styled Champagne, while of course retaining all of the elegance for which Henriot bubbliés are prized. This Tête de Cuvée has had a number of names over the years, and I was first made familiar with it in the mid-1980s, when it was known as Cuvée Baccarat. During my visit to the cellars at the end of March, Monsieur Fresnet was

kind enough to pull a bottle of the 1981 Cuvée Baccarat from the cellars to complete our tasting, allowing me to walk a bit down memory lane! Under any name, the Henriot prestige cuvée is a superbly complex and compelling Tête de Cuvée, that is built for long-term cellaring. Henriot is a great Champagne house that is currently at the top of its game and deserves to be more widely known.

Champagne Henriot Brut de Souverain NV

Henriot's Brut Souverain bottling is the only cuvée here that customarily now includes a small percentage of pinot meunier in the blend, as the ostensibly half and half blend of pinot noir and chardonnay is augmented with three to five percent of pinot meunier, as the house now has a contract for pinot meunier fruit from a vineyard that they are extremely fond of at the very top of the Montagne de Reims. This is a bottling that I have become more and more impressed with each year that I taste it, as I have the feeling that it is seeing just a bit more bottle age in the cellar these days than was the case perhaps back when the Henriot family had just purchased Bouchard. The other possibility of course is that the relatively new inclusion of pinot meunier in this cuvée has made it more immediately impressive out of the blocks. In any case, the new release is excellent, offering up a deep and youthfully complex nose of apple, tart orange, gentle notes of bread dough, fine minerality and a gentle touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core of fruit, elegant *mousse*, and a long, crisp and focused finish. A lovely wine that will age very well indeed. 2012-2030. **91+**.

Champagne Henriot Blanc de Blancs Brut NV

One of the workhorses in the Henriot stable is their excellent Blanc de Blancs, formerly called Blanc de Souverain. The cuvée is aged a minimum of four years on the lees in the cellar prior to disgorgement, with the current release consisting primarily of base wines from the 2006 vintage and comprised of fifty percent Grand Crus, thirty percent Premier Crus and the balance hailing from vineyards with very Chablis-like soils in the south of the Champagne region. The bouquet on the new release of Henriot's Blanc de Blancs is lovely, offering up a youthful mélange of lemon, pink grapefruit, chalky minerality, white flowers, bread dough and citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and racy, with a superb core, snappy acids, pinpoint bubbles and excellent length and grip on the focused and complex finish. Fine, fine juice that I would tuck away in the cellar for a couple more years and really let it blossom. 2014-2035. **92+**.

Champagne Henriot Brut Rosé NV

The Henriot Brut Rosé is a blend each year of anywhere from twelve to sixteen percent still pinot noir, with the current release falling in the middle of the range at fourteen percent. The base wine here is from the 2007 vintage, with twenty-five percent of the blend made up of reserve wines. Despite its fairly high percentage of still pinot in the blend, the color is not particularly dark for a Brut Rosé, with its pale salmon color reflecting a short maceration on the skins for the still wine. The nose on the new release is absolutely lovely, offering up a youthful mélange of white cherries, tangerine, chalky soil tones, bread dough and a floral topnote redolent of cherry blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and tightly-knit, with lovely focus and mid-palate depth, refined *mousse*, brisk acids and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly balanced finish. This is a lovely bottle of Brut Rosé that will be even better with a couple of years in the cellar. 2012-2030. **92**.

2005 Champagne Henriot Brut Millésime

The 2005 Henriot Brut Millésime will be the new vintage released on the market, and the wine was showing beautifully at the time of my visit. The nose is deep and very classy, wafting from the glass in a complex mix of brioche, apple, tangerine, a strong vein of minerality, citrus peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the core, with crisp acids, outstanding focus and balance, refined *mousse* and simply great length and grip on the laser-like finish. This will be a long-lived and excellent example of the vintage. 2012-2035. **93+**.

1996 Champagne Henriot Brut Millésime

The 1996 Henriot Brut Millésime is drinking beautifully at age twelve and is just now entering its peak period of drinkability. The deep and still very vibrant nose jumps from the glass in a complex mélange of apple, orange peel, wheat toast, a touch of fresh almond, stony minerality and a nice touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and racy, with a superb core of fruit, very refined *mousse*, excellent focus and balance and lovely grip on the snappy and very long finish. This is a very classy example of the vintage that thoroughly dusted a bottle of 1990 Veuve Clicquot Grande Dame that was paired up with it at the tasting. 2012-2030+. **93+**.

1981 Champagne Henriot “Cuvée Baccarat” (disgorged 2010)

I was recalling during my visit with Laurent Fresnet how much I had enjoyed the few 1981 vintage Brut bottlings that I had tasted in the last couple of years (including Lanson’s 1981 the day previously) and Laurent kindly excused himself for a moment to run down to the cellars and pull a bottle of the 1981 Cuvée Baccarat. This wine has aged brilliantly (like all of the 1981s I have tasted of late), offering up a deep and beautiful nose of pear, almonds, brioche, wonderfully complex soil tones, a touch of citrus peel and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a great core of fruit, still quite crisp and vibrant acids, lovely focus and complexity, elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly balanced and very classy finish. This wine is at its zenith of peak drinkability, but will have not difficulties cruising along for at least another couple of decades. Great juice. 2012-2035. **95**.

To reiterate, I have tasted a lot of wines in preparation for this report, so perhaps a bit of structural background on the notes will help with those looking for specific wines or producers. The following tasting notes are grouped together first by type of wine: non-Champagne Sparkling Wines, Non-Dosage or Low-Dosage bottlings, Sec or Demi-Sec Cuvées, Blanc de Blancs Non-Vintage Bruts, Non-Vintage Bruts, Brut Rosé Non-Vintage, Vintage-Dated Blanc de Blancs, Vintage Brut and Vintage Brut Rosé. Within each grouping, the wines are listed alphabetically by the name of the producer. Within the vintage-dated sections, the wines are listed by vintage, from younger to older, and then alphabetically within each year’s selections. Where I am reporting on a producer or house that I have not tasted with much regularity, I have included information on the house style and estates’ winemaking philosophies- in the cases where I had this information readily available. For those estates where this information has been listed in previous reports, I have confined myself to the note on the specific wine, reasoning that any folks interested in such background data can easily access this through the database and previous years’ notes on the wines in question. The tasting notes were primarily accrued during the summer months of this year, but I have included notes on any Champagne or Sparkling Wine (with the exception of Spanish Cavas, which will get their own piece in the next issue) that I have

crossed paths with since the last report on these wines was released at this time last year. I have also tried to indicate, when I had the information available, when the wine had been disgorged, and for older bottles of non-vintage Brut that I have pulled out of my cellar to check on their evolution, I have at least indicated when the wine was originally released. With the smaller growers, I have also tried to indicate in which village they are located and if the cuvée in question is labeled as Grand Cru.

A few readers have asked me about what stemware I use for these tastings, and everything sampled here in my office has been tasted out of Riedel Vinum Series Prestige Champagne glasses, which I find consistently amongst the best stems in terms of delivering both aromatic and flavor complexity, as well as safeguarding the mousse, which I feel is a fundamental element of sparkling wine and is as critical to assessment of the wine's ultimate quality as elements such as depth, length and complexity. I know that some folks prefer smaller white wine glasses for drinking and assessing bubbly, but I find that the obvious advantages of the greater aromatic and flavor expression found in these glasses are offset by the dramatic loss of mousse when drinking sparkling wines in larger bowls. Riedel's Vinum Prestige glasses have wider bowls than the standard Champagne flute, but do a very good job of retaining mousse as well. They are not my absolute favorite glasses for Champagne, which are the special glasses that Riedel now produces for Krug, which have a decidedly wider bowl and walls that slant inwards towards the top, allowing for the effervescence to be retained just as well as their Prestige Champagne glasses, while adding the benefit of greater intensity and precision to the aromatic and flavor expressions in the wine. I use my Krug glasses over the course of the year when I am drinking Champagne, but prefer to utilize the Prestige Vinums for the preparation of this annual feature, assuming that this will much more closely align my tasting notes with the experiences of most subscribers who may drink one of the wines reported on below. This also allows a more level playing field for any wines reviewed at visits to domaines or at larger tastings (one of which I attended in early September of this year), as I find that the Riedel Vinum Prestige glass is most often the glass of choice at these venues.

Sparkling Wines

The sparkling wines listed below are a small, but very tasty sampling of top releases from this underappreciated genre of wines. The wines are listed alphabetically, with the non-vintage bottlings appearing first, and then the vintage-dated bottlings appearing from youngest to oldest. As the notes below will attest, there are some truly fine, on-Champagne sparkling wines being produced these days, and I am sure this is only the tip of the iceberg.

Caposaldo Prosecco Brut NV

I was quite impressed with this bottling of Prosecco, which I had not encountered previously. The deep and classy nose offers up a perfumed blend of apple, pear, acacia blossoms, stony minerality and orange peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and frothy, with fine focus and balance, good acids and a long, bright and vibrant finish. Good juice that is best as an aperitif. 2012-2018. **88.**

Domaine des Coutures Crémant de Loire Brut NV

Domaine des Coutures Crémant de Loire is a fascinating sparkling wine, as this good producer in Saumur-Champigny has made this lovely wine entirely out of Cabernet Franc. The nose is deep, complex and absolutely singular in its blend of gooseberry, currant leaf, white

cassis, lovely soil tones and an exotic topnote of freshly-culled peppermint leaves. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and complex, with frothy *mousse*, tangy acids and impressive length and grip on the classy finish. The cabernet franc personality here is unmistakable and really works nicely- a great sparkler to go with more savory fare and probably the most diabolical wine one could serve at a double-blind tasting! 2012-2015. **88.**

Clotilde Davenne Crémant de Bourgogne Brut Extra NV

Clotilde Davenne is a full-time winemaker at a well-known Chablis estate, but she moonlights on her small, 8.5 hectare Crémant de Bourgogne project in the Yonne. Many of her vines are quite old, and it shows in the intensity of flavor in her wines. Her non-vintage Extra Brut is really very fine, offering up a very Champagne-like nose of green apple, pink grapefruit, a beautifully complex base of limestone, warm bread and a touch of lime peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and bouncy, with a fine core of fruit, impressive complexity, frothy *mousse* (which is decidedly more elegant than some Grower Champagnes I sampled for this report!) and a long, crisp and soil-driven finish. I would be very surprised if a wine this well-balanced did not age extremely well. This is truly outstanding sparkling wine and an absolute steal! 2012-2020. **91.**

Clotilde Davenne Crémant de Bourgogne Brut Extra Rosé NV

Clotilde Davenne's non-vintage Crémant de Bourgogne Brut Extra Rosé is every bit as lovely as her straight Brut Extra bottling. The wine is a pale and pretty salmon color and the nose offers up a complex and very vibrant mélange of melon, white cherries, gentle smoky tones, orange peel, chalky soil tones and biscuits. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still youthfully snappy, with a lovely core of fruit, elegant *mousse*, fine mineral drive on the backend and excellent length and grip on the long and still quite youthful finish. Whereas Madame Davenne's Brut Extra is a lovely drink right from the start, I would be strongly inclined to give this superb Rosé bottling a year or two in the cellar to really unwind, as this wine has superb potential, but there is a touch of youthful backend bitterness currently on display here that is best waited out with a bit of bottle age. This is very serious juice! 2013-2020. **90+.**

Ferrari "Metodo Classico" Brut NV

I have long been a fan of the Ferrari sparkling wines, which have been about as fine a non-Champagne sparkler for about as long as I can remember, so I was very happy to have the opportunity to taste the new releases from this fine Italian specialist. The non-vintage Brut bottling is comprised of one hundred percent chardonnay and offers up a deep and classy nose of apple, a touch of tangerine, warm bread, a lovely base of soil, orange blossoms and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core of fruit, a fine base of soil, very good focus, slightly coarse *mousse* and fine length and grip on the vibrant finish. This is a lovely wine that does not have quite the same polish on the palate as top examples of non-vintage Brut Champagne, but in terms of complexity and length, there is an awful lot to like here. 2012-2020. **89+.**

Ferrari "Metodo Classico" Brut Rosé NV

Ferrari's non-vintage Brut Rosé is a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay and a lovely, delicately pale salmon color. The bouquet is a fine blend of melon, tart orange, lovely soil tones, bread dough and dried roses. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with bright acids, lovely soil definition, frothy *mousse* and good length and grip on the focused finish. The bubbles here dissipate a bit briskly, but the backend intensity and length are most impressive. 2012-2018. **89.**

Crémant de Jura “Indigène” Brut NV- André et Mireille Tissot

The Crémant de Jura “Indigène” from André et Mireille Tissot is a lovely sparkler, offering up a deep, complex and slightly exotic bouquet of apple, pear, overtly smoky tones, a touch of lavender and a fine base of stony soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with slightly coarse *mousse*, bright acids and very good length and grip. Good juice. 2012-2015. **88.**

2009 Le Rocher des Violettes Pétillant Montlouis- Xavier Weisskopf

Aromatically, the 2009 Sparkling Montlouis from Xavier Weisskopf is really lovely, but the wine simply contains a bit too much sweetness on the palate for me and I find this residual sugar a distraction. The top flight bouquet offers up scents of apple, sweet quince, honeycomb, chalk and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively complex, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, very good acidity and sadly, just a bit too much sweetness on the long finish. If this were done a bit drier in style, it would be outstanding. 2012-2018. **86.**

2007 Domaine Huët Pétillant Vouvray Brut

The 2007 Domaine Huët Pétillant Vouvray is a superb bottle in the making, and while it is certainly quite accessible right out of the blocks, as the note on the 1964 (please see below) will attest, the real fireworks for this wine are still in the future. The beautifully classic nose offers up scents of pears, sweet quince, chalky soil tones, orange peel, a touch of warm biscuit and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core of fruit, very refined *mousse*, crisp acids and simply superb focus and grip on the very long and classy finish. Great juice that will age like a dream. 2012-2040+. **92+.**

2004 Ferrari “Perlé” Blanc de Blancs Brut Vintage

The 2004 Ferrari “Perlé” Blanc de Blancs Brut Vintage is an outstanding wine that was aged five years on its lees prior to disgorgement and preparation for the market. The superb nose wafts from the glass in a classy blend of apple, pear, brioche, a touch of lavender, a beautifully complex signature of soil and a delicate topnote of pastry cream. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very refined, with much more sophisticated *mousse* than the non-vintage bottling, zesty acids and outstanding focus and complexity on the poised, long and elegant finish. This is one of the best vintages of this bottling I have had the pleasure to taste. High class juice! 2012-2020. **92.**

2003 Roederer Estate “l’Hermitage” Vintage Brut

It had been several years since I last tasted the l’Hermitage bottling from Roederer Estate, which for a long time was my reference point sparkling wine from California. I was very happy to see that the 2003 is outstanding and every bit as fine as I remember the vintages of this wine from the decade of the 1990s. The wine offers up a deep and classy bouquet of bread dough, ripe apples, orange peel, a touch of nuttiness and a complex base of dusty soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and well-balanced, with elegant *mousse*, fairly tensile acids and fine length and grip on the focused and classy finish. Fine juice. 2012-2030. **92.**

2002 Domaine Huët Pétillant Vouvray Brut (First Release)

In the 2002 vintage, Noël Pinguet made two separate releases of this wine, with fully fifty percent of the production held back in the cellars on the lees quite a bit longer than the first release. I cannot recall precisely how much longer the second release was held back in the cellars, but I seem to recall that the first release was let out to the market at age five. This wine is aging brilliantly and has now blossomed nicely and is at a very good point for primetime

drinking, offering up a complex nose of quince, stony soil tones, a touch of bread dough, dried flowers and hints of both honeycomb and lanolin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied tightly-knit, with a lovely core of fruit, very refined *mousse*, excellent focus and grip and a very long, zesty and transparent finish. Fine, fine juice. 2012-2035+. **93.**

1964 Domaine Huët Pétillant Vouvray Sec

Domaine Huët's 1964 Sparkling Sec is still drinking very well indeed and shows probably another decade's worth of life still in it at forty-eight years of age! This particular bottle was not quite as vibrant as the one I reported on for my feature on Domaine Huët back in the winter of 2007, but still a lovely drink. The nose shows a beautifully refined mélange of sweet quince, chalky soil tones, new leather, orange peel and a bit of vinesmoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and still bright and bouncy, with just a whisper of *pétillance* left, but lovely acidity keeping the wine structured and focused. The finish is long, perfectly balanced and shows off great complexity, and I suspect at this point in time, it is more a proposition of the corks starting to give up the ghost, rather than the wine intrinsically starting to reach the end of its plateau of fine drinking. Just a lovely wine. 2012-2020+. **91.**

Extra Brut, Brut Nature and Brut Zero Non-Vintage Bottlings

Ayala Brut Nature NV

This is a brand new release from Ayala, who has never produced a Brut Nature to my knowledge, and the wine is absolutely superb. The deep, complex and vibrant nose soars from the glass in a blaze of apple, orange zest, a touch of quince, warm biscuits, stony minerality, a touch of fresh walnut and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with very refined *mousse*, a rock solid core of fruit, brisk acids and simply outstanding length and grip on the laser-like finish. This is a very high caliber new edition to the Brut Nature sweepstakes, and while the wine will drink very well from the start, I really like the structure here and would be inclined to tuck it away in the cellar for a few years and let it develop some secondary layers of complexity, Superb juice! 2012-2025+. **93.**

Besserat de Bellefon "Cuvée des Moines" Extra Brut NV

The Besserat de Bellefon "Cuvée des Moines" Extra Brut is a complex wine that seems to lack just a bit of fruit perception on both the nose and palate from its very low *dosage*. The deep and toasty nose offers up scents of warm bread, lovely soil tones, leesy nuances and a smoky topnote, but very shy fruit tones. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and absolutely bone-dry, with lovely soil complexity, elegant *mousse* and very fine length and grip on the taught and soil-driven finish. This is truly a wine for Extra Brut purists, and may prove to be borderline austere for the uninitiated. It is well-made, but I would have loved a bit more overt fruitiness in this *cuvée*, which would have made it more accessible to all Champagne lovers and not just lovers of Extra Brut. 2012-2020+. **88.**

François Boulard et Fille Blanc de Noir "les Murgiers" Extra Brut NV

The current release of the Blanc de Noirs "les Murgiers" from François Boulard et Fille is a fine and quite young wine that should blossom nicely with a bit of bottle age. The deep and complex nose offers up scents of bread fruit, biscuits, orange peel, smoky tones and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and just a touch youthfully four-square, with fine acids, elegant *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the finish. This is good juice that is certainly drinkable now, but may gain a bit more refinement with a bit of time in the cellar. 2012-2025. **89+.**

François Boulard et Fille “Grand Cru Mailly” Brut Nature NV

The Grand Cru Mailly bottling from François Boulard et Fille is made up of a blend of ninety percent pinot noir and ten percent chardonnay. The new release is superb, jumping from the glass in a classy blend of apple, lemon, warm bread, beautiful soil tones and a nice touch of gentle leesiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy, with a fine core of fruit, frothy *mousse*, snappy acids and lovely focus and balance on the very long, nascently complex and youthful finish. I would tuck this away in the cellar for at least a year or two to let its girdle of acidity relax a bit- it should prove to be quite long-lived. Fine juice. 2013-2030. 91+.



Guy de Chassey Brut de Brut NV (Premier Cru- Louvois)

I very much like the new release of Brut de Brut from Guy de Chassey, but this is a young and quite piercing wine on the palate that does not have any extra *dosage* to buffer the youthful acidity and really will be for purists only for the next year or so, until the structure relaxes a little. The *cépage* is comprised of seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay and the wine does not undergo malolactic fermentation. The current release all hails from the 2008 vintage. The nose is complex and classy, wafting from the glass in a blend of apple, bread dough, a touch of fresh nutmeg, lovely minerality and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with lovely mineral drive, a fine core, elegant *mousse* and a reasonably long, almost tensile finish. If you are not one of those Brut

Nature lovers who finds any hint of *dosage* distracting, then this wine may be a bit too brusque for you structurally for the next year or so. But, it is well-made and purists are going to love it from the outset. 2012-2020+. **90.**

Champagne Corbon “Absolument Brut” NV (Avize)

The new release of Absolument Brut from Agnès Corbon is a lovely, bone dry wine that shows off outstanding mineral complexity and fine fruit purity, but is really a wine that purists are going to take the most pleasure in, as it is an aptly named cuvée and “absolutely dry.” The nose shows off lovely complexity in its blend of tart pear, lemon chiffon, a gentle touch of yellow roses, half-baked bread, orange peel and complex, chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and razor sharp, with a lovely core, superb transparency, elegant *mousse*, brisk acids and very good length and grip on the snappy finish. I love the aromatic and flavor complexity of this wine- both of which are truly exceptional- but, this wine is quite tensile on the palate and not for everyone. I was very impressed with the glass I tasted of this wine, but it is not a style which I would necessarily reach for a second glass. Bottle age may help round this out a bit, but I would have taken greater pleasure in this wine with just a touch more generous *dosage*. But, it is a very well-made wine in its style. 2012-2020+? **92.**

Pascal Douquet Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Grand Cru- Mesnil sur Oger)

Pascal Douquet’s Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs shows off a lovely aromatic blend in its bouquet of pear, delicious apples, warm biscuits, lemon zest and chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with fine focus, brisk acids, slightly coarse *mousse* and a fairly short, albeit well-balanced finish. This is not a bad drink (and one of my favorite cuvées from Monsieur Douquet that I tasted in preparation for this report), but it really could use more length on the backend. Solid plus. 2012-2020. **87.**

Godmé Père et Fils “Brut Intégral” Brut Nature NV

The new release of Godmé Père et Fils’ “Brut Intégral” was not singing at the time of my tastings, but this may well have just been an awkward stage that this very young wine is going through presently. The new release is comprised of fifty percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot noir and ten percent pinot meunier, with the base wine hailing from the 2005 vintage. The nose on my sample seemed very much dominated by yeast autolysis notes, with a wheat toasty dustiness that was a bit unrefined. Underneath are notes of tangerine, lovely minerality, citrus peel and gentle smokiness that are first rate, but the yeastiness makes it hard to focus on these other elements. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and again, quite marked by its leasiness, with crisp acids, refined *mousse*, very good mid-palate depth and excellent length and grip on the finish. There is a bit of backend bitterness here that also needs to be waited out. This is really a bit grumpy at the present time and it is hard to get a firm read on where this wine is going down the road. It could end up outstanding, but it could also end up a bit stillborn. 2014-2025+? **86-90+?**

Godmé Père et Fils Extra Brut “Grand Cru” NV (Fall 2010 Release)

In contrast to the slightly disjointed Godmé Père et Fils “Brut Intégral”, this older release of their Extra Brut Grand Cru is simply stunning and is hitting on all cylinders today. The deep and classy nose exudes both complexity and breed in its fine mélange of white peach, tart orange, brioche, stunning minerality, iris blossoms and a nice touch of fresh nutmeg in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with superb, ethereal *mousse*, crisp, flawlessly-integrated acids and simply stunning length and grip on the utterly refined finish. Brilliant wine. 2012-2030. **94.**

Philippe Gonet Extra Brut “3210” NV

Maison Philippe Gonet is today run by the brother and sister team of Pierre and Chantal Gonet, who took over for their father at the tender ages of twenty-two and twenty-three respectively. The “3210” appellation on this wine refers to its three years of aging prior to release, its blend of two *terroirs* (fruit from villages of Le Mesnil and Mongueux in the Aube make up this blend), one grape (chardonnay) and zero *dosage*. The current release of the Philippe Gonet non-vintage Extra Brut “3210” is a superb bottle, offering up a deep and complex nose of green apple, quince, tart orange, bread dough, stony minerality and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with fine focus, pinpoint bubbles, crisp acids and superb length and grip on the elegant finish. This is the first time I have tasted any wines from this small grower in Mesnil sur Oger and I was very, very impressed. 2012-2025. **92+**.

Laherte Frères “Les Clos” Extra Brut NV

Since I first tasted this relatively new cuvée from Laherte Frères, I have been very impressed with the Les Clos, which I find to be one of my favorite Extra Brut bottlings out there. The current release is every bit as fine as the three previous incarnations of this wine that I have tasted, offering up a deep, youthful and quite stunning nose of pear, apple, citrus zest, complex, almost salty soil tones and a floral topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and very soil-driven, with impressive complexity, brisk acids, excellent focus and balance, slightly coarse, youthful *mousse* and absolutely stunning length and grip on the finish. My score may be a tad on the conservative side, but I would like to follow this wine in the cellar for a few years and see if the bubbles relax a bit more with bottle age and give the wine a more polished palate impression. But, in terms of depth, mineral drive and complexity, this is stellar juice. 2014-2035. **92+**.

Larmandier-Bernier Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV

The new release of the non-vintage Larmandier-Bernier Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut is really a lovely bottle of wine, with the base wine from the 2008 vintage and forty percent of the blend comprised of wines from 2007 and 2006. Seventy percent of the blend comes from the family’s vineyards in the premier cru village of Vertus, with the balance from grand cru villages of Cramant, Oger and Avize. The wines were fermented in a combination of large, old casks and stainless steel and the *dosage* is 4 grams per liter. The wine this year offers up a very expressive nose of pink grapefruit, apple, chalky minerality, a gentle touch of mint, bread dough and a lovely topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and quite tangy, with a lovely fine core of fruit, very refined *mousse*, lovely mineral drive on the backend and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. This is an Extra Brut bottling that does not threaten overt austerity, but rather a bone-dry bubbly that allows great transparency and purity to define the wine. Lovely juice. (Lot # LBB80211) 2012-2022+. **90**.

Michel Lorient “Sélection” Extra Brut NV

As is true of all the different cuvées which I tasted from Michel Lorient, the “Sélection” Extra Brut is a very refined bottle of bubbly, jumping from the glass in a delicate and classy aromatic blend of tart pear, lemon zest, gentle smokiness, warm bread, complex minerality and a touch of iris blossom in the upper register (from pinot meunier in the blend). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and supremely elegant, with frothy *mousse*, crisp acids and superb focus and balance on the very long and dancing finish. This is a lovely and almost ethereal example of Extra Brut from a very exciting new (at least to me) grower. 2012-2025. **91**.

Franck Pascal “Sagasse” Brut Nature NV

Franck Pascal is one of the few *biodynamique* growers who I am familiar with in the Champagne region. His cuvée “Sagasse” is his basic non-vintage bottling, which is comprised of a blend of fifty-seven percent pinot meunier, thirty-seven percent pinot noir and six percent chardonnay and this bottling is primarily from the 2006 vintage, with six percent reserve wines blended into the cuvée. The wine is excellent, offering up a bright and complex nose of apple, pear, biscuits, a lovely base of soil tones and a topnote of lemon peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with crisp acids, elegant, pinpoint bubbles and fine focus and grip on the very long and youthful finish. Like a lot of Brut Nature bottlings, this is a bit brisk out of the blocks and will benefit from a year or two of cellaring to allow a bit of relaxation on the palate. Good juice. 2013-2025+. **91+**.

Ployez-Jacquemart “Passion” Extra Brut NV

The new release of the Ployez-Jacquemart “Passion” Extra Brut bottling is the finest I have yet tasted of this cuvée, as the wine shows off exquisite balance and lovely complexity on both the nose and palate. The deep, pure and very classy bouquet delivers a mélange of apple, quince, stony minerality, lemon peel, sourdough bread and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with brisk acids, very refined *mousse*, excellent focus and balance and a very long, youthful and powerful finish. This is already a very impressive glass of bubbly, but give this superb wine a few years and it should really blossom and provide some highlights. 2012-2025+. **91+**.

Pol Roger “Pure” Extra Cuvée de Réserve Brut Nature NV

The new release of Pol Roger’s “Pure” Brut Nature is another fine success for this consistently well-made bottling. The deep and quite youthful nose offers up scents of green apple, pink grapefruit, lemon peel, bread dough, complex soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with very fine depth, frothy *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the focused finish. There is a bit of SO₂ that still needs to be worked through here, so I would give this wine a year or two of bottle age to really let it start to hit on all cylinders. It is a very fine bottle in the making. 2013-2025+. **92**.

Vazart-Coquart et Fils Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Grand Cru- Chouilly)

This was the first time I had seen a bottling of Extra Brut from Vazart-Coquart et Fils, and the wine was very well-made and will be very popular amongst fans of the low *dosage* genre of bubbly. The simply beautiful bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of apple, pear, spring flowers, brioche, chalky minerality and a whisper of *crème patissière* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant, with lovely complexity, elegant *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the focused and absolutely bone-dry finish. This may be borderline austere for some tasters, but for fans of Extra Brut bottlings, this should prove to be extremely popular, as it is beautifully made in that uncompromising style. 2012-2020+. **91**.

Extra Brut, Brut Nature and Brut Zero Vintage Bottlings

2007 Larmandier-Bernier “Terre Vertus” Brut Nature (Grand Cru)

The Terre Vertus bottling from Larmandier-Bernier is usually one of my absolute favorites of the Brut Nature genre, but the 2007 seems just a touch short on the palate this year. The nose is deep and utterly refined, offering up a youthful mélange of apple, a touch of iodine, gentle notes of lavender, orange zest and stony minerality. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with good, but not great depth at the core, refined *mousse*, snappy acids and fairly moderate length (particularly for this consistently excellent cuvée) on the finish. The focus

here is also not top division right now, but that characteristic I attribute to the relative youth of the wine and I would expect it to snap into focus with a bit more bottle age. This is a very good wine in need of a couple of years in the cellar, but it is not the strongest of recent vintages for this bottling. 2014-2025. **89+**.

2006 Larmandier-Bernier “Vieilles Vignes de Cramant” Extra Brut (Grand Cru)

The 2006 Vieilles Vignes de Cramant from Larmandier-Bernier is superb, hailing from vines that range from forty-eight to seventy years of age. It is barrel fermented in a combination of sixty percent older Burgundy barrels and the remainder in old wood *foudres* and has a *dosage* of 2 grams per liter. The '06 Vieilles Vignes de Cramant offers up a deep and vibrant nose of apple, tart pear, sourdough bread, orange zest and a complex base of stony minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and beautifully focused, with a fine core of fruit, lovely complexity, crisp acids and very fine length and grip on the classy finish. There is just a touch of backend, youthful bitterness here that should dissipate with a bit more bottle age, as today the wine is just a touch austere on the finish for my tastes. But, this is a very well-made wine that fans of Extra Brut will certainly be delighted with right out of the blocks. 2012-2020+. **90+**.

2006 J. L. Vergnon “Confidence” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature (Grand Cru)

The J. L. Vergnon Brut Nature vintage cuvée, which they call “Confidence”, hails entirely from old vine fruit in their holdings in Mesnil sur Oger. 2006 bottling of Confidence shows just a touch of buttery oak on the nose, as I assume it was aged in a few older Burgundy casks. The bouquet is a fine and complex blend of apple, lemon peel, complex, chalky minerality, sourdough bread and the aforementioned dollop of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite dry, with a very good core of fruit, elegant *mousse*, brisk acids, fine focus and a very long, snappy and bone dry finish. This wine is balanced for purists who really do not want the *dosage* to get in the way of the mineral drive of the wine, and while I like it very much, I find the very delicate shading of oak here to be just a bit of a distraction-keeping its score down a touch. For those who do not mind a bit of wood in their Champagne, add three points! 2012-2030. **90**.

2005 Georges Laval “les Chênes” Brut Nature (Premier Cru- Cumières)

As I noted in the review of this lovely bottling in the 2004 vintage, the les Chênes cuvée is a Blanc de Blancs that hails from a particular subsection of the village of Cumières, where chardonnay does especially well. As 2005 was a vintage that favored chardonnay in general in the region, it is not surprising that the 2005 les Chênes is a fine follow-up to the excellent 2004 version, offering up a deep and classy nose of apple, pear, brioche, a touch of fresh nutmeg, beautifully complex soil tones and a dollop of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and very, very deep at the core, with excellent focus and complexity, very refined *mousse*, bright acids and simply stunning length and grip on the classy finish. As I noted when reviewing the Georges Laval wines last year, each cuvée is barrel-fermented and raised in older Burgundy barrels, so the wines do indeed show a bit of wood to their personalities. For some tasters this is going to be a distraction, but if one does not mind a touch of wood influence in their bubbly, there is no doubt that the great depth, complexity and length of the 2005 les Chênes is something to get very, very excited about! 2015-2040. **94**.

2005 Georges Laval “les Hautes Chêvres” Brut Nature (Premier Cru- Cumières)

The les Hautes Chêvres bottling from Georges Laval is a blanc de noirs bottling that is aged for ten months in older Burgundian barrels and the given four years of aging on the lees prior to disgorgement and release from the cellar. The 2005 is a fine follow-up to the outstanding 2004, as the wine offers up a deep-pitched and complex nose of pear, brioche, a

touch of fresh almond, a very complex base of soil and a whisper of oakiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and superbly complex, with crisp acids, ethereal and very elegant *mousse*, outstanding focus and excellent length and grip on the very classy finish. Like all of the Georges Laval bottlings, there is a touch of oakiness here that may not be to everyone's taste, but this is a very long, very deep and complex wine of impressive breed and complexity. 2012-2025. **93+**.

2004 Laherte Frères Extra Brut Millésime

The 2004 Laherte Frères Extra Brut Millésime is not quite as precise on the backend as their Vintage Brut bottling from 2005, but it too is a very good wine. The deep and refined nose is exemplary, offering up scents of apple, tart orange, bread dough, complex minerality and a gentle leesiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, but without the same customary focus of most Laherte bottlings. The *mousse* is very elegant and frothy, the acids are well-integrated and the finish is long and shows good grip, but I would love to see just a bit more backend precision here- which may come with a bit of bottle age? But, very good juice nonetheless. 2014-2030. **89+**.

2002 Ployez-Jacquemart Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime

The 2002 Ployez-Jacquemart Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs is a fine bottle that shows a lovely spine of acidity to dovetail with the fine ripeness of the vintage. The deep and complex nose offers up an elegant mélange of delicious apples, tangerine, warm bread, gentle smokiness, lovely minerality and a floral topnote redolent of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and dancing, with fine mid-palate depth, very elegant *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the wide open and beautifully balanced finish. This is not quite as powerful as the house's "Passion" Extra Brut non-vintage bottling, but it is an older wine and at ten years of age it is drinking very well indeed. High class juice. 23012-2025. **92**.

Sec and Demi-Sec Bottlings

Piper-Heidsieck "Cuvée Sublime" Demi-Sec NV

The current release of Piper-Heidsieck's "Cuvée Sublime" Demi-Sec is absolutely stunning and one of the finest, non-dry Champagne that I have tasted in several years. The deep and very vibrant nose jumps from the glass in a very classy blend of apple, nectarine, brioche, orange zest, an impressively complex base of soil tones and a musky floral topnote redolent of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and zippy, with a great core of fruit, stunning mineral drive, very elegant *mousse*, a great girdle of acidity and laser-like focus on the very, very long finish that closes with just a kiss of sweetness. This is a beautifully made bottle of Demi-Sec that does not suffer any loss of precision or minerality on the backend from its residual sugar. Stunning wine, and if I were to find need of a non-dry bottle of bubbly for a dessert course or late night sipping, this is clearly the one I would reach for at the present time. 2012-2020. **92+**.

Pol Roger "Rich" Extra Cuvée de Réserve Sec NV

Pol Roger's "Rich" bottling is superb in its current guise, as this year's version shows off outstanding cut and focus to go with the slightly sweeter style of a Sec bottling. The deep and beautifully detailed nose offers up scents of apple, orange, warm bread, complex soil tones and a touch of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively complex, with a fine core of fruit, refined, pinpoint bubbles, vibrant acidity and excellent length and grip on the perfectly balanced and very elegant finish. Fine juice. 2012-2020+. **91**.

Taittinger “Nocturne” Sec NV

The current release of Taittinger’s “Nocturne”- which incidentally, has one of the most beautiful wine labels I have ever seen- is a very good bottle, but it seems just a touch sweeter to me than the last few years versions have been and I find this touch of additional sweetness (if it is not just my imagination) a tad distracting on the backend of the palate. The nose shows a touch of sulfur that needs to blow off before the wine reveals a lovely bouquet of peach, apple, bread dough, a lovely base of soil and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely focused, with bright acids, very elegant *mousse* and good length and grip on the slightly sweet finish. Good juice, but at least to my palate, this would be a bit more satisfying this year with the *dosage* turned down just a touch. 2012-2020. **88.**

Blanc de Blancs Non-Vintage Brut

Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV

The current release of the Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” Blanc de Blancs is a young and very stylish wine, wafting from the glass in a complex aromatic mélange of lemon, green apple, bread dough, chalky minerality and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nicely transparent, with frothy *mousse*, bright acids and very fine length and grip on the focused and quite classy finish. This is still quite tightly-knit, and while it is eminently drinkable today, I would love to give it a few years in the cellar to unwind structurally and really show what it is made of- it should prove to be quite long-lived. 2012-2030. **91+.**

Demière-Ansiot Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Current Release- Grand Cru Oger)

The new release of non-vintage Brut from Demière-Ansiot is outstanding, jumping from the glass in a vibrant mélange of pears, apples, a touch of fresh nutmeg, complex, chalky minerality and a gently musky, floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and frothy, with a superb core of fruit, very refined *mousse*, lovely focus and exceptional length and grip on the poised and very accessible finish. A lovely bottle of Blanc de Blancs. 2012-2025. **92.**

Demière-Ansiot Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Spring 2010 Release- Grand Cru Oger)

I have very much enjoyed the wines from this fine house in Oger since a good friend out in California introduced me to their wines a decade ago. This bottle had been in my cellar for a couple of years and was drinking splendidly, offering up a deep and complex nose of brioche, pears, delicious apples, a complex base of chalky soil, a touch of smokiness and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and blossomed beautifully, with a good core, very elegant, pinpoint bubbles, lovely focus and a long, complex and zesty finish. One could not ask for a better evolution from a bottle of non-vintage Blanc de Blancs. This release is now into its apogee, but has plenty of life still ahead of it. 2012-2020. **91.**

José Dhondt Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Grand Cru- Oger)

I was quite interested to hear that José Dhondt continues to use a traditional, basket press, rather than a pneumatic press, for the production of his wines. The current release of his non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is excellent, offering up a deep and toasty nose of apple, pear, chalky minerality, wheat toast and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, vibrant and impressively complex, with lovely mineral drive, crisp acids, elegant *mousse* and a fine core. The finish is long and shows off fine grip and focus, as this deep and broad-shouldered Blanc de Blancs is really a classic example of wines from the village of Oger. 2012-2025+. **90.**

Pascal Douquet Blanc de Blancs Brut NV

Pascal Douquet has two distinct non-vintage Blanc de Blancs bottlings, one hailing entirely from fruit sourced in the grand cru village of Mesnil sur Oger, and this cuvée, which is produced from a variety of different villages and does not carry the grand cru distinction. The straight Blanc de Blancs NV is a deep and rather forcibly styled bubbly, offering up scents of apple, lemon peel, fairly aggressive toastiness and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit blunt in style, with slightly coarse *mousse*, sound acids and a long, but four-square and simple finish. This is okay, but no better. 2012-2020. **85.**

Pascal Douquet Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Grand Cru- Mesnil sur Oger)

The non-vintage Brut from Pascal Douquet is a bit longer on the finish than the Extra Brut from this house, but this has the Achilles' heel of many grower bubbly in being rather coarse and inelegant on the palate. The complex nose is really quite good, offering up scents of apple, pear, citrus zest, brioche, chalky minerality and a nice touch of pastry cream in the upper register. However, on the palate, the promise falls off a bit, as this full-bodied and complex wine is quite coarse and lacking in refinement, with crisp acids, rather harsh *mousse* and pretty good length and grip on the finish. This is a serviceable drink (and a small step up from their basic Blanc de Blancs NV), but it is not special and clearly not first division bubbly. 2012-2020. **87.**

Hervé Dubois Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Grand Cru- Avize)

The current release from Hervé Dubois is another absolutely classic bottle of Blanc de Blancs, jumping from the glass in a stylish and very vibrant mélange of apple, warm bread, orange peel, chalky minerality and a touch of spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with superb focus, a superb core of fruit, ever so slightly coarse *mousse* (not the point of distraction, but the bubbles here are a touch larger than in some top examples), and absolutely lovely length and grip on the very classy finish. Fine juice, and as the note below will attest, this will be quite an ageworthy example. 2012-2025. **90+.**

Hervé Dubois Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Spring 2010 Release)

I had been most impressed with the last year's new release from Hervé Dubois, as this chardonnay specialist in the village of Avize made the finest non-vintage bottling that I have tasted from them for last summer's release. This bottle had been in my cellar for a couple of years and I thought it was a good time to see how it was evolving. The wine offers up a lovely and complex aromatic blend of apple, fresh-baked bread, chalky minerality, an exotic note of menthol and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with the structure fully blossomed, fine focus and excellent length and grip on the nuanced finish. My only minor complaint with this wine is that the *mousse* here is just a touch coarse, which may downgrade the wine slightly for those who believe that the first requirement of any world class example of Champagne is elegance. To my mind, the more recent releases here have shown even more sophisticated *mousse* and even more palate polish than this wine (which, it has to be admitted, has aged quite well) and should prove to be even better for aging. 2012-2020. **90.**

Godmé Père et Fils Blanc de Blancs Premier Cru Brut NV (Summer 2012 Release)

The new release of the Godmé Père et Fils Blanc de Blancs is a Premier Cru, despite the house being located in the grand cru village of Verzenay, as clearly some fruit from premier cru vineyards is incorporated into the blend. Twenty-five percent of the cuvée is barrel fermented and it is a fairly low *dosage* at eight grams per liter. The superb bouquet offers up a complex and quite youthful mélange of lemon, pears, vibrant, chalky minerality, a touch of *crème patissière*, fresh nutmeg and a touch of apple blossom in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep,

full-bodied and youthfully snappy, with a rock solid core of fruit, very elegant *mousse*, great focus and outstanding length and grip on the racy finish. This is a superb bottle of Blanc de Blancs that is certainly approachable right out of the blocks, but it will really provide some fireworks with a couple of years of bottle age! 2014-2025+. **92.**

Philippe Gonet Blanc de Blancs “Cuvée Roy Soleil” Brut NV

The Philippe Gonet Cuvée Roy Soleil is a lovely, albeit, still quite young, example of Blanc de Blancs. The fine bouquet offers up a youthful blend of apple, bread dough, a gentle touch of lime, a hint of the pastry cream to come and a lovely base of chalky, stony minerality. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and intensely flavored, with a fine core of fruit bound up in a zesty girdle of acidity, refined, delicate *mousse*, and fine length and grip on the quite soil-driven finish. This is a lovely, *aperitif* styled Blanc de Blancs that is a very good glass of bubbly today, but which will clearly benefit from a few years of bottle age. 2013-2025+. **90.**

Lilbert-Fils Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Grand Cru- Cramant)

I was very impressed with the current release of the non-vintage Blanc de Blancs from Lilbert-Fils. The deep, complex and very soil-driven bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex mélange of pear, musky floral tones, iodine-like, chalky soil nuances (which will make any fan of Meursault excited!), a bit of vanilla custard and a gentle topnote redolent of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully transparent, with a fine core of fruit, frothy *mousse*, excellent focus and very good length and grip on the perfectly balanced finish. Fine juice that will be even better with another year or two of bottle age. 2012-2020+. **91+.**

Pierre Moncuit Blanc de Blancs “Cuvée Hugues de Coulmet” Brut NV

The current release of Pierre Moncuit’s Cuvée Hugues de Coulmet is all from the 2008 vintage and hails from five hectares of vines that the family owns in Sézanne, rather than from the domaine’s parcels in Mesnil sur Oger. This cuvée undergoes complete malo, is raised entirely in stainless steel and has a *dosage of* 9 grams/ per liter. The wine is quite lovely, offering up a classic nose of apples, pears, a touch of lemon zest, chalky soil tones, bread dough and a gentle floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, youthful acids and lovey length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is tasty already, but will be better with a bit of bottle age. (Lot # L204106) 2012-2020+. **90.**

Pierre Moncuit Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Grand Cru- Mesnil sur Oger)

The new release of Pierre Moncuit’s non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is outstanding, but it is a young wine that will really benefit from a year or two in the cellar. Like the house’s Cuvée Hugues de Coulmet, the base wine for the new release is all from the 2008 vintage, with the grapes sourced from thirty year-old vines that the Moncuits own in Mesnil sur Oger. It too is raised in stainless steel and goes through full malo. The deep, vibrant and youthful nose wafts from the glass in a blend of fresh apricot, pear, sourdough bread, a touch of fresh nutmeg, chalky soil tones and a nice dollop of spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully tight, with a very good core of fruit, frothy *mousse*, snappy acids and fine focus and length on the nascently complex finish. This is not a bad drink today, but give it a bit of time in the cellar and this will really be something special in the glass. (Lot # L204105) 2013-2025+. **91+.**

Marcel Moineaux Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Grand Cru- Chouilly)

Marcel Moineaux has changed his label this year, with the wine now sporting a chic black and white classic look that will probably be more widely accepted in the marketplace- though I do miss the floral embellishments of the old label. However, the new release is simply

superb in the glass, offering up a deep and very refined nose of apple, tart orange, lovely minerality, bread dough and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very complex, with a seamless structure that is the epitome of elegance. The wine is rock solid at the core, offers up frothy *mousse* and sports exceptional length and grip on the focused and impeccably balanced finish. Last year's version was very complex, but a touch short on the backend, but this new rendition shows no defects whatsoever and is a superb wine and an outstanding value! 2012-2025+. **92**.



Verdant, mid-summer vineyards basking under the sun in Mesnil sur Oger.

Bruno Paillard Blanc de Blancs “Réserve Privée” Brut NV

I am a very big fan of Bruno Paillard Champagnes, and the new release of his non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is young and very promising. The deep and classy nose jumps from the glass in a blend of delicious apples, pear, chalky minerality, bread dough, spring flowers and a touch of *crème patissière* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully brisk, with a rock solid core, superb mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and a very long, focused and snappy finish. This will be a superb bottle in time, but it really deserves a couple of years in the cellar to blossom. 2014-2030. **91+**.

Pierre Paillard Blanc de Blancs “Acte 1” Brut NV

I very much liked the aromatic and flavor complexity of the Pierre Paillard “Acte 1” bottling, but the wine was typical of several other grower Champagnes that I tasted in showing a

bit of coarseness to its *mousse*, which always keeps my score down a bit. The nose is deep-pitched and quite ripe in its blend of pear, peach, bread dough, a lovely base of soil tones and a gentle leesiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with the aforementioned coarse *mousse*, good focus, but a slightly short finish. This is not bad-particularly in terms of complexity- but, I would love to see it with a bit more polish to its bubbles and a bit more length on the backend. The underlying raw materials are certainly first class. 2012-2020. **87.**

Serveaux Fils Blanc de Blancs Brut NV

The new release of the non-vintage Blanc de Blancs from Serveaux Fils is excellent and absolutely loaded with personality. The deep and very vibrant nose jumps from the glass in a blend of apple, tart orange, bread dough, lime peel, stony minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly complex, with beautiful balance, crisp acids, elegant *mousse* and very fine length and grip on the classy finish. This is not quite as complex on the palate as it is on the nose today (though this may arrive with a bit of bottle age), but this is a thoroughly satisfying and refined glass of bubbly that should age well for the next twelve to fifteen years. Lovely juice that is singing right out of the blocks, in contrast to last year's release, which needed a bit of bottle age to show its true potential. 2012-2025. **91.**

The Rare Wine Company "le Mesnil" Blanc de Blancs Brut NV

I have consistently enjoyed The Rare Wine Company's bottling of le Mesnil, and the new release is the finest I have tasted to date. The lovely and very elegant nose wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, pear, warm bread, stony minerality and a nice touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and focused, with very elegant *mousse*, good mid-palate depth and lovely mineral drive on the long and classy finish. This is a very classic example of Côte des Blancs bubbly that may even improve with a few years in the cellar. 2012-2022+. **91+.**

Vazart-Coquart et Fils Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Grand Cru- Chouilly)

This particular note hails from the big Champagne tasting held here in New York in September, which happily still featured last year's release of this fine cuvée. Somehow, there was a mix up in shipping last fall, so that double the yearly supply of non-vintage Blanc de Blancs from Vazart arrived here at the New York distributor's warehouse, which happily means that an additional year of cellaring has been taken care of by the wholesaler. As is often the case with top quality Brut NV bottlings, the wine is even better this year than last, offering up a deep and very classy bouquet of apple, pear, chalky soil tones, spring flowers, lemon peel and warm biscuits. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and now wide open, with excellent mid-palate depth, beautiful balance and focus, elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the very suave and vibrant finish. Lovely juice! 2012-2025. **92.**

Jean Velut Blanc de Blancs Brut NV

I was very impressed by the quality of the Jean Velut non-vintage Blanc de Blancs. The excellent nose jumps from the glass in a classy blend of apple, tangerine, warm bread, lovely minerality, a touch of fresh nutmeg and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very elegant, with a fine core of fruit, lovely, pinpoint bubbles, crisp acids and excellent, nascent complexity on the very long and transparent finish. This is still quite a young wine and a few years in the cellar will really pay rewards. Impressive juice. 2013-2028+. **91+.**

J. L. Vergnon “Conversation” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Grand Cru)

For the last decade, the Vergnon family has had Christophe Constant as their Cellar Master, with Monsieur Constant moving to increase quality at this fine estate in Mesnil sur Oger by reducing yields in the five hectares of vines owned by the family and harvesting riper grapes that was the case previously here. By picking at higher sugar levels, the Vernon wines no longer need to be chaptalized and the dosage is kept quite low. The changes instituted by Monsieur Constant have made Champagne J. L. Vergnon one of the darlings of many three-starred Michelin restaurants in France. Their cuvée “Conversation” is their non-vintage bottling, which does not undergo malo and is a blend from the Vernon holdings in the villages of Mesnil sur Oger, Avize and Oger, with the vines averaging a minimum of thirty years of age and the wine is aged on its fine lees for four years prior to disgorgement. The new release is excellent, offering up a very pure and classy nose of delicious apples, pears, wheat toast, lovely minerality and a nice touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and toasty, with broad shoulders, lovely mid-palate depth, crisp acids, pinpoint bubbles and fine complexity and grip on the long and zesty finish. This is already a lovely bottle, but I would be inclined to give it a couple of years in the cellar to allow it to really blossom from behind its girdle of zesty acidity. It should prove to be quite long-lived. 2014-2035. **91+**.

Non-Vintage Blanc de Noirs Brut

Barnaut Blanc de Noirs Brut NV (Grand Cru- Bouzy)

The new release of Barnaut’s non-vintage Blanc de Noirs is excellent, offering up a very elegant and complex aromatic blend of tart orange, wheat toast, a hint of lavender, complex minerality, citrus zest and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, elegant, pinpoint bubbles and fine length and grip on the bouncy and focused finish. This is quite low on *dosage*, which may make it seem a bit more like a Brut Nature to some folks, but it is a very well-made and tasty bottle. 2012-2025. **90+**.

Bernard Girardin “Cuvée BG” Brut NV (Fall Release)

Champagne Girardin is located in the Marne Valley and their Cuvée BG is comprised of sixty percent chardonnay, thirty percent pinot Meunier and ten percent pinot noir. The current release of his non-vintage Cuvée BG is outstanding and a superb follow-up to last year’s version, offering up a deep and very refined bouquet of apple, pink grapefruit, bread dough, wonderfully complex soil tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very elegant, with a lovely core, tiny, pinpoint bubbles, lovely focus and a very, very long finish of excellent balance and grip. This is a high class and very polished glass of bubbly. 2012-2025+. **91+**.

Godmé Père et Fils Blanc de Noirs Brut NV (Released May 2012)

The current release of Godmé Père et Fils Blanc de Noirs is a lovely wine, which is comprised entirely of pinot noir. The base wine of the new release is from the 2007 vintage, with fully forty percent of the blend hailing from reserve wines dating back to ’03, and the *dosage* is 6 grams per liter, which follows the trend of Monsieur Godmé to use lower level *dosage* in all of his recent bottlings. The nose is deep, pure and very vibrant in its blend of tart orange, apple, bread dough, complex and very precise minerality, citrus zest and a lovely floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and extremely elegant, with excellent focus, fine mid-palate depth, very refined *mousse*, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the perfectly balanced finish. This is a lovely wine that should age every bit as well as the bottling I tucked away in the

cellar four years ago (which is reported on immediately below). Fine and high class juice. 2012-2025. **92.**

Godmé Père et Fils Blanc de Noirs Brut NV (Released May 2008)

The Godmé Père et Fils Blanc de Noirs has aged beautifully and is just now entering into its plateau of peak maturity. The bouquet has blossomed into a very complex and classy mélange of apples, tart pears, rye toast, caraway seed, chalky soil tones and a touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and wide open, with a fine core of fruit, utterly refined *mousse*, excellent focus and balance and a very long, zesty and soil-driven finish. This is decidedly more giving in the mid-palate than it was upon release and is a superb glass of bubbly today, but which shows no signs of slowing down any time soon. 2012-2025. **93.**

Michel Lorient Blanc de Noirs “Brut Réserve” NV

Michel Lorient’s non-vintage Blanc de Noirs is comprised entirely of pinot meunier, and is a young, but lovely wine in the making. The deep and youthfully vibrant nose jumps from the glass in a mélange of white peach, beautifully refined soil tones, a hint of passion fruit, warm bread, gentle smokiness and the very gently musky floral tones of pinot meunier. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully light on its feet, with fine mid-palate depth, frothy *mousse*, crisp acids and lovely focus and grip on the perfectly balanced and elegant finish. This is a lovely wine in the making, and while it is delicious today, a couple of years in the cellar will really pay dividends. 2012-2025. **91+.**

Thierry Massin Blanc de Noirs “Brut Sélection” NV

I am really starting to ask myself why I do not have significantly more wines from this outstanding producer in the Côte des Bar in my own cellar, as each year the Massin wines I taste for this report are amongst the stars of their respective categories. The new release of the Massin Blanc de Noirs is stellar, soaring from the glass in a very vibrant aromatic mélange of apple, orange zest, very complex minerality, bread dough and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with outstanding focus, utterly refined *mousse*, crisp acids and simply superb length and grip on the zesty and dancing finish. One has to remember that the great band of Kimmeridgian limestone that defines the grand crus of Chablis and the hauntingly chalky soils of the Monts Damnés in Sancerre resurfaces as well in the Côte des Bar section of Champagne, and this Chablis-like minerality is very much in evidence in this lovely new release from Monsieur Massin. 2012-2022+. **92.**

Pierre Paillard Blanc de Noirs “Acte 1” Grand Cru Brut NV (Bouzy)

Like all of the Pierre Paillard bubbly that I sampled, the underlying base wine here is excellent, and the *mousse* here seems a bit more sophisticated than in some of the bottlings I tasted from this grower. The deep, refined and youthful nose offers up scents of green apple, quince, sourdough bread, lovely minerality and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully snappy, with an excellent core, very respectable *mousse*, fine focus and a very long, mineral and slightly yeasty finish. This is a very young wine that shows off fine length and grip on the backend and should be lovely with a year or two more in the cellar. 2013-2025. **90.**

Non-Vintage Brut

Ayala “Brut Majeur” NV

The new release of Brut Majeur is a lovely wine, with admirable complexity on both the nose and palate, but this current release seems just a touch shorter on the finish than last year’s version. The deep and classy nose wafts from the glass in a vibrant mix of apple, wheat toast,

gentle smokiness, lovely soil tones and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely focused, with a good core of fruit, refined *mousse*, and just of residual sweetness showing from the *dosage* today on the backend (which I assume is just an indication that this cuvée had been very recently disgorged prior to shipment to the states and should disappear back into the body of the wine with a bit more bottle age). The finish is not really short, but it is not quite as long as is customarily the case with this fine bottling from Ayala. That said, this is still a very tasty bottle of bubbly that should drink well for at least a decade. 2012-2022+. **88+**.

Barnaut “Grande Réserve” Brut NV (Grand Cru- Bouzy)

Champagne Barnaut’s current release of their Grande Réserve non-vintage Brut is a lovely wine, offering up a deep and vibrant nose of delicious apples, lemon zest, brioche, a hint of *crème pâtissière*, chalky soil tones and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and beautifully balanced, with its full-bodied format light on its feet, the *mousse* quite elegant and the finish long, bright and beautifully focused. This is a very elegant and refined wine that should age quite well, and while it is drinking very fine out of the blocks, a few years of cellaring should allow the girdle of acidity to peel back a bit more and reveal even more mid-palate generosity. Fine juice. 2012-2025+. **91+**.

Bérèche et Fils “Brut Réserve” NV (disgorged January 2012)

I was impressed to see that Bérèche et Fils is based in the small village of Ludes, located on the Montagne de Reims, as this is of course home to one my favorite *petits maisons*, Ployez-Jacquemart. This was my first taste of any of the wines from Bérèche et Fils and I was very impressed. The Bérèche family currently tends 9.5 hectares of vines, scattered amongst villages on the Montagne de Reims and the Vallée de la Marne. They began first bottling and selling some wine on their own in the 1970s and now produce roughly 85,000 bottles per year. The Brut Réserve bottling is a blend of about twenty percent barrel-fermented wines and the remainder raised in tank, with malolactic fermentations generally avoided. The current release is based primarily on the 2008 vintage and includes thirty percent reserve wines in the blend. It is roughly a one-third each mix of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier, and it is absolutely superb. The deep and very youthful nose soars from the glass in a complex mélange of apple, orange zest, warm biscuits, a touch of lavender and a very complex base of minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with very refined *mousse*, snappy acids and outstanding length and grip on the intense finish. There is great backend mineral drive here and superb flavor authority. This is great juice that should age very well indeed and will be even better with a few years more bottle age. 2012-2030. **93**.

Billecart-Salmon Brut Réserve NV

I have lost track a bit of the most recent wines from Billecart-Salmon, as the new US importer for this house is just as difficult for journalists (or at least this one!) to deal with as its predecessor. It is too bad, as I have always liked the wines from Billecart, but my requests for samples has resulted in the usual run-around. This bottle was tasted while on the road in Europe. The current release of Billecart-Salmon’s non-vintage Brut Réserve is a quite good and is drinking pretty well out of the blocks for a young wine from this house, whose wines usually benefit from some cellaring. The nose is complex and classy, offering up scents of apple, bread dough, orange peel and a complex base of stony minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and well-balanced, with very refined *mousse*, good focus and a long, poised and very respectable finish. This is very good, but not great- though perhaps some bottle age will unlock some inner secrets here that are not readily apparent at the present time. 2012-2020+. **89**.



Bollinger “Speciale Cuvée” Brut NV (Summer 2012 Release)

This note hails from a sample of the most current release here in the US, which I tasted this month here in New York. This is a lovely and classy wine that is more minerally and less overtly “toasty” than was the case with this bottling a generation ago, but equally fine. The nose is deep and complex, offering up a lovely blend of apple, orange peel, warm bread, a bit of caraway seed, complex soil tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with crisp acids, very refined *mousse*, excellent grip and balance and a very long and youthfully classy finish. This is a lovely bottle that is already quite tasty, but may yet develop more of the old school Bollinger “toastiness” with further bottle age. 2012-2025+. 91+.

Bollinger “Speciale Cuvée” Brut NV (Late 2011 Release?)

This particular bottle of Bollinger non-vintage Brut was tasted in St. Émilion in the spring and was showing quite well- I assume that it was the current release in the market in France at that time and is clearly a different cuvée from the one reported on above. The nose is deep and quite refined in its mélange of apple, pear, wheat toast, a touch of honeycomb, chalky soil tones and citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, but not particularly complex, with a good core of fruit, bright acids, refined *mousse* and pretty good length and grip on the focused finish. I had expected a bit more complexity here on the palate, but perhaps I just caught this wine a bit too early in its evolution.

It is certainly a good, solid effort, but I remember this wine as being even better back in the day when I used to drink it with great regularity. 2012-2020+. **89.**

Bernard Brémont Brut NV (Grand Cru- Ambonnay)

I have long been a fan of the wines of the small grower house of Bernard Brémont, and am disappointed that I do not see them as regularly as I did several years ago. However, I usually pick up the new releases from a store in Beaune which carries them each time I arrive here in November for my first look at the new vintage in Burgundy, and have been consistently happy with the wines. This new release of his non-vintage Brut is excellent, offering up a deep and complex nose of apple, a touch of tangerine, bread dough, chalky soil tones and a youthful touch of grapefruit peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a bit agitated from its recent disgorging (with the *dosage* not yet well-integrated into the body of the wine), but with excellent focus and balance, refined *mousse*, and lovely minerality on the snappy and very long finish. At the time, this just needed a bit of time in the cellar to fully come back from its disgorgement, and as it was tasted in November of 2011, it should be singing right now. 2012-2025+. **92+.**

Bernard Brémont Brut NV (Grand Cru- Ambonnay) Spring 2011 Release

Last spring's release from Bernard Brémont of his non-vintage Brut is blossoming beautifully and really is a stunning glass of Brut NV. The deep, vibrant and very complex nose offers up scents of apple, sourdough bread, a touch of grassiness, a beautifully complex base of soil, smoky tones and a dollop of fresh herbs in the upper register. As I have said in the past, there is more than a passing resemblance to young Dom Perignon in the aromatic profile of this bottling from Monsieur Brémont and this is very much in evidence with this lovely wine. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and absolutely rock solid at the core, with very elegant *mousse*, bright acids, superb focus and balance and great grip and bounce on the very, very long and classy finish. This wine is just starting to really blossom, and is a great glass of bubbly. 2012-2025+. **93.**

Pierre Brigandat et Fils "Brut Tradition" NV

This was my first taste of wines from Pierre Brigandat et Fils and the house's current release of their non-vintage Brut is stunning. The small domaine is located in the Côte des Bar, in the village of Channes and the current head of the 7.5 hectare family estate is Bertrand Brigandat. The non-vintage Brut is made up of one hundred percent pinot noir, though it makes no mention of Blanc de Noirs on the label. It hails primarily from the 2005 vintage, with a bit more than twenty percent of the blend made up of reserve wines. The deep and complex nose jumps from the glass in a mélange of apple, grapefruit, smoky overtones, warm biscuits, beautifully complex soil tones and a nice touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and youthfully complex, with lovely mid-palate depth, ripe, crisp acids, very elegant *mousse*, superb balance and excellent length and grip on the youthful and quite classy finish. While quite tasty today, I would opt for tucking this lovely wine in the cellar for another year and really let it blossom. This is superb juice and a great value! 2013-2025+. **92+.**

Guy de Chassey Brut NV (Grand Cru- Louvois)

The new release of non-vintage Brut from this fine, Montagne de Reims producer is outstanding and a seamless beauty of great refinement. The deep, complex and very classy nose offers up a fine mélange of apple, brioche, nectarine, complex soil tones, orange zest and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off outstanding mid-palate depth, with utterly polished, frothy *mousse*, superb focus and balance, bright acids and absolutely

superb length and grip on the very long and sophisticated finish. I could drink this beautiful bottle of bubbly all day long! 2012-2030. **92.**

Guy de Chassey “Nicolas d’Olivet” Cuvée Réservee Brut NV (Grand Cru- Louvois)

The Guy de Chassey “Nicolas d’Olivet” Cuvée Réservee is a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay. The current release is a very fine bottle of wine, but it suffered just a touch in my tasting by following hard on the heels of the superb Brut NV from this fine house in Louvois, as it is not quite as refined on either the nose or palate as the above wine. The bright and vibrant nose offers up a lovely mélange of apple, wheat toast, a touch of hazelnut, orange zest and fine minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with good, but not super refined *mousse*, bright acids and very good length and grip. In comparison to this year’s non-vintage Brut from Guy de Chassey, the Nicolas d’Olivet Cuvée Réservee comes across as a bit “nobly rustic”. Picture it as the country cousin to the Parisian refinement of the straight non-vintage Brut this year. But, still a very good glass of bubbly with plenty of personality. 2012-2025. **89.**

Etienne Chéré Brut Tradition NV (Spring 2010 Release)

Champagne Etienne Chéré is located in the Marne Valley in the village of Champigny sur Marne. I have liked the wines since I first encountered them three or four years ago, and cellared a few bottles to see how they evolve with bottle age. This particular release of their Brut Tradition has been in the cellar for two years and has blossomed beautifully, offering up a deep and very lovely nose of apple, pear overtones, brioche, beautifully complex minerality and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and wide open, with lovely mid-palate depth, refined *mousse*, bright acids and superb length and grip. A couple years out from release has brought this wine to its zenith of peak drinkability, and though it shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon, the two year mark out from release looks like a perfect moment for drinking this cuvée. 2012-2020+? **92.**

Etienne Chéré “Brut Sélection” NV (Fall 2012 Release)

The non-vintage Etienne Chéré “Brut Sélection” is a blend of forty percent chardonnay and thirty percent each pinot noir and pinot meunier. The current release all hails from the 2008 vintage and went through full malolactic fermentation. The bright and complex nose jumps from the glass in superb blend of apple, bread dough, smoky overtones, lemon zest, complex minerality and a touch of fresh nutmeg. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and flawlessly balanced, with a rock solid core of fruit, bright acids, elegant *mousse* and superb length and grip. This is just a beautiful bottle of Brut NV that is very good out of the blocks, but will really sing with a few years in the cellar and should age superbly well. It was disgorged in late 2011. 2012-2030. **92+.**

Paul Clouet Brut “Selection” NV (Grand Cru- Bouzy)

The new release of Paul Clouet’s Brut “Selection” is a superb and very expressive example, offering up a deep and very floral bouquet of pears, nectarines, a nice touch of acacia blossom, brioche, gentle smokiness and an outstanding base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and frothy, with a very fine core of fruit, superb complexity, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the perfectly focused finish. This is a lovely bottle for drinking right out of the blocks and which should have no difficulties delighting the senses for a good dozen years. 2012-2025. **91+.**

R. H. Coutier Brut NV (Grand Cru- Ambonnay)

The new release of the Coutier non-vintage Brut is a deep, complex and toasty wine of impressive breed and depth. The *cépage* this year is comprised of seventy percent pinot noir and

thirty percent chardonnay, all hailing from the family vineyards in Ambonnay. The wine undergoes complete malolactic, hails principally from the 2007 vintage (with some reserve wines in the blend) and is finished with a *dosage* of 6 grams per liter. It was disgorged in March of 2011, after three years on the lees and was aged under cork, rather than crown top. The first rate bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of apple, wheat bread, orange zest, a lovely base of soil, a touch of nuttiness and a gentle topnote redolent of heather. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and youthful, with very elegant *mousse*, a lovely core of fruit, superb focus and balance and a long, classy finish. This wine is drinking very well out of the blocks, but it will have no difficulties aging for the next ten to fifteen years and will even improve with a few years of bottle age. Lovely wine. 2012-2025. **90+**.

Baron Dauvergne “Cuvée Privilège” Brut NV (Grand Cru- Bouzy)

The new release of the Baron Dauvergne non-vintage Brut “Cuvée Privilège” is a very young wine that currently offers up an excellent nose, but a rather adolescently grumpy palate that demands some bottle age. The complex bouquet offers up a lovely blend of apple, tangerine, brioche, a fine base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and snappy, with a fine core of fruit, refined, pinpoint bubbles, almost painfully tensile acidity and a finish that is nicely focused, but currently quite abrupt and closes with youthful bitterness. There are some fine components here, but this wine needs at least a year or two of cellaring to allow the brisk acids to back off a little bit. If the wine can rally on the backend with bottle age, then my score will prove to be too conservative. But, it is pretty tough sledding right now. 2014-2025+. **88+**.

Barone Dauvergne “Oiel de Perdrix” Brut NV (Grand Cru- Bouzy)

The “Oiel de Perdrix” or “Eye of the Partridge” bottling from Barone Dauvergne is a lovely wine again this year, but this seemed to me to have been recently disgorged, as it was showing its *dosage* in a rather sweet style that seemed to indicate that everything had not yet snapped back into place after disgorgement. The color is a very beautiful, delicate melon, with just a faint blush of pink, and the nose is really quite gorgeous in its mélange of white cherries, melon, bread dough, chalky soil tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant on the attack, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the slightly sweet finish. It does not seem to my palate as if the *dosage* was overly generous here, but rather, that the *dosage* is not currently synthesized into the other elements of the wine- which is a character I have encountered quite frequently with wines that have been recently disgorged. If the *dosage* eventually gets absorbed back into the other elements and no longer acts as a bit of distracting sweetness on the backend, then the score at the higher end of my range will be appropriate, as all the other elements here are lovely. 2012-2022+? **87-91+?**

Champagne Deutz “Brut Classic” NV

The current release of the Deutz Brut Classic is a very young and very promising bottle of non-vintage Brut, but it will need at least a couple of years in the cellar to really blossom from behind its girdle of acidity and start to show some generosity. The deep and very classy nose offers up a youthful blend of quince, lemon, bread dough, chalky minerality and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very tightly-knit, with a fine core, great focus and cut, elegant *mousse* and superb length and grip on the zippy finish. With a bit of bottle age, this will be excellent. 2014-2030+. **91**.

Duval-Leroy Brut NV

The new release of this fine, Vertus-based house's non-vintage Brut is quite fine, offering up a deep and classy nose of apple, warm biscuits, a touch of fresh nutmeg, orange peel and a lovely base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and fairly complex, with a good core, refined *mousse* and good, but not great length on the classy finish. Other than this wine being just a touch short, there is a lot to like here about the new release of Brut NV from Duval-Leroy. 2012-2022. **89.**

Nicolas Feuillatte Brut Réserve NV

In the last few years, I have been quite impressed with how the quality of the Nicolas Feuillatte lineup has risen, and the current release of their Brut Réserve is another strong effort that is a step or two up from what this *maison* used to produce a decade ago. The bright and complex nose offers up a mix of lemon, apple, bread dough, complex, chalky minerality and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and nicely balanced, with quite good, but not great depth at the core, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and really very nice complexity on the long, minerally and quite poised finish. This is really quite a good bottle of bubbly and an excellent value. 2012-2020+. **89+.**

Gatinois "Brut Tradition" NV (Grand Cru- Aÿ)

The current release of Gatinois "Brut Tradition" is another simply lovely bottle of wine. The house style here at Gatinois is quite similar to the old Bollinger style, taking advantage of the ripe pinot noir for which the vineyards of Aÿ are rightfully famous for and crafting a richer, toastier style of Champagne. The *cépage* of this cuvée is eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay, all from the family vineyards in Aÿ. The base wine here is from 2007, with thirty percent of the blend made up of reserve wines from 2006 and 2005. The complex and classy bouquet is a deep and slightly oxidative in its superb blend of baked apples and peaches, a bit of red berry, warm bread, almonds, an excellent, complex base of minerality and a bit of fresh nutmeg in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and beautifully wide open for current drinking, with a fine core of fruit, bright acids, tiny, pinpoint bubbles and excellent focus and grip on the very long, zesty finish. This is a beautiful bottle of bubbly in that richer style that made Bollinger so famous a generation ago. (Lot # L10-01) 2012-2022. **91+.**

Godmé Père et Fils "Brut Réserve" NV (Released May 2008)

The Godmé Père et Fils "Brut Réserve" that I have cellared for four years has blossomed beautifully and is an excellent example of why it is a richly rewarding experience to lay down non-vintage Brut bottlings for an extended period of time before drinking them in earnest. When I first reported on this release back in Issue 15, the wine was very good, but I had hopes that it would blossom a bit with further bottle age and it has exceeded my expectations and is now a terrific glass of bubbly. The deep and complex nose offers up a fine mélange of apple, caraway seed, very complex minerality, brioche and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and wide open, with a fine core of fruit, bright acids, very elegant *mousse* and a very long, pure and complex finish that dances across the palate with zesty acids and a beautiful spine of minerality. Great juice now at its prime, but still with plenty of life ahead. 2012-2025. **93.**

Philippe Gonet Brut Réserve NV

This is a grower in Mesnil sur Oger with whom I had not been previously familiar, as his wines are new to the American market, but I was very impressed with what I tasted. The wine is still fairly young, but offers up a really outstanding bouquet of pear, brioche, orange zest, a touch of *crème pâtissière*, chalky minerality and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is

deep, nascently complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, refined *mousse*, bright acids and excellent focus and balance on the very long and snappy finish. This is a lovely drink already, but I have little doubt that another year or two of bottle age will pay handsome dividends. High class non-vintage Brut! 2012-2025+. **91+**.

Charles Heidsieck “Brut Réserve” NV

The Charles Heidsieck non-vintage “Brut Réserve” sports a new label and bottle this year (which I quite like), but I was under the distinct impression that the wine was a bit younger than has been customary for this cuvée upon release than had been the case in the past. Was the wine trotted out into the market a bit sooner to get the new package out into the hands of consumers? In any case, this is a lovely bottle of non-vintage Brut in the making, but it will need a couple of years cellaring time to really blossom. The deep and classy bouquet offers up a youthfully complex mélange of apple, quince, stony minerality, bread dough and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and still very youthful, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the focused and snappy finish. All this lovely wine needs is a bit more bottle age to really come into its own. 2014-2030+. **90+**.

Jacquesson Cuvée Number 735 Brut NV (Disgorged September 2011)

The new release of Jacquesson’s non-vintage Brut, Cuvée 735, is a lovely wine of great promise, but as has been the case with this bottling for several years now, its best days are still a few years in the future. The blend this time around is thirty-three percent pinot noir, twenty percent pinot meunier and forty-seven percent chardonnay. The deep, complex and youthful nose offers up a fine mix of bread dough, apple, a touch of quinine, orange peel, fresh almonds, stony minerality and leesy tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a touch yeasty, with a fine spine of minerality, snappy bubbles, brisk acids and a very long, tight and still quite youthful finish. Tuck this fine wine away for another three or four years to let it relax a bit structurally- it should prove to be quite long-lived and exquisite at its apogee. 2015-2035. **91+**.

Krug Grande Cuvée Brut NV

The newest release in the US market of Grande Cuvée from Champagne Krug is a beautiful wine that is already accessible, but whose true apogee of peak drinkability is still very many years in the future. The deep and beautifully youthful nose offers up scents of apple, lemon zest, wheat toast, superbly complex soil tones and a nice touch of smokiness (from pinot meunier?) in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and tightly-knit, with crisp acids, pinpoint bubbles, laser-like focus and outstanding length and grip on the classy finish. This is a fine drink already, but for those who long for the more toasty side of Grande Cuvée, I would suggest that a decade’s worth of cellaring will allow this wine to really blossom. 2012-2040. **94.**

Krug Grande Cuvée Brut NV

This bottle of Krug Grande Cuvée was tasted while visiting the domaine in Reims in March and is probably the next release to be prepared for the market. This is a beautiful version of this great bottling, offering up a deep and youthfully complex nose of apple, tart orange, wheat toast, kaleidoscopic minerality, citrus zest and a nice touch of fresh almond. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with great purity and complexity, bright, zesty acids, exceptional focus and balance, pinpoint bubbles and outstanding length and grip on the utterly poised finish. Great juice- but, of course, this should come as no surprise to anyone. 2016-2050. **95.**

Laherte Frères Brut Tradition NV

The new release of Laherte Frères' non-vintage Brut Tradition is excellent, wafting from the glass in a complex and refined nose of green apple, lemon, bread dough, stony minerality and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very well-balanced, with elegant *mousse*, crisp acids, lovely focus and grip and a very long, bouncy and impressively complex finish. Fine, fine juice. 2012-2030. **92.**

Lamiable Brut NV (Grand Cru- Tours-sur-Marne)

The current release of Lamiable's non-vintage Brut is an okay bottle of grower bubbly, but again, with the shortcomings of coarseness to the bubbles and a bit of bitterness on the backend. The bouquet is quite good in its complex mélange of green apple, quince, bread dough, citrus peel and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a tad rustic, with big and coarse bubbles, crisp acids and sneaky length and grip on the inelegant finish. There are clearly some pretty good raw materials here in the base wine, but the lack of elegance with the *mousse* really detracts. 2012-2020. **85.**

Lasalle "Cuvée Préférence" Brut NV (Released Spring 2010)

I could not get samples of the current releases from Lasalle- a house I like very much- but, had this bottle in my cellar and thought I might open it and see how it was evolving a few years out from its release. The nose is deep, complex and has blossomed beautifully, offering up a fine mélange of apple, orange zest, brioche, complex minerality, gentle chalkiness and a refined, floral topnote redolent of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with lovely complexity, bright acids, very refined *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the focused and classy finish. A lovely wine that shows plenty of life still ahead of it. 2012-225+. **92+.**

Laurent-Perrier Brut NV

I cannot get the domaine or its American importer to pay any attention to my requests for samples of the new releases here, so I was very happy to find the Laurent-Perrier non-vintage Brut being poured by the glass at Hotel Le Cep in Beaune on my most recent trip to Burgundy. The new release is lovely (why are the American importers hiding this wine from enthusiastic writers?), offering up a refined and complex nose of lemon peel, green apple, beautifully complex minerality, bread dough and a nice touch of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and beautifully balanced, with very refined *mousse*, lovely focus and a long, youthful finish. I would opt for giving this fine example a year or two of cellaring to fully allow it to blossom, but it is still quite tasty in its relative youth. 2012-2030. **92.**

Gérard Lorient "Brut Tradition" NV (Disgorged Spring 2012)

I am a huge fan of this bottling from Gérard Lorient, which is comprised entirely of pinot meunier, with the family's vines all planted in the 1950s, making this a rare old vine cuvée. The pinot meunier here gives the wine a very refined and gently floral aspect that I find particularly exciting, and the new release is superb, soaring from the glass in a complex and very elegant blend of apple, tart peach, a touch of lavender, a beautifully complex base of soil, warm bread and a touch of fresh almond. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very refined, with superb core of fruit, crisp acids, refined *mousse* and flawless poise and balance on the very long and very elegant finish. This is a beautiful bottle of non-vintage Brut which is drinking superbly well right out of the blocks, but should have no difficulties cruising along for a decade or more with great style and grace. 2012-2022+. **92.**

Marguet Père et Fils Cuvée Réserve Brut NV (Grand Cru)

Marguet Père et Fils is located in the great village of Ambonnay, and their Brut NV is a fifty-fifty blend of pinot noir and chardonnay. There is a small percentage of barrel-fermented lots included in this blend, which is a lovely follow-up to last year's stellar bottling of Cuvée Réserve. The deep, complex and very pure nose offers up a fine mélange of apple, a touch of tangerine, refined soil tones, brioche, gentle notes of almond and just a dollop of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is deep and full-bodied, with lovely focus and complexity, lovely *mousse* and very good length and grip on the bright and bouncy finish. Last year's version seemed a little more bound up in its structure at this stage, but the new release is singing right out of the blocks. This is a very fine source. 2012-2030+. **92.**

Mercier Brut NV

I crossed paths with this wine at Café Lavinal in Bages during my spring trip to Bordeaux for the *En Primeur* tastings of the 2011s. The Cazes family (of Lynch Bages fame), who owns Café Lavinal, really should remove this wine from its by the glass Champagne selections, as this was one of the most mediocre glasses of Champagne that I have tasted in several years. The utterly simple nose offers up scents of underripe apple, quince, bread dough and lemon peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, simple and short, with coarse *mousse* and no redeeming qualities. I ordered it as I had no idea what Mercier's wines were like, and after dutifully taking this note, I ordered a beer! 2012-2015. **70.**

Moutard Père et Fils "Grande Cuvée" Brut NV

The new release of Grande Cuvée from Moutard Père et Fils is simply an outstanding bottle of wine and it is absolutely wide open for current consumption and drinking brilliantly. This wine is made from one hundred percent pinot noir and did not undergo malo. It was disgorged in October of 2010, after being aged three years on the lees. The deep and very classy nose seems to show almost a bit of floral touch of pinot meunier to it (though the wine is all pinot noir) in its complex mélange of apple, white cherries, warm bread, exotic floral tones, a beautifully complex base of soil and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with superb complexity, bright, zesty acids, lovely, pinpoint bubbles and simply superb length and grip on the laser-like finish. This is a simply stellar bottle of Brut non-vintage that is drinking superbly well right out of the blocks and should have no difficulties keeping ten to fifteen years in the cellar. (Lot # LBR08*27810) 2012-2025. **92+.**

Mumm de Cramant Brut NV

I have friends who are big fans of this bottling from Mumm, but I have been quite underwhelmed with the last several releases of this cuvée that I have tasted. The most recent release offers up a solid and vaguely artificial nose of apple, simple minerality, bread dough and floral tones that seem more perfume than fresh blossom in tone. On the palate the wine is medium-full, frothy and unsubstantial in the mid-palate, with respectable acidity, solid length and grip and zero signs of complexity or breed. A very superficial glass of bubbly. 2012-2020. **86.**

Bruno Paillard "Première Cuvée" Brut NV

The new release of Bruno Paillard's Première Cuvée is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a complex and classy blend of apple, lemon zest, brioche, complex minerality and a nice touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and snappy, with an excellent core, fine focus, very elegant, pinpoint bubbles and excellent length and grip on the youthful and snappy finish. While there is plenty of pleasure to be had

drinking this wine today, I would opt for giving it a couple of years in the cellar to loosen up a bit structurally. This is fine juice. 2012-2030. **92.**

Pierre Paillard Grand Cru Brut NV (Bouzy)

Like several of the Pierre Paillard bottlings that I tasted in preparation for this report, the house's non-vintage Brut shows off excellent raw materials, but not quite enough sophistication to its bubbles to rank above merely good. As I have noted elsewhere, for folks who are willing to sacrifice a bit of polish on the palate (particularly with the *mousse*) for the complexity of the underlying base wine, my score will seem at least two or three points too conservative. In any event, the non-vintage Brut from Pierre Paillard offers up a lovely and complex nose of warm biscuits, apple, bread fruit, complex soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite soil-driven in personality, with crisp acids, coarse bubbles and very good length and grip on the complex finish. With first class, pinpoint bubbles, this would be truly outstanding juice, but it is essentially just a bit too coarse for my palate. 2012-2020. **87.**

Hubert Paulet "Cuvée Tradition" Brut NV (Premier Cru- Rilly la Montagne)

I have always liked the wines from this fine producer on the Montagne de Reims and the current release of the Paulet non-vintage Brut is a blend of fifty percent pinot meunier, and twenty-five percent each of chardonnay and pinot noir. The fine and complex bouquet offers up scents of apple, peach, warm bread, a complex base of soil and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and currently a touch yeasty (from recent disgorgement perhaps?), with a fine core of fruit, very elegant *mousse* crisp acids and fine length and grip on the slightly leesy finish. If the leesiness here is just a passing phase from *degorgement* and the wine snaps more precisely into focus, then my score will prove to be a few points on the conservative side, as there is fine depth and complexity here in this elegant wine. 2012-20225+. **89+?**

Hubert Paulet "Cuvée Risléus" Brut NV

I am a very big fan of the Cuvée Risléus bottling from Hubert Paulet, which is the estate's *Tête de Cuvée* and sees at least a significant percentage of barrel fermentation. The current release is based primarily on the 2001 vintage and is outstanding. The deep and complex nose jumps from the glass in a classy blend of apple, orange zest, a touch of bee pollen, almond, bread dough, a beautifully complex base of soil and a bit of wood tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and classy, with an excellent core of fruit, lovely focus and balance, tiny, pinpoint bubbles and superb length and grip on the classy finish. There is certainly some overt barrel fermentation tones here on both the nose and the palate, but they are very well done and far from obtrusive in this very deep and serious bottle of bubbly. 2012-2030. **93.**

Philipponnat "Royal Réserve" Brut NV

The new release of Philipponnat's non-vintage "Royal Réserve" is outstanding. The wine offers up a deep, complex and gently leesy nose of apple, bread dough, a bit of citrus peel, complex, stony minerality, a touch of fresh nutmeg and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still youthfully tight, with fine mid-palate depth, crisp acids, very elegant *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the snappy and quite primary finish. While the new release of the Philipponnat "Royal Réserve" is a fine drink right out of the blocks, I would opt for giving this wine a year or two in the cellar to fully come into its own- it should prove to be quite long-lived by the standards of non-vintage Brut. 2012-2030+. **91+.**

Piper-Heidsieck Brut NV

I have been very impressed with the progress that Piper-Heidsieck has made with all of their bottlings in the last few years. The new release of the Piper Brut NV is outstanding

aromatically, offering up a complex and minerally nose of apple, quince, bread dough, a lovely base of stony minerality, orange peel and a touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and snappy, with lovely mid-palate depth, fine *mousse*, crisp acids and very good focus and balance. The only quibble I would make with the new release is that it is a touch short on the backend (particularly in comparison to the version of this wine I tasted back in the fall of 2010), but all other constituent components here are quite impressive. For those who have still not heard that Piper-Heidsieck is a *Grande Marque* on the rise, here is another fine example of just how far this house has come in the last decade. 2012-2020+. **88.**

Ployez-Jacquemart Brut NV

The current release of the Ployez-Jacquemart non-vintage Brut is excellent on both the nose and palate. The deep, bright and complex bouquet offers up scents of apple, tart pear, brioche, chalky minerality and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and racy, with a rock solid core, very refined *mousse*, zesty acidity and fine focus and balance on the very long, youthful finish. This is a lovely bottle that will be even better with a year or two more bottle age. As always, one of the best Brut NV's out there today. 2012-2030. **92.**

Pol Roger "Extra Cuvée de Réserve" Brut NV

The new release of Pol Roger's "White Label" non-vintage Brut is outstanding and a great value. The superb nose jumps from the glass in a complex blend of apple, lemon peel, sourdough bread, chalky minerality and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with very elegant *mousse*, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long and classy finish. This is a fine drink right now, but as has always been the case with this consistently excellent Brut NV, this wine will age quite well and really blossom with additional layers of complexity with a few years of cellaring. 2012-2025. **92.**

Pol Roger "Extra Cuvée de Réserve" Brut NV (served from magnum)

This was served at the opening dinner for the annual *En Primeur* week of festivities in Bordeaux during the first week of April of this year, and the wine was showing beautifully. I assume that this is the previous release of the Pol Roger white label to the cuvée reported on above, but there was no way to be sure of this. The nose is deep, complex and vibrant, offering up scents of tart apple, a touch of pink grapefruit, bread dough, chalky minerality and a nice topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a superb core of fruit, bright acids, utterly refined *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the complex and youthful finish. Another outstanding Pol Roger white label. 2012-2025+. **91+.**

Camille Savès "Carte Blanche" Premier Cru Brut NV (2012 Release)

As readers may recall from a short profile I wrote on this superb house a few years back, even though Champagne Camille Savès is based in the grand cru village of Bouzy and most of their vineyards lie within this village (or Ambonnay), their Carte Blanche bottling incorporates production from some additional family chardonnay vineyards that lie in the village of Tauxières (which is a premier cru), so the entire cuvée is only entitled to premier cru status. Nevertheless, it has been consistently excellent and the new release is another superb bottle of bubbly, offering up a deep and vibrant nose of apple, pink grapefruit, complex minerality, bread dough and a lovely, floral topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with a very fine core of fruit, elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and outstanding length and grip on the focused and beautifully balanced finish. This bottling was disgorged in late 2011. The current release of Carte Blanche is superb juice that will age very well. (Lot #9816) 2012-2030. **91+.**

Camille Savès “Carte d’Or” Grand Cru Brut NV (Bouzy)

The new release of Camille Savès’ “Carte d’Or” was sent to me from France at the start of September, so there is a distinct possibility that this had been recently disgorged before it was sent. I am so accustomed to this cuvée absolutely shining, that this slightly disjointed showing caught me by surprise and hence, my suspicion that the wine had recently been disgorged and was just temporarily out of balance as a result. In any case, the wine showed a slight lack of focus on both the nose and palate, but otherwise, some very tasty and complex components. The new release is a customary blend of seventy-five percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent chardonnay, all from the family vineyards in the village of Bouzy. The bouquet is a deep blend of apple, orange, warm biscuits, a touch of clove, lovely soil tones and a bit of pastry cream. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with lovely mineral drive on the backend, refined *mousse*, and very good length and grip on the slightly blurry finish. I have cellared and drunk so much Carte d’Or over the last five years that I have a hard time imagining that this wine will not snap back into perfect focus with a few more months bottle age. 2013-2025+. **89-92?**

Jacques Selosse Initial Brut NV (2010 Release)

Anselme Selosse’s basic Brut NV is far from a basic wine. This current release is a blend from the vintages of 2003, 2004 and 2005 and was aged for twelve months in “one wine” barrels sourced from Domaine Leflaive in Puligny-Montrachet. It is comprised entirely from chardonnay from the Selosse family vineyards in Avize. The nose on the new release of Initial is stunning, soaring from the glass in a blaze of apple, tangerine, smoky notes, beautiful, chalky minerality, a touch of almond paste and a gentle framing of wood tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully pure, with superb complexity, lovely acids, very elegant *mousse* and stunning length and grip on the focused and dancing finish. Just a beautiful bottle. 2012-2030+. **95.**

Taittinger Brut “La Française” NV

The new release of Taittinger’s Brut “La Française” is excellent, with lovely mid-palate depth and the very obvious potential to improve with a bit of cellaring. The refined and complex nose wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, tart orange, bread dough, fine minerality and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, with crisp acids, fine mid-palate depth, pinpoint bubbles, lovely focus and excellent length and grip on the still very youthful finish. This is certainly a good drink today, but there is a bit of the backend austerity of youth that will dissipate if the wine is tucked away in the cellar for a year or two. A fine result. 2012-2025. **90+.**

Taittinger Folies de la Marquetterie Brut NV

The new release of this fine single vineyard bottling from Taittinger is excellent and aromatically as expressive as any cuvée in the fine Taittinger lineup this year. As I have noted before, this is a very interesting *cépages* for Taittinger, which is primarily a chardonnay house, as the wine is a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay. The wine shows a bit of influence from barrel fermentation on its deep and extremely vibrant nose, offering up scents of delicious apples, white peaches, orange blossoms, brioche, a very stylish base of soil and a nice touch of fresh nutmeg in the upper register. On the palate the wine is complex, full-bodied and very classy, with excellent depth in the mid-palate, elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the wide open, focused and zesty finish. It may just be my impression, but it certainly seems that this wine sees a year or two more aging on its lees prior to disgorgement and release, as it is absolutely singing on the palate right now. The current release of Folies de la

Marquetterie will continue to improve over the next couple of decades, but this wine is gorgeous right now. High class juice! 2014-2030+. **92+**.

Taittinger “Prélude” Grand Cru Brut NV

I have been a huge fan of the Taittinger “Prélude” bottling since it was first crafted and the current release is absolutely superb and perhaps the most elegant rendition to date of this fine cuvée. My first sample of this wine was uncharacteristically short, and while I did not detect any overt corkiness on either the nose and the palate, I could not believe that the sample was representative. I am really happy that I reached out to get a second sample, as the pristine bottle was everything I could hope for from this outstanding wine, soaring from the glass in a very refined mélange of apple, pear, a hint of creosote, warm biscuits, beautifully complex soil tones, a touch of orange zest and a beautiful floral topnote redolent of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant, with glorious, pinpoint bubbles, bright, suave acids and outstanding focus and grip on the very, very long and quintessentially elegant finish. As I have said before, this wine is not far off the sublime quality of the Comtes de Champagne here and is a superb value! 2012-2030+. **93+**.

Jean Velut Brut NV

This was my first tasting of the wines of Jean Velut and I found them very good in terms of aromatic and flavor complexity, but like several other Grower Champagnes out there, the *mousse* was a tad on the coarse side and kept my score down just a bit. The bouquet on Monsieur Velut’s non-vintage Brut is certainly superb, offering up a very expressive mélange of apple, pear, complex soil tones, brioche and a touch of pastry cream in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite soil-driven, with lovely focus and balance, a fine core, and very good grip and length on the slightly coarse finish. For those who do not mind trading a bit of coarseness on the palate for superb complexity to the base wines, then add at least a few points to my score, as there is a lot of personality to be found here in the glass. 2012-2025. **88**.

Veuve Clicquot “Yellow Label” Brut NV (served from magnum)

I do not regularly receive samples from Veuve Clicquot, so I was very happy to see that this wine was being poured out of magnum at Cheval Blanc at the end of the *En Primeur* week of tastings, as I was curious to see what the current release of this sales juggernaut tasted like. It was okay, but clearly, more of the budget here is devoted to brand management than to winemaking, and the wine essentially made me sad to think back to how great this wine was twenty-five years ago- when of course the house could not give it away and had almost no market penetration in the US. Times have changed, but not necessarily for the better- at least for those of us who care what the quality of the wine is on the other side of the cork. The nose on the current release is a yeasty blend of apple, bread dough, citrus peel, a touch of quinine and stony minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rather severe in style, with a youthful tartness, not much fruit, snappy acids and delicate *mousse*. The finish is pretty short (particularly for a marketing juggernaut), with a rather blunt personality that is passable, but certainly still decidedly second division. 2012-2020. **84**.

Marie Weiss Brut NV

The Marie Weiss label is produced by the superb, small Champagne house of Ployez-Jacquemart, which is located in the small village of Ludes on the Montagne de Reims. The Marie Weiss bottling is produced entirely from purchased grapes or must, and the new release was quite a lovely bottle. The refined and complex nose wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, white peach, brioche, a nice touch of fresh nutmeg and a lovely base of chalky soil tones. On the

palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and wide open, with good mid-palate depth, lovely focus and complexity, elegant *mousse* and lovely balance on the long and classy finish. This is not quite as structured out of the blocks as the Ployez-Jacquemart Brut NV, which really is built to age long and gracefully, and the Marie Weiss is a lovely counterpoint from the Ployez family for those who really want to drink their bubbly right after it is purchased. Fine juice. 2012-2022. **90**.



Magnums in Gosset's antique-styled bottles resting in their riddling racks in the cellars in Épernay.

Non-Vintage Brut Rosé

Ayala “Brut Majeur Rosé” NV

The new release of Ayala’s Brut Majeur Rosé is a very light salmon color (almost more peach than pink in hue) and very stylish on both the nose and palate. The discreet and very pretty nose offers up scents of melon, tangerine, bread dough, citrus peel and a lovely base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is relatively deep, full-bodied and very elegant, with lovely complexity, refined, pinpoint bubbles, crisp acids and pretty good length and grip on the well-balanced and stylish finish. This wine does not quite possess the depth and drive on the backend to merit an outstanding score, but it is a delicious and very well-made wine that I would be happy to drink any time. 2012-2020. **89**.

Barnaut Brut Rosé “Authentique” NV (Grand Cru- Bouzy)

The new release of Barnaut Brut Rosé “Authentique” is a superb bottle of bubbly, offering up a deep and very classy bouquet of cherries, blood orange, a touch of cinnamon stick,

rye toast, orange zest and an excellent base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with lovely, frothy *mousse*, fine mid-palate depth and lovely focus on the very long, tangy and elegant finish. This is a very high class Brut Rosé. 2012-2020. **91**.

Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” Brut Rosé NV

Besserat de Bellefon’s Cuvée des Moines bottlings are done in a Crémant style, which has a bit lower pressure and more delicate bubbles as a result. The Brut Rosé bottling in the Cuvée des Moines lineup is a blend of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier and is a lovely, copper-salmon color. The nose is bright and quite youthful in its mélange of tart orange, white cherries, stony minerality, smoky overtones and bread dough. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully tight, with brisk acids, frothy *mousse*, good weight in the mid-palate and good length and grip on the still quite primary finish. This definitely needs a couple of years to blossom, but will be quite good when it comes into its own, as it is well-balanced and admirably complex behind its girdle of acidity. 2014-2025. **89+**.

Billecart-Salmon Brut Rosé NV

Billecart-Salmon, along with Gosset, has long been considered one of the preeminent Rosé specialists in Champagne and their new release of their non-vintage Brut Rosé is worthy of their reputation. The pale melon colored wine offers up a beautiful bouquet, wafting from the glass in a classy and still quite youthful mélange of white cherries, melon, orange blossoms, bread dough, chalky soil tones and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, youthful and full-bodied, with a fine core, brisk acids, elegant *mousse* and superb length and grip on the focused and still fairly tight finish. Give this lovely bottle a couple of years of cellaring to blossom. 2014-2030+. **92**.

Bollinger Brut Rosé NV

It has been a few years since I last crossed paths with Bollinger’s non-vintage Rosé and the new release is quite good, showing plenty of the house’s affinity for pinot noir on both the nose and palate. The color is a pale, copper-salmon and the bouquet is a complex and classy blend of melon, a touch of tangerine, plenty of smokiness, rye toast, orange rind and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite dry, with a fine core of fruit, good, but not overly vigorous *mousse*, sound acids and a long, complex and fairly youthful finish. This is very good now and will be even better with a few years of cellaring to bring out its secondary layers of complexity. 2012-2025. **91+**.

Paul Clouet Brut Rosé NV

The new release of Paul Clouet’s non-vintage Brut Rosé is absolutely lovely. The color is a pure salmon, and the wine offers up a very classy nose of cherries, strawberries, rye toast, lovely, complex minerality, orange peel and a gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with fine mid-palate depth, elegant *mousse*, excellent focus and fine length and grip on the poised and classy finish. Just a very refined bottle of Brut Rosé. 2012-2025. **91**.

R. H. Coutier Brut Rosé NV (Grand Cru- Ambonnay)

I really like the style of the Coutier wines and the new release of their non-vintage Brut Rosé is lovely. This is a blend of fifty-two percent chardonnay and forty-eight percent pinot noir, all hailing from the family’s vineyards in Ambonnay. Like the current release of their non-vintage Brut, this wine hails principally from the 2007 vintage, with a percentage of reserve wines included. It too was aged on the cork for just under three years and disgorged in January of 2011. It undergoes full malo and received a *dosage* of 6 grams per liter. The wine is a very pale

salmon color and offers up a deep and vibrant nose of white cherries, tangerine, warm biscuits, chalky minerality and a delicate topnote of dried roses. On the palate the wine is complex, full-bodied and wide open, with a fine core of fruit, very refined *mousse*, bright acids and superb length and grip on the elegant and classy finish. High class juice. 2012-2022+. **92.**

Champagne Deutz Brut Rosé NV

The current release of non-vintage Deutz Brut Rosé was the one wine in their lineup that did not sing at my tastings here in August. The wine is a lovely, very pale salmon color and offers up a very young and promising nose of tangerine, wheat toast, spice tones, a bit of leanness, white pepper and a good base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and tight, with brisk acids, frothy *mousse* and a touch of sweet-sour disequilibrium showing up on the fairly long and rather impenetrable finish. Perhaps this had the *dosage* recently adjusted during *degorgement* and was not yet back in perfect balance? The wine definitely needs a bit of bottle age, but if this sample is representative, it is one of the weaker wines I have tasted from this consistently excellent house. 2013-2018+? **87?**

Pascal Douquet “Premier Cru de la Côte des Blancs” Brut Rosé NV

The Pascal Douquet Brut Rosé is a very deep salmon color and offers up a classy and quite deep-pitched bouquet of cherries, blood orange, rye toast, chalky soil tones and orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely focused, with a good core, fleeting bubbles and a surprisingly short (particularly given the excellent promise of the nose), simple finish. Other than this wine being extremely short on the finish and having virtually no bubbles thirty seconds after it is poured in the glass, it has some nice attributes. But, can it really be this short and lacking in *mousse*, or was the bottle somehow not in condition? If this is the wine, then it is disappointing. 2012-2016? **82?**

Duval-Leroy Brut Rosé NV

The current release of the non-vintage Duval-Leroy Brut Rosé is a lovely example of its genre, with a pale salmon color and fine complexity on both the nose and palate. The deep and very elegant nose offers up scents of tangerine, white cherries, a hint of cinnamon stick, rye toast, a touch of spiced meats, lovely minerality and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with excellent mid-palate depth, bright acids, superb focus and balance, very elegant *mousse* and superb length and grip on the bouncy and classy finish. This is a lovely bottle of Brut Rosé for current consumption, but it has the spine of acidity and fine balance to age well. 2012-2025. **92+.**

Duval-Leroy Sec Rosé NV (375 ml.)

I really like the complexity and polish of the Duval-Leroy Sec Rosé, which possesses a deep and vibrant nose and a beautifully focused palate. But, the residual sweetness on the backend here gets in the way for my palate, taking away some precision on the backend. The color here is a pretty and pale salmon. The deep and very classy nose jumps from the glass in a blend of tangerine, wheat toast, lovely, complex minerality, citrus peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and snappy, with lovely mineral drive, pinpoint bubbles, excellent complexity and good length and grip on the modestly sweet finish. I can see how this wine would be a joy to drink for those new to Champagne, but it seems a pity to waste such superb raw materials with enough *dosage* to take away a bit of the backend focus. 2012-2017. **89.**

Nicolas Feuillatte Brut Rosé NV

I had some very good wines from Nicolas Feuillatte in preparation for this report, but their non-vintage Brut Rosé was not the strongest wine in their current lineup. The color is pretty

dark for a Rosé- cherry red, rather than salmon- and the wine offers up a straightforward nose of melon, cherries, rose petals, bread dough and soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and a touch angular, with crisp acids, slightly coarse *mousse* and a bit of backend, youthful bitterness on the fairly long finish. This is okay, but clearly not a specialty for this house. 2012-2018. **86.**

Charles Heidsieck “Rosé Réserve” Brut NV

Like the current release of Charles Heidsieck’s non-vintage Brut, the Rosé Réserve is sporting a handsome new package and seems a bit younger to me than was typical for this wine. The quality here is as high as ever, but this wine will need a bit of bottle age to really start to hit on all cylinders. The color is a very pale salmon and the bouquet offers up a bright and youthful mélange of melon, blood orange, chalky minerality, rye toast, orange peel and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a very fine core of fruit, elegant *mousse*, brisk acidity and very fine length and grip on the still quite adolescent finish. Tuck this away for a couple of years and watch it blossom. My score may prove conservative, but I am really not accustomed to tasting new releases from Charles Heidsieck that are this young in the bottle. 2014-2030. **90+.**

Lamiable Brut Rosé NV (Grand Cru- Tours-sur-Marne)

I really like the deep salmon color of the current release of the Lamiable Brut Rosé, but the nose is a pretty candied blend of cherries, orange zest, rye toast and a yeasty, leesy upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and dusty and muddled from its extended lees contact, with impressively elegant *mousse*, but no focus and a dusty, leesy finish that is both short and simple. This is decidedly second division juice. 2012-2016. **84.**

Guy Larmandier Brut Rosé NV

I do not taste the Guy Larmandier wines with any regularity, but this bottle of non-vintage Brut Rosé was not too bad at all. The complex nose offers up scents of blood orange, strawberries, rye toast, stony minerality and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with good complexity, slightly coarse *mousse*, and good length and grip on the finish. This is a rather typical grower bubbly in its fine blend of complexity on both the nose and palate, tied to a rather coarse style that is not particularly elegant, but satisfying for those who are willing to trade the quality of the underlying wine for a bit of customary Champagne polish and refinement. It is not a bad drink, but not in the first division of Grower-Récoltant producers’ Brut Rosés. 2012-2020+. **87.**

Larmandier-Bernier Rosé de Saignée Extra Brut NV

The new release of the Larmandier-Bernier Rosé de Saignée Extra Brut is quite dark in color, but absolutely lovely on both the nose and palate. This is one hundred percent pinot noir and hails entirely from the 2008 vintage and received 3 grams per liter of *dosage*. The deep and very classy nose offers up scents of blood orange, cherries, smoky overtones, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core of fruit, sound acids, elegant *mousse* and a long, classy and quite dry finish. This may be a touch austere for the uninitiated, but for those who find *dosage* often in the way of the purity inherent in a wine, this is a Rosé that will absolutely delight. 2012-2022+. **91.**

Lasalle Brut Rosé NV (Released Spring 2010)

Like the Lasalle “Cuvée Préférence” Brut NV reviewed above, this came out of my cellar. This is a very pale rosé in color, but works marvelously with food. The wine is drinking beautifully at the present time, offering up a very refined and classy nose of white cherries, tart orange, chalky minerality, sourdough and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied,

crisp and complex, with lovely mid-palate depth, elegant *mousse*, bright acids, fine focus and a very long, complete and zesty finish. Fine juice. 2012-2020+. **92.**

Michel Lorient Brut Rosé NV

The non-vintage Michel Lorient Brut Rosé is a lovely, fairly light-colored Rosé that shows off the inherent delicacy of a wine with plenty of pinot meunier influence. The deep and very classy nose wafts from the glass in a complex mélange of blood orange, sweet cranberry, wheat bread, complex minerality, a touch of dried roses and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with young, zesty acids, delicate *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the frothy and dancing finish. As is the case with all the Lorient bottlings that I tasted, there is a lovely lightness of step on the palate for this wine that is most impressive. 2012-2022+. **91.**

Moutard Père et Fils “Rosé Saignée” Brut NV

The current release of the Moutard Père et Fils non-vintage “Rosé Saignée” is a beautiful salmon color and bright and pure on both the nose and palate. This wine was aged three years on the lees and disgorged in February of 2011. The top-notch bouquet wafts from the glass in a lovely mélange of cherries, blood orange, wheat toast, gentle spice tones, a beautifully complex base of soil, dried rose petals, lovely smokiness and a touch of orange zest. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bouncy and beautifully balanced, with an excellent core of fruit, vibrant acids, lovely focus and absolutely superb length and grip on the dancing finish. For me, this is utterly classic Brut Rosé. (Lot # LR008*03911) 2012-2025. **93+.**

Bruno Paillard Brut Rosé “Premier Cuvée” NV

The new release of Bruno Paillard’s Brut Rosé “Premier Cuvée” is a very young wine that is a delicately pale salmon color that recalls a bit the Rosés from folks like Krug. The wine is very young, but shows plenty of promise in its superb bouquet of tangerine, a touch of cranberry, bread dough, chalky soil tones and a dollop of orange rind in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and currently quite high-toned, with a good core of fruit, refined *mousse*, crisp acids and lovely focus and grip on the very long and snappy finish. Give this fine bottle at least a year of cellaring to blossom. It should age very well and should peak in four or five years. 2013-2025+. **91.**

Pierre Paillard Grand Cru Brut Rosé NV (Bouzy)

I found the quality of the *mousse* decidedly superior in Pierre Paillard’s Brut Rosé than in this producer’s non-vintage Blanc de Blancs, but it is still just a touch on the coarse side and this keeps down the score a couple of points as a result. Everything else about this wine is superb. The color is a very delicate, orange-salmon hue and the nose is a fine and smoky blend of blood orange, cranberry, rye toast, and a quite lovely and complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a rock solid core of fruit, snappy acids and very fine length and grip on the classy finish. For those who do not mind their grower bubbly with a bit less refinement in terms of *mousse*, this is a superb bottle of Brut Rosé that offers up a lot of personality and complexity. For those who still demand a Champagne be first and foremost an elegant sparkling wine, then the slightly less than ideal *mousse* will prove to be a distraction. But, no denying that there are some very strong raw materials in this bottling. 2013-2023+. **89.**

Philipponnat “Réserve Rosée” Brut NV (Disgorged October 2011)

The current release of Philipponnat’s Réserve Rosée is based on wines from the 2007 vintage and it is outstanding. The wine is a pale salmon color and offers up a deep and very suave nose of melon, tangerine, bread dough, chalky soil tones, roses and a touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and extremely elegant, with a

fine core of fruit, crisp, well-integrated acids, refined *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the crisp finish that shows off great lightness of step. I would suspect that there is a fair bit of chardonnay in this superb Brut Rosé, which gives almost a sense of creaminess in the mid-palate. Lovely juice that should get even better with a few years of bottle age. 2012-2025. **92+**.

Pierre Peters Brut Rosé NV

The Pierre Peters non-vintage Brut Rosé is comprised of a blend of sixty percent chardonnay and forty percent pinot meunier. The current release is not bad at all, offering up a deep and very “winey” nose of cherries, orange peel, sourdough bread, chalky soil tones and a bit of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plump at the core, with fairly modest *mousse*, good complexity and a fairly heavy-handed finish. This is a rosé that clearly puts a bit more emphasis on the red wine aspect of the equation, and though it is not bad, I would opt for serving it with food, rather than as an aperitif (which is how I was presented the wine). 2012-2025. **88**.

Piper-Heidsieck Rosé Sauvage Brut NV

I have consistently enjoyed the unique style of the Rosé Sauvage in the last few years from Piper-Heidsieck, as the very high percentage of still red wine added to the blend makes for a fine partner at the table. The current release is characteristically bright cherry in color and offers up a fine bouquet of black cherries, rye toast, blood orange, a touch of cinnamon stick, smoky nuances and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very “winey” in style, with crisp acids, excellent *mousse* and fine focus and grip on the long and perfectly balanced finish. This is probably too rich for sipping as an aperitif, with fully twenty-five percent still wine in the blend, but it is terrific at the table, and if one wants to really try something different, pop this to go with your steaks on the grill in torrid summer weather! A lovely and consistently unique concept in Brut Rosé. 2012-2020. **90**.

Ployez-Jacquemart Extra Brut Rosé NV

The Ployez family’s non-vintage Rosé bottling is an Extra Brut and it is absolutely stunning this year. The color is a fairly light salmon and the nose is simply magical, soaring from the glass in a vibrant blend of tangerine, white cherries, rye toast, chalky minerality, a nice touch of cinnamon and a topnote of dried roses. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with a superb core of fruit, utterly refined *mousse*, great complexity, zesty acids and simply stunning length and grip on the racy and very elegant finish. This is a great bottle of Rosé! 2012-2025. **93**.

Camille Savès Brut Rosé NV Grand Cru- Bouzy (Released Spring 2012)

The current release of Camille Savès Brut Rosé is a blend of sixty percent chardonnay and forty percent pinot noir from the village of Bouzy, with twelve percent of this being still pinot noir incorporated into the cuvée. The wine does not undergo malo and was disgorged in January of 2011. The new release is a lovely wine, with a classic deep salmon color and offering up a superb bouquet of blood orange, *fraises du bois*, bread dough, a nice hint of cinnamon, a beautifully complex base of soil and citrus zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and snappy, with fine nascent complexity, lovey focus and balance, very classy, pinpoint bubbles and outstanding length and grip on the elegant and youthful finish. This is eminently drinkable today, but based on how well the 2008 release of this wine evolved in my cellar, it is pretty hard not to argue that this wine would be best tucked away for a few more years to allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. It is quite clear that Camille Savès is one of the finest sources for Brut Rosé out there today. 2012-2030. (Lot # 9408) **92+**.

Camille Savès Brut Rosé NV Grand Cru- Bouzy (Released Spring 2008)

This bottling of Camille Savès Brut Rosé has aged brilliantly and is a better drink today than it has been any time in its history. The deep, complex and wide open nose offers up a vibrant and spicy blend of cherries, blood orange, cinnamon stick, brioche, chalky soil tones and a lovely touch of woodsmoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, crisp and full-bodied, with outstanding focus and balance, still very elegant and bouncy *mousse*, a great base of chalky minerality and outstanding length and grip on the beautiful finish. This is a Brut Rosé at its apogee of peak drinkability and a very convincing argument for aging these wines for several years. There is still plenty of life in this stellar wine. 2012-2025. **93.**

Serveaux Fils “Rosé Saignée” Brut NV

I was very impressed by the fine quality of the new release of the Serveaux Fils “Rosé Saignée”, which is one of the darker Rosés that I tasted in preparation for this report, as the wine is a vibrant cherry red. This particular cuvée is a blend of fifty percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier, with eighty percent of the blend from the 2008 vintage and twenty percent from 2007. The bouquet is fairly deep-pitched, but classy and inviting in its mélange of cherries, blood orange, sourdough, a touch of cinnamon, lovely minerality and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and frothy, with a superb core of fruit and very good length and grip on the classy finish. This is definitely crafted as a food wine and is perfect at the table (it would be great with turkey come Thanksgiving time here in the states!). Lovely juice. 2012-2018. **90.**

Taittinger “Prestige” Rosé Brut NV

The current release of Taittinger’s non-vintage Brut Rosé is absolutely superb and one of the finest recent releases I can recall of this consistently excellent bottling. The color is a very vibrant light cherry and the wine offers up a deep and very classy nose that is a blend of wild strawberries, blood orange, rye toast, refined minerality and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and racy, with a lovely spine of minerality, frothy, elegant *mousse*, excellent balance and a very long, snappy and absolutely precise finish. This will age quite well indeed, but is already a lovely drink and an outstanding value. 2012-2025. **92.**

Jean Velut Brut Rosé NV

Jean Velut’s non-vintage Brut Rosé is quite a dark cherry red in color. The nose is deep-pitched and shows a fair bit of still pinot noir influence in its blend of cherries, blood orange, cinnamon stick, wheat toast and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite “winey” in personality, with a lovely core, sound *mousse*, crisp acids and very good focus and balance on the long and soil-driven finish. I like this wine very much, but it is a tad short on complexity in comparison to several other top Brut Rosés, and it is only this fairly modest complexity that keeps the score down a bit. It is a wine that is certainly better at the table than sipping as an aperitif, but there is a lot to like here as far as the wine goes. 2012-2020. **88.**

Vintage Blanc de Blancs Brut

2007 Champagne Deutz Blanc de Blancs Brut

The 2007 Blanc de Blancs from Deutz is a very young wine that shows excellent potential. The promising nose offers up a nascently complex blend of pear, tart orange, complex, chalky minerality, bread dough and a topnote of grapefruit peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with bracing acids, elegant *mousse*, lovely focus and balance and a very long, classy and youthful finish. There is still some backend bitterness that

needs to be waited out on this fine wine, but a couple of years in the cellar should really pay dividends. 2015-2030+. **90+**.

2007 José Dhondt “Mes Vieilles Vignes” Blanc de Blancs Brut

I am not sure if Monsieur Dhondt released his 2007 or his 2006 bottling of Mes Vieilles Vignes first, as I tasted this 2007 at his New York distributor’s fine tasting here in September, but his American importer sent me a sample of the 2006 from France the month previous- which seems to indicate that the 2007 was the first released here in the states. In any case, the sixty-five year-old chardonnay vines here in Oger have produced a really lovely wine in 2007 which is decidedly more accessible in style than the more steely-structured 2006 version, offering up a deep and very suave nose of pear, brioche, a touch of pink grapefruit, stony limestone soil tones and a gentle dollop of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and quite wide open, with a good core, fine focus, lovely, pinpoint bubbles and excellent length and grip on the complex and classy finish.

2006 Demièrè-Ansiot Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Grand Cru- Oger)

The 2006 Demièrè-Ansiot Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime is a very lovely wine that will no doubt outlive the current release of this house’s non-vintage bottling, but it is not a huge step up in terms of complexity from that truly exceptional Brut NV this year. The nose is very deep and refined, offering up scents of pear, delicious apple, wheat toast, a lovely and quite complex base of white soil tones, citrus peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very classy, with a fine core, excellent focus and balance, refined *mousse* and simply superb length and grip on the bouncy finish. This is a lovely bottle for drinking over the next fifteen to twenty years and a quintessential example of Oger at its most elegant. 2012-2030. **92+**.

2006 José Dhondt Blanc de Blancs “Mes Vieilles Vignes” Brut (Grand Cru- Oger)

It had been a year since I last crossed paths with a bottle of the ’06 Dhondt Vieilles Vignes, and the wine is blossoming nicely with an additional year of bottle age. All the vines for this particular cuvée were planted in 1949. The deep, complex and very refined nose wafts from the glass in a blend of pears, apple, *crème patissière*, complex, chalky minerality, bread dough and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy, with a rock solid core of fruit, elegant *mousse*, brisk acids and excellent length and grip on the still very youthful finish. The wine closes with a primary note of orange peel that suggests that even though this wine is decidedly more open than it was a year ago, this is still very early days for this fine bottling and further cellaring will definitely be rewarded. 2016-2030+. **93+**.

2006 Hervé Dubois Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Grand Cru- Avize)

The 2006 Hervé Dubois Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime is a lovely wine that is young and shows impressive promise. The bright and classy bouquet offers up scents of apple, tart orange, bread dough, chalky minerality and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and youthfully complex, with fine mid-palate depth, frothy *mousse*, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the still youthfully zippy finish. All this fine wine needs is a few years in the cellar to properly unwind. 2015-2030+. **92.**

2006 D. Henriët-Bazin “Cuvée Marie-Amélie” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Premier Cru)

I was very impressed with the quality of the Henriët-Bazin wines that I tasted in preparation for this article. The house has been producing its own wines now for five generations, with Marie-Noëlle Rainon-Henriët now in charge of this fine small producer. The east-facing vineyards for their Blanc de Blancs Cuvée Marie-Amélie all hail from the village of Villers-Marmery on the Montagne de Reims, with the vines all in excess of fifty years of age.

This wine from Henriët-Bazin does not go through malolactic fermentation. The 2006 is outstanding, jumping from the glass in a complex blend of pear, apple, brioche, chalky minerality, lemon peel and a gentle toastiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with lovely, elegant *mousse*, fine mid-palate depth, zesty acids and excellent focus on the long and classy finish. This is a lovely bottle of Blanc de Blancs that is drinking well out of the blocks and should delight for a good dozen years or more. 2012-2025+. **93.**

2006 Vazart-Coquart et Fils Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut Millésime (Chouilly)

Apparently, the 2006 Brut Millésime was also double-shipped last year to New York, as this fine vintage is still readily available and starting to really blossom nicely. The youthful nose is still a bit on the primary side as it wafts from the glass in a very pure blend of pear, lemon zest, bread dough, complex minerality, *crème patissière*, spring flowers and orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a rock solid core, bright acids, excellent balance, vigorous *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the still fairly young finish. This is a lovely wine in the making, but even after a year in the cellars here in New York, this is still a puppy! 2014-2030. **92+.**

2006 J. L. Vergnon “Resonance” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Grand Cru)

The 2006 vintage Brut bottling from J. L. Vergnon, dubbed “Resonance” is excellent. The deep, complex and classy nose jumps from the glass in a mix of apple, white peach, lovely minerality, wheat toast, a bit of smokiness and a vibrant topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent mineral drive, pinpoint bubbles and superb length and grip on the zesty and beautifully focused finish. This is a lovely wine that is already quite tasty, but a couple of years of bottle age should really work a bit of magic and allow this wine to blossom beautifully. 2012-2030. **92+.**

2005 José Dhondt “Mes Vieilles Vignes” Blanc de Blancs Brut

The 2005 José Dhondt “Mes Vieilles Vignes” was certainly a bit tight out of the blocks, but it has blossomed beautifully with a couple of years of bottle age in my cellar and is really starting to drink beautifully today. The exquisite nose jumps from the glass in a blend of fresh pears, nectarines, warm bread, orange peel, complex, chalky minerality and a lovely topnote of fresh nutmeg. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and racy, with very refined *mousse*, crisp acids and superb focus and grip on the very long and refined finish. This is really turning into a stunning bottle. 2013-2030+. **94.**

2005 Pierre Moncuit Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime

While 2005 is a stronger vintage for chardonnay in the Champagne region, I was surprised to find myself drawn to the non-vintage bottling from Pierre Moncuit this year over the house’s 2005 vintage-dated bottling, as I love the lift and purity of the two Brut NV cuvées this year. The 2005 Brut Millésime is a very good wine, but both the nose and the palate seem fairly evolved already, as the wine offers up a bouquet of pear, apple, brioche, some leesy tones, chalky minerality and a fairly lactic topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and perhaps just a touch unfocused, with a good, weighty core of fruit, frothy *mousse* and very fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is an impressively complex wine, but it seems to lack just a touch of the vibrancy of the very special Brut NV bottlings from Moncuit this year. 2014-2030. **89+.**

2005 Vazart-Coquart et Fils Blanc de Blancs “Special Club” Grand Cru Brut (Chouilly)

The 2005 Special Club bottling from Vazart-Coquart has evolved quite slowly in the year since I last crossed paths with it and it remains a very young and very promising wine. The deep, vibrant and fairly toasty nose offers up scents of apple, pear, wheat toast, lovely minerality, bread dough and orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with brisk acids, excellent focus and balance, very elegant *mousse* and a very long finish that shows off fine grip and detail, as well as a touch of youthful backend bitterness that needs a bit more bottle age to resolve. A very fine and still very young wine. 2014-2030. **92+**.

2004 Duval-Leroy “Clos des Bouveries” Blanc de Blancs Brut

The Clos des Bouveries is located in the village of Vertus and is planted entirely to chardonnay. Duval-Leroy partially barrel ferments this wine, and based on the sample of the 2004 that I tasted, some of this wood is new oak. The nose is deep and complex, but also fairly marked by its new wood in its blend of pear, lemon zest, acacia blossoms, buttery oak, chalky minerality and warm biscuits. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and crisply complex, with good mid-palate depth, refined *mousse*, fine focus and very good length and grip on the slightly oaky finish. The oak here is not particularly aggressive, but I still find it less than ideally cured and consequently a bit more strident than it might be in a perfect world. Perhaps there is just a higher percentage of new wood in the 2004, as this is one of the first (if not the first) and perhaps that is the reason the wood sticks out a bit in this wine. If the wood was all older in nature, this would be dynamite juice, but it is a bit clunky because of its oak. I look forward to tasting subsequent vintages of this wine. 2012-2025. **88**.

2004 Michel Lorient Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime

The 2004 Michel Lorient Blanc de Blancs is a lovely wine that shows a big of influence from some barrel fermentation. The deep, complex and very classy nose offers up a complex mélange of apple, pear, brioche, a complex base of soil, orange zest and a touch of creosote from the barrels. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully elegant, with fine mid-palate depth, classy *mousse*, bright acids and very good length and grip on the complex and focused finish. There is a bit more wood on the backend of the palate than there is on the nose, and some tasters may find this a bit of a distraction, but there is no denying that the wine is beautifully poised and complex. I would give this a couple of years of bottle age to allow it to better integrate its shadow of oak influence. Good juice that I would rate even higher if the wood could recede even further into the background from the outset. 2014-2030. **91**.

2004 Philipponnat “Grand Blanc” Brut Millésime (Disgorged August 2010)

The fine vintage-dated Blanc de Blancs bottling from Philipponnat includes a bit of juice from Clos des Goisses in it this year, which of course does not hurt the quality! The nose on this young and very classy wine wafts from the glass in a blend of pear, lemon chiffon, brioche, chalky minerality and a topnote of lemon zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and tightly-knit, with a rock solid core of fruit, tangy acids, pinpoint bubbles and outstanding focus and grip on the very, very long and youthful finish. This is certainly a tasty glass of Champagne today, but as the note on the 1996 Grand Blanc (please see below) will fully attest, this outstanding cuvée is built for aging and will be at its best with another four or five years of bottle age. 2015-2035+. **92+**.

2004 Vazart-Coquart et Fils “Grand Bouquet” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut Millésime (served from magnum)

As I noted a year ago, Monsieur Vazart heartily dislikes the style and shape of the Special Club magnums, so he refuses to bottle his version of Special Club in the required mags and instead releases them in his own, traditionally-shaped magnums and designates them on the label as “Grand Bouquet”. So, effectively, this is the 2004 Vazart Special Club bottling in magnum, and it is a superb wine. The very refined and complex nose wafts from the glass in a mélange of apple, pear, lemon zest, warm biscuits, a simply beautiful base of soil, spring flowers and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and now really starting to blossom and come into its own, with superb delineation, a lovely core, frothy *mousse* and truly outstanding length and grip on the very complex and refined finish. Lovely juice that is now beginning to drink splendidly. 2012-2030+. **93+**.

2002 Corbon Brut Millésime Blanc de Blancs (Grand Cru- Avize)

I very much liked the classy 2002 Corbon Brut Millésime bottling of Blanc de Blancs, as the wine offers up very impressive aromatic and flavor complexity. The superb nose is deep and classy, offering up a fine mélange of pear, apple, warm biscuits, chalky soil tones and a vibrant topnote of lemon zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, a touch of youthful angularity to resolve, pinpoint bubbles and very fine length and grip on the focused and well-balanced finish. I can certainly imagine that many folks will be perfectly content to drink this wine now for its exuberant personality, but I would be inclined to tuck it in the cellar for a couple more years and allow the wine to blossom into a more harmonious and elegant mouthful of bubbly. Fine juice. 2014-2025+. **91**.

2000 Pascal Douquet Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Premier Cru- Le Mont Aimé)

Pascal Douquet’s 2000 vintage Blanc de Blancs, which is from premier cru vineyards, rather than the grand crus found in the 1999 vintage, is an okay wine, but is rather short on the backend and lacks a fair bit of charm on both the nose and palate. The simple bouquet is a blend of apple, wheat toast, leesy tones and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and four-square, with sound *mousse*, good acids, but a rather short and pedestrian finish. This is passable at best. 2012-2016. **84**.

2000 Krug Clos du Mesnil Brut

It had been nearly a year since I last tasted the 2000 Clos du Mesnil, as it was served just prior to its release during our *Voyage Assemblage* tasting at the domaine last June. I was very happy to cross paths with it again and find the wine every bit as brilliant as I remembered it from last summer. The nose is deep, complex and starting to blossom beautifully, soaring from the glass in a mélange of brioche, delicious apples, a touch of passion fruit, orange zest, complex, chalky minerality and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and magically pure, with excellent depth and focus, snappy acids, impeccable balance, tiny, pinpoint bubbles and a very, very long, powerful and refined finish. Champagne simply does not get better than this great wine- only more complex with proper bottle age! 2016-2040. **96**.

2000 Pol Roger Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime

The 2000 Blanc de Blancs bottling from Pol Roger is outstanding and still a very youthful wine. The deep, nascently complex and vibrant nose delivers a fine mélange of apple, tangerine, chalky soil tones, brioche, citrus peel, a touch of cinnamon and a discreet topnote redolent of honeyed almonds. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and focused, with a

good core of fruit, very refined *mousse*, bright acids and excellent balance on the very long finish. Previous vintages of this wine have seemed more rapier-like out of the blocks, but the 2000 is a bit more laid back structurally and should drink well (at a very high level I might add) from a relatively early age for this consistently excellent cuvée. Fine, fine juice. 2014-2025. **92.**

2000 Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs Brut

The 2000 Comtes de Champagne is an absolutely splendid example of the vintage. The deep, young and aristocratic nose soars from the glass in a blaze of delicious apple, pear, brioche, a touch of caraway seed, gentle notes of *crème patissière* and a very complex base of minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, crisp, beautifully-integrated acids, laser-like focus, very elegant *mousse* and stunning length and grip on the very pure and perfectly balanced finish. This is a great vintage of Comtes de Champagne that is certainly accessible already, but as is the case with most releases of this great bottling, the real fireworks are still a good decade down the road! 2012-2040. **95.**

1999 Pascal Douquet Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Grand Cru- Mesnil sur Oger)

I had high hopes for the 1999 Blanc de Blancs from Pascal Douquet, as this wine carried the Grand Cru designation on the label, which his other vintage Bruts did not. The nose seemed to offer a lot of promise in its deep and vibrant blend of apples, orange zest, bread dough and a nice base of minerality, but in the end, there simply was not a whole lot of aromatic complexity here. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, four-square and depressingly short on the finish, with good acids and fairly refined *mousse*. The wine simply plunges off the table on the backend, which is too bad, as even with only modest complexity here, the aromatics and flavors were really pretty good. 2012-2017. **83.**

1996 Philipponnat “Grand Blanc” Brut Millésime

The 1996 Philipponnat vintage Blanc de Blancs bottling is just starting to reach its apogee of peak drinkability at age sixteen, offering up a deep and blossoming bouquet of pear, brioche, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, just a whisper of honeycomb and a lovely topnote of almond paste. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with the vintage’s snappy acids very well-integrated. The wine has superb mid-palate depth, lovely complexity and excellent length and grip on the *à point* and bouncy finish. Fine juice that should drink splendidly for the next couple of decades. 2012-2035. **93.**

1995 Charles Heidsieck “Blanc de Millenaires” Brut Millésime

It had been three years since I last tasted this stunning 1995 Blanc de Blancs and the ensuing passing of time had done nothing but enhance the luster of this beautiful wine. The deep and absolutely stunning nose offers up a glorious mélange of apple, peach, wheat toast, a great base of complex soil nuances, gentle leesy tones and a whiff of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and now at its apogee of peak drinkability, with a great core of fruit, refined *mousse*, superb focus and balance and great length and grip on the absolutely stunning finish. What a great bottle! 2012-2030. **95.**

1964 Pol Roger “Blanc de Chardonnay” Brut

The 1964 Pol Roger “Blanc de Chardonnay” is still a fairly interesting old glass of Champagne, though most of its bubbles are now a thing of the past. The deep and honeyed old nose offers up scents of honeyed apple and quince, a touch of corn meal, chalky soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full and now a bit chunky, but with lovely flavors, still good underlying acids and sneaky length and grip. This is effectively a still wine today, with just a memory of its *mousse*, but it is a tasty wine. Drink up. **87.**



Vintage Brut

2006 D. Henriët-Bazin “Carte d’Or” Brut Millésime (Premier Cru)

The Carte d’Or bottling from Madame Rainon-Henriët is a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay, all hailing from vineyards the family owns in the grand cru (for pinot noir) villages of Verzenay and Verzy. Because the house uses chardonnay from these villages as well in the cuvée, the wine is listed as a Premier Cru bottling. In contrast to the house’s fine Blanc de Blancs, “Cuvée Marie Amélie”, the Carte d’Or does go through full malo. The 2006 Carte d’Or is outstanding, offering up a deep and complex nose of apple, gentle spice tones, warm bread, very complex minerality, orange peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and beautifully balanced, with frothy *mousse*, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the complex and very long finish. Fine, fine juice. 2012-2030. **93+**.

2006 Champagne Deutz Brut Millésime

The 2006 Champagne Deutz Brut Millésime is a very young and a very promising wine, offering up a deep and nascently complex nose of apple, orange zest, smoky overtones, a beautifully complex blend of soil tones, warm bread and a touch of nutmeg in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with brisk acids, very refined *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the laser-like finish. This will need a handful of years of cellaring to really come into its own, but this is a superb wine of excellent potential and will be a very worthy addition to any well-stocked cellar. 2015-2035. **92+**.

2006 Lamiable Brut Millésime “Cuvée les Meslaines”

The 2006 Lamiable “Cuvée les Meslaines” sports a new and improved label from the 2005 and 2004 versions that I also sampled in preparation for this report, but the wine is pretty much cut from the same cloth as the two previous vintages. The simple nose is a blend of apple, bread dough, indistinct soil tones and a bit of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, four-square and a bit coarse, with dusty, yeast autolysis flavors and a distinct

note of bitterness on the crisp and reasonably long finish. This is young and may improve with a bit of bottle age, but it is ultimately a pretty pedestrian effort. 2012-2020. **82+?**

2006 Michel Lorient “Pinot Meunier Vieilles Vignes” Brut Millésime

A year ago a sommelier at one of the top restaurants in New York mentioned to me at a Champagne tasting (the same one that this year caused the slight delay in the release of this issue, as it is a major tasting of new releases from some of the very finest grower Champagne producers in the region) that I really should try this particular bottling from Michel Lorient. Happily, I came across my notes from last year’s tasting while researching another article for this issue, so I was able to track down Monsieur Lorient’s US importer and receive samples of the entire Lorient portfolio for this feature. The 2006 old vine bottling of pinot meunier from Michel Lorient is a superb bottle, offering up the house’s supremely elegant style on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a deep and utterly refined mélange of apple, bread dough, a touch of nuttiness, beautifully complex soil tones, a smoky topnote and even a hint of spiced meats. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully delineated, with a lovely core of fruit, superb, elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and a very long, classy and youthful finish. This is high class juice that will improve with further bottle age. 2014-2030. **92+**.

2006 Marguet Père et Fils Brut Millésime (Grand Cru)

Given how beautifully the non-vintage Brut from Marguet Père et Fils showed in my tastings, I was surprised not to be as impressed with their 2006 vintage Brut. The nose is certainly quite pretty, offering up a complex blend of apple, pear, chalky minerality, warm biscuits, citrus peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and quite tight, with only modest mid-palate depth, frothy *mousse*, but only moderate length on the slightly bitter and very youthful finish. This clearly needs time to unwind, but if this bottle is representative, it is a modest disappointment from the high standards of Marguet Père et Fils. 2015-2035? **87+?**

2005 Janisson Baradon et Fils “Tue Boeuf” Brut Millésime

This was the first time that I had tasted a wine from Janisson Baradon et Fils, who are located in Épernay, and I was very much impressed with the quality of the wine. The house was founded in 1922 and today is run by Richard Janisson, with assistance from his two sons, Maxence and Cyril. The Janisson family owns just under nine hectares of vines, primarily in Épernay, but also with parcels in the villages of Chouilly and Brimont. The Tue Boeuf cuvée takes its name from the *lieu à dit* in Épernay from which it hails and is comprised of one hundred percent pinot noir. It is barrel-fermented in older wood. The nose on the 2005 is excellent, offering up a deep and complex blend of apple, pear, brioche, a complex base of soil, orange zest, a touch of hazelnut and just a bit of barrel tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with beautiful balance, very refined *mousse*, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the bouncy and finely honed finish. This is really a high class glass of Champagne. I would love to taste more wines from this fine house! 2012-2025. **92+**.

2005 Laherte Frères Brut Millésime

I have consistently been impressed with the quality of the wines from this estate and the 2005 Laherte Frères Brut Millésime is a fine follow-up to their excellent 2004 version. The superb nose jumps from the glass in a mélange of apples, oranges, a complex base of soil, warm bread, citrus peel and a faint whiff of barrel fermentation. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with fine complexity, a superb core, bright acids, refined *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the focused finish. Good juice here. 2012-2025+. **91+**.

2005 Lamiable Brut Millésime “Cuvée les Meslaines”

The 2005 Lamiable Brut Millésime “Cuvée les Meslaines” is a fairly simple and four-square bubbly which offers up a straightforward nose of quince, baked apples, rye toast, a hint of soil and a gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and coarse, with good complexity and core, but with a chunky style, large, sharp bubbles and no style or grace on the reasonably long finish. This is typical second division growers’ Champagne, with decent underlying complexity to the base wine, but no sense of elegance or refinement. 2012-2018+? **85.**

2005 Michel Lorient Brut Millésime

The 2005 Michel Lorient Brut Millésime is comprised of a blend of eighty percent pinot meunier and twenty percent chardonnay. The bouquet is absolutely stunning in the very refined and elegant style of this superb house, wafting from the glass in a complex mélange of apple, brioche, a touch of melon, a classy base of soil, gentle smokiness and all the lovely, discreet floral tones that one finds in bubbly based on pinot meunier. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and supremely elegant, with a fine core of fruit, refined *mousse*, crisp acids and outstanding focus and grip on the very long and perfectly poised finish. I really love the understated breed and exemplary complexity of all the Lorient bottlings, but this may well be the pick of the litter! 2012-2025+. **93.**

2004 Bernard Girardin Brut Millésime

The 2004 Bernard Girardin Brut Millésime has evolved beautifully over the year since I last crossed paths with it and the wine is now drinking very, very well, as a year of bottle age has allowed it to blossom seamlessly. The deep and very striking nose jumps from the glass in a blend of tangerine, white peach, brioche, a complex base of soil, citrus zest, gentle smokiness and a touch of lavender in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very complex, with fine mid-palate depth, very refined *mousse* and glorious focus and grip on the very, very long and supremely elegant finish. A year ago this wine was extremely promising, but still youthfully tight and almost structurally tensile, but it is now wide open and drinking with great style and class. 2012-2030. **93.**

2004 Lamiable Brut Millésime “Cuvée les Meslaines”

I had hopes that the 2004 Lamiable “Cuvée les Meslaines”, hailing from a stronger vintage than the rather disappointing 2005 version, might be a step up in terms of elegance and breed. But, to my surprise, this was not even in the league of the 2005, as the ’04 offers up a simple and rustic nose of fallen apples, yeasty tones, a bit of nuttiness and a dusty base of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and coarse, with no complexity and a pedestrian, extremely clipped finish. This is a pretty poor shockingly effort from a fine vintage. 2012-2016. **79.**

2004 Franck Pascal “Quinte-Essence” Brut Millésime

The cuvée “Quinte-Essence” is the Brut Millésime from Franck Pascal and is a blend of one-third each pinot meunier, pinot noir and chardonnay. The 2004 version is a young and a very, very classy wine, offering up scents of apple, a touch of sweet grapefruit, stony minerality, bread dough and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and racy, with a fine core of fruit, frothy *mousse*, lovely focus and balance and a very long, snappy and youthful finish. Fine juice, but I would be reluctant to open a bottle until it has seen a few more years in the cellar, as there are a lot of layers here that are only hinted at behind this fine wine’s serious wall of acid. 2014-2030+. **92.**

2004 Taittinger Brut Millésimé

This now the third year in a row that I have reported on the 2004 Taittinger Brut Millésimé, which continues to get better and better with bottle age. 2004 is clearly an excellent year for Taittinger and this cuvée is now one of the strongest vintage-dated bottlings from Taittinger that I have tasted in years. The deep and youthfully complex nose jumps from the glass in a blend of brioche, apple, quince, lemon peel, a touch of white Burgundy-like creosote, stony minerality and a smoky topnote. From the touch of creosote in the nose, I assume that a small percentage of the blend here this year was barrel-fermented. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with superb, elegant *mousse*, crisp acids, fine focus and absolutely stunning length and grip on the backend. The last vintage of Taittinger Brut Millésimé that I can recall showing this kind of flavor authority out of the blocks was the stunning 1982! 2015-2040. **93+**.

2004 Piper-Heidsieck Brut Millésime

The 2004 Piper-Heidsieck Brut Millésime is truly an outstanding wine on both the nose and palate, and it is a very strong testament to how far Régis Camus, longtime cellar master at Charles Heidsieck has taken Piper since he assumed control of the winemaking here several years ago. The wine is a blend of chardonnay and pinot noir, and was aged five years on the lees prior to disgorgement. The deep, pure and vibrant nose jumps from the glass in a classy blend of apple, pear, warm biscuits, a touch of fresh coconut, chalky soil tones and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very refined, with very good mid-palate depth, elegant *mousse*, crisp, ripe acids and very good length and grip on the open and complex finish. This is drinking beautifully today, but should have no difficulty aging gracefully for at least the next fifteen to twenty years. A lovely wine. 2012-2030. **92**.

2003 Champagne Deutz “Amour de Deutz” Brut Millésime

The Deutz *Tête de Cuvée* is absolutely brilliant in this very warm vintage, showing no signs of heaviness or overly generous ripeness on either the nose or palate and almost denying its vintage of origin. In fact, this is one of the most elegant and seamless beauties that I have tasted in several years and a glorious bottle of Champagne. The celestial bouquet soars from the glass in a complex and utterly refined mélange of delicious apples, pears, lemon blossoms, warm biscuits, chalky minerality and a delicate dollop of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and absolutely seamless, with a great core of fruit, racy acids, laser-like focus, ethereal *mousse*, stunning transparency and magical length and grip on the very complex and still very young finish. This is a winemaking *tour de force* that argues rather persuasively that blended Champagnes can reach the same exalted heights as single vineyard wines in the great region. I cannot believe this is a 2003 vintage bubbly, and would love to taste this cuvée in a great classic vintage such as 2002 or 2004! Sheer brilliance! 2012-2030+. **95+**.

2002 Bernard Brémont Brut Millésime (Grand Cru- Ambonnay)

The 2002 Bernard Brémont Brut Millésime is a lovely wine that is just beginning to blossom and is a superb example of the vintage. The deep and complex nose offers up a fine mélange of apple, tart pear, bread dough, excellent minerality, spring flowers and a nice touch of lemon peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and racy, with a fine core of fruit, crisp acids, refined *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the blossoming finish. Fine juice. 2012-2030. **92+**.

2002 Pascal Douquet Grand Cru Brut Millésime (Mesnil sur Oger)

The 2002 vintage bottling from Mesnil sur Oger from Pascal Douquet is already starting to show signs of decline (if my bottle is representative) on both the nose and palate, offering up a bouquet of fallen apples, nutskin, pastry dough, leesy tones and a bit of chalky soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite dulled from leasiness, with sound acids and a short, slightly coarse finish. The bubbles here are not particularly refined, but it is more the overt signs of oxidation on the nose and flavor profile here that are the most troubling, as this simply should not be in a ten year-old bottle of bubbly. This is still drinkable, but if the sample is representative, then drinking this wine sooner, rather than later, is advisable. 2012-2018. **86.**

2002 Thierry Massin Brut Millésime

The 2002 Thierry Massin Brut Millésime is a youthful and very refined example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a vibrant nose of pear, lemon zest, chalky soil tones, bread dough and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, snappy and still quite tightly-knit, with a good core of fruit, frothy *mousse*, brisk acids and very good length and grip on the focused and still young and slightly bitter finish. This still needs a few years in the cellar to soften up a bit structurally, and today it is still a little on the young side for primetime drinking. But, a little patience should result in a very tasty glass of wine. 2014-2030. **90.**

2002 Bruno Paillard “Brut Assemblage”

The 2002 Bruno Paillard “Brut Assemblage” is one of the later releases from the ripe and superb 2002 vintage and the wine was really showing beautifully at my tastings here in New York. The deep, complex and toasty nose jumps from the glass in a mélange of apple, a touch of fresh apricot, lovely soil tones, warm bread and a subtle topnote of pastry cream. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just beginning to show some secondary development on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, brisk acids, elegant *mousse*, excellent focus and grip and outstanding mineral drive on the very long and classy finish. This is a superb bottle in the making that is very accessible already, but possesses the focus and spine of acidity to carry it far into the future and this wine will probably not be at its apogee until around 2018 or so. Superb juice. 2012-2030. **93.**

2002 Pierre Paillard Grand Cru Brut Millésime (Bouzy)

Like all of the Pierre Paillard wines that I tasted for this report, the 2002 Brut Millésime possesses outstanding complexity on both the nose and palate, and the only character flaw I find in this superb wine is that the *mousse* is just a bit coarse. But, in terms of aromatic and flavor complexity, there is an awful lot to like here in this fine example of the 2002 vintage. The deep and very classy bouquet offers up scents of apple, tangerine, brioche, a lovely base of complex soil tones, orange zest and a hint of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is complex, full-bodied and beautifully focused, with a fine core of fruit, crisp acids and truly exceptional length and grip on the finish. If the bubbles were just a bit more refined, this would really rate highly for me, but I have to keep the score down a little for the slightly less than outstanding *mousse*. For fans of grower Champagne that weigh complexity over the refinement of the *mousse*, please add three points to my score, because this wine is certainly deep, long and magically complex. 2012-2025+. **90+.**

2002 Franck Pascal “Equilibré” Cuvée Prestige Brut

Surprisingly, the 2002 Equilibré from Franck Pascal was my least favorite of the three wines that I tasted for him recently, as it seemed just a touch “dulled” to me on the palate from yeast autolysis tones. The nose is quite ripe and promising, offering up scents of apple, pear, bread dough, dusty limestone soil, orange zest and leesy tones. On the palate the wine is deep,

full-bodied, complex and frothy, with a fine core of fruit, bright acids and a fairly yeasty backend. The finish is certainly long and complex, but there is a bit of vivacity missing from the yeastiness here that keeps my score down a bit. 2013-2030. **89.**

2002 Philipponnat “Clos des Goisses” Brut

The 2002 Clos des Goisses is a brilliant synthesis of a top vintage and one of Champagne’s most profound *terroirs*. The magical nose soars from the glass in a youthful blend of apple, orange zest, sweet nutskin, very complex, stony minerality, bread dough, gentle smokiness, spring flowers and a nice touch of caraway seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a striking base of minerality, a rock solid core, utterly refined *mousse* and absolutely stunning length and grip on the laser-like and still quite primary finish. I would not even think of opening a bottle of this great young wine until it has had another four or five years of bottle age. This is one of the finest young vintages of Clos des Goisses I have ever had the pleasure to taste! 2017-2045. **95+.**

2000 Charles Heidsieck Brut Millésime

There is a fair bit of SO₂ to blow off when this wine is first opened, but once this occurs, there is a simply stunning glass of bubbly underneath. The bouquet once it blossoms is gorgeous, offering up scents of apple, orange zest, wheat toast, a superbly complex base of soil tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very classy, with a great core of fruit, elegant *mousse*, and simply superb length and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. This is still a fairly youthful example of the 2000 vintage and its best years remain ahead of it. Very high class juice! 2014-2035+. **93+.**

2000 Krug Vintage Brut

While the 2000 Clos du Mesnil showed almost identically to its previous showing nine months previously, the 2000 Krug Vintage showed even finer promise than it had at the same visit to the maison last June, and clearly, I slightly underestimated this great wine. The wine offers up a deep and utterly classic bouquet of ripe apple, tart orange, caraway seed, beautifully complex minerality, rye toast and a touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with great purity and complexity, very refined *mousse*, brisk acids and laser-like focus on the stunningly long and still very primary finish. This is a great Krug Vintage in the making. 2019-2060+. **95+.**

2000 Pol Roger “Extra Cuvée de Réserve” Brut Millésime

I had last tasted the 2000 Pol Roger Brut Millésime as an aperitif wine at a great old Burgundy dinner I attended in Beaune in November of 2011. The wine was still very young at that point in time, but a bottle tasted this summer showed the wine blossoming beautifully and really starting to come into its own at age twelve. The superb bouquet wafts from the glass in a wide open blend of apple, tangerine, brioche, complex soil tones, a hint of honeycomb, orange peel and a nice touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very complex, with an excellent core of fruit, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the focused and very refined finish. This is a lovely bottle that is just entering its plateau of peak maturity- where it should cruise along nicely for fifteen to twenty years. 2012-2030+. **93.**

1999 Champagne Deutz “Cuvée William Deutz” Brut

The 1999 Cuvée William Deutz is still a very young example of the vintage, but it will be outstanding with a year or two more in the cellar. The deep and youthfully complex nose jumps

from the glass in a vibrant blend of apple, quince, bread dough, gentle leesy tones, citrus peel and a superb base of soil. On the palate the wine is young, deep and nascently complex, with its full-bodied format beautifully balanced and zesty. The focus here is excellent, the core deep and pure, the *mousse* frothy and the finish very, very long and classy. There is still a touch of youthful backend bitterness here that will dissipate with further bottle age. Fine juice. 2014-2035+. **92+**.

1999 Nicolas Feuillatte “La Palme d’Or” Brut

Nicolas Feuillatte’s Tête de Cuvée, La Palme d’Or is very fine in the 1999 vintage, offering up a deep and impressively complex nose of apple, sourdough, a touch of caraway seed, lovely minerality, citrus peel and a nice dollop of fresh nutmeg in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and just a touch leesy in style, with outstanding mid-palate depth, superb mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the focused and classy finish. This is a lovely, lovely bottle of bubbly. 2012-2022+. **92+**.

1999 Philipponnat “Clos des Goisses” Brut (Disgorged April 2008)

Philipponnat’s 1999 Clos des Goisses is a brilliant wine in the making, but it is still very, very young and has some SO₂ to work through before it will really be ready for primetime drinking. The superb bouquet is a youthful and vibrant blend of grapefruit, white currant, kaleidoscopic minerality, brioche, gentle smokiness and orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, utterly refined *mousse*, brisk acids, laser-like focus and stunning mineral drive on the very, very long and snappy finish. This is a great wine in the making, but I would not consider opening a bottle of the ’99 Clos des Goisses for at least another four or five years. It is not that the wine is not drinkable at this early stage, but to open bottles now is to waste precious magic in the future! A great wine in the making, but exercise a bit of patience. 2016-2040. **94+**.

1998 Philipponnat “Clos des Goisses” Brut

I tasted the ’98 Clos des Goisses at a large tasting sponsored by the Rare Wine Company here in New York in January, and at that time I was unaware that Philipponnat was now putting the date of disgorgement for all of their wines on the back label, so I did not make a note of when this wine had been disgorged. Sorry about that! In any event, the 1998 Clos des Goisses is drinking beautifully and has reached a superb point in its arc of evolution. The utterly refined and mature nose offers up a superb mélange of baked apples and peaches, rye bread, very complex minerality, citrus peel and a touch of caraway seed. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with a wide open personality, superb mid-palate depth, elegant *mousse*, excellent focus and balance and a very, long, crisp and complex finish. Like so many of the top 1998 vintage Champagne bottlings, the ’98 Clos des Goisses has now reached its apogee and is drinking marvelously well. It should continue to dazzle the senses for at least the next dozen years and perhaps far longer. A beautiful wine. 2012-2025+. **93**.

1998 Ployez-Jacquemart “Liesse d’Harbonville” Brut

The Ployez-Jacquemart Tête de Cuvée, the Liesse d’Harbonville is barrel-fermented in older Burgundy barrels, which marries beautifully with the non malolactic style of this cuvée. The 1998 is a superb follow-up to the stellar 1996 Liesse d’Harbonville (which can still be found on the market and is absolutely worth a special search to add to the cellar for Champagne fanciers intent on having the finest examples of this superb vintage in their collections), as the ’98 is also a stunning, non-malo Champagne that will age long and gracefully. The outstanding bouquet jumps from the glass in a very complex mélange of pear, brioche, a touch of hazelnut,

tangerine, a beautifully complex base of soil tones and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with a rock solid core, outstanding complexity, very refined *mousse*, snappy, non-malo acids, laser-like focus and a very, very long and classy finish. There is no overt signs of barrel fermentation on the palate here, but just a nice rounding of the wine on the backend that marries beautifully with the snappy, non-malo style of the wine. This is another absolutely stellar Liesse d'Harbonville vintage from this superb, small house located on the Montagne de Reims. 2012-2030+. **94.**

1998 Krug Vintage Brut

I was very glad to cross paths with the 1998 Krug Vintage again while in Reims in March, and the wine was showing beautifully again. As readers may recall, this is the first Krug Vintage since the 1981 to contain more chardonnay than red grapes in the final blend, as the very hot *fin de saison* favored chardonnay over the two pinot grapes. The wine was showing beautifully in March, delivering a fine bouquet of apple, orange peel, wheat toast, a touch of nuttiness, complex, minerally soil tones and a nice dollop of maturing Champagne toastiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully complex, with a lovely combination of a wide open personality and a fine spine of acidity. The finish is superbly balanced, classy and very, very long. This is a superb Krug Vintage for drinking now, but it will clearly last two or three more decades with ease. 2012-2040. **94+.**



1996 Clos Cazals Blanc de Blancs Brut- Claude Cazals

Currently, Claude Cazals' daughter, Delphine is in charge of the vineyard and cellars here at this small estate in Oger. I had never previously tasted the wine from this grower, but a good friend in Germany served this on my recent trip to the country. The nose is quite lovely and showing signs of having reached its apogee in its mélange of pear, brioche, a touch of almond, chalky minerality and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and *à point*, with fine *mousse*, lovely complexity, but a slightly loose-knit finish that suggests that drinking this wine up over the relative near-term will be the best course of action. I was very impressed with the complexity here. 2012-2020. **91.**

1996 Duval-Leroy Femme de Champagne Brut

The 1996 Duval-Leroy Femme de Champagne is a stunning wine that is now reaching its apogee of peak drinkability and is wide open and absolutely superb on both the nose and palate. The deep, complex and toasty bouquet offers up a classy mélange of apple, tangerine, *pain grillé*, a beautifully complex base of soil and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and toasty, with a superb core of pure fruit, crisp acids, utterly refined *mousse*, laser-like focus and superb length and grip on the wide open, vibrant and very classy finish. This is just a stunning bottle of bubbly. 2012-2035. **95.**

1996 Charles Heidsieck Brut Millésime

The 1996 Charles Heidsieck Brut Millésime never found its way into the distribution chain here in the States, but happily, a resourceful friend who loves Charles Heidsieck wines was able to track down a case in Europe for his cellar, so I was able to taste this wine in preparation for this report. This is truly an exceptional example of the vintage, soaring from the glass in a bright and vibrant bouquet of apple, tangerine, brioche, a stunningly complex base of soil and just a hint of honeycomb in the upper register showing that the secondary layers of maturity are starting to emerge. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully complex, with stunning mid-palate depth, snappy, well-integrated acids, laser-like focus, refined *mousse* and exquisite balance and complexity on the very, very long and completely classy finish. Just a glorious bottle of 1996 bubbly that is still on its way up in quality. 2012-2035. **93+.**

1996 Dom Perignon

As readers may have noticed, the wines from Moët et Chandon do not make regular appearances in the pages of the newsletter, as perhaps they are a bit gun shy about trotting out their basic bottlings for me. Consequently, I was very pleased to cross paths with the 1996 Dom Perignon a few months back, as it is a beautiful wine that I had not yet had an opportunity to taste. The deep, young and classic bouquet offers up scents of green apple, lemon, stony minerality, youthful DP herbal tones, sourdough bread and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very racy, with a rock solid core, superb focus and grip, bright, well-integrated acids, very refined *mousse* and outstanding drive on the very, very long finish. This is a classic DP that should start to blossom around its twentieth birthday, but really will not peak until it hits age thirty. Fine juice. 2016-2050. **95+.**

1990 Billecart-Salmon “Grande Cuvée” Brut (served from magnum)

The 1990 Grande Cuvée from Billecart-Salmon is drinking beautifully in magnum, as it offers up a complex and vibrant bouquet of green apple, a touch of candied grapefruit, lemon zest, sourdough, lovely minerality and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still nicely racy, with a fine core of fruit, elegant, pinpoint bubbles and superb

length and grip on the bright and nicely structured finish. This is a lovely example of the vintage that shows no signs of slowing down any time soon. 2011-2025. **94.**

1990 Veuve Clicquot Grande Dame Brut

The 1990 Grande Dame retains a stylish bouquet at age twenty-two, but does not show a lot of substance on the palate these days. I cannot recall if this wine was particularly strong in its youth, or if this was one of the vintages of Grande Dame that seemed to be adversely affected by the house's rise to prominence. In any event, today, the wine offers up a pretty bouquet of bread dough, dried apple, a touch of nutskin, smoky tones and a very discreet base of soil. On the palate the wine is fullish, frothy and really a bit soft now, with moderate mid-palate depth and a surprisingly short finish. One really should expect a lot more from a Tête de Cuvée from a top vintage, but this wine is what it is. 2012-2018. **88.**

1979 Bollinger R.D. Brut

The 1979 Bollinger R.D. is getting towards the end of its plateau and is probably best drunk up in regular-sized formats in the next few years. The wine remains lovely and vibrant, as it offers up a deep and very, very complex nose of toasted almonds, baked apples, a touch of honey, summer truffles, brioche, lavender, orange peel, gentle leesiness, a wonderfully complex base of soil and a bit of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite tertiary, with impressively crisp acids, fading, but still quite evident *mousse*, superb complexity and really fine grip on the very long and focused finish. This is still a very lovely, mature old bottle of bubbly that should see out the remainder of the decade with little difficulty, but it has done with improving in the bottle and really there is no good reason not to be opening bottles over the near-term, as this is a delicious wine. 2012-2020. **93.**

Vintage Brut Rosé

2007 Champagne Deutz Brut Millésime Rosé

The 2007 Brut Rosé from Champagne Deutz is a very fine wine in the making, but it is still quite youthful and I would be inclined to give it a few years of cellaring before having at it in earnest. The color is a very, very pale salmon and the nose is a very classy mélange of tangerine, white cherries, gentle smoky overtones, bread dough, a complex base of chalky soil and a nice touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, superb focus and outstanding length and grip on the still very young finish. This is perfectly drinkable today, but it will be entirely more interesting with a few years' worth of bottle age to allow the structure here to loosen up a little. Fine juice. 2012-2025+. **92.**

2007 Marguet Père et Fils Brut Rosé

The 2007 Marguet Père et Fils Brut Rosé offers up a lovely nose, but its *mousse* is a bit coarse on the palate and keeps its score down a few points. The excellent bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of cranberry, cherry, rye toast, lovely minerality and orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit lacking in elegance, with good acids and focus, but a slightly heavy-handed personality and a less than refined bubbles detracting from what are unquestionably strong raw materials. This is not bad by any means and may gain a bit of polish with further bottle age, but it is the weakest wine I tasted in preparation for this report from the fine house of 2007 Marguet Père et Fils. 2012-2017. **87.**

2005 André Beaufort Brut Millésime Rosé (Grand Cru-Ambonnay)

I am a huge fan of the exotic, spicy Ambonnay non-vintage bottling of Brut Rosé from André Beaufort, but this was the first time I had an opportunity to taste a vintage-dated Rosé bottling from these vineyard holdings. Needless to say, it too is outstanding and very flamboyant in style, soaring from the glass in a stunning and very spicy mélange of cherries, blood orange, cloves, stony minerality, wheat toast, gentle smokiness and a vibrant topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with very refined *mousse*, zesty acids, superb focus and outstanding length and grip on the very complex finish. Like the non-vintage version of this wine, this is a very spicy and “red winey” example of Brut Rosé, with a fairly dark color and lots of red wine in the blend. I have served these Rosés to some folks who have found them a bit too much of a good thing, but I find them absolutely irresistible in style and a great food companion. 2012-2025+. **95.**

2005 Hubert Paulet Brut Millésime Rosé (Premier Cru- Rilly la Montagne)

The 2005 Hubert Paulet vintage Brut Rosé is a very, very fine wine, with impressive complexity and lightness of step on both the nose and palate. The color is a very pale salmon and the bouquet is a refined mélange of melon, tangerine, bread dough, chalky soil tones and a touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and very elegant, with frothy *mousse*, fine mid-palate depth, good acidity and impressive focus and grip on the very long, poised and complex finish. This is a very high class glass of Brut Rosé. 2012-2025. **92+.**

2004 Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Brut Rosé

The more I taste wines from the 2004 vintage, the more I am impressed with the overall quality of this outstanding year. It may not have quite the showy ripeness of the 2002 vintage, but it seems that everything in this year was doled out in the end in perfect measure and 2004 is going to produce an awful lot of true cellar treasures down the road. The 2004 Comtes de Champagne Rosé is an absolutely brilliant young wine, soaring from the glass in a tightly-knit and glorious mélange of blood orange, cherries, lovely smokiness, chalky minerality, rye toast and a nice touch of orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and utterly refined, with superb complexity, impeccable focus and balance, utterly refined *mousse*, brisk, beautifully-integrated acids and simply stunning length and grip on the dancing finish. This is very approachable now, due to its flawless balance, but this is still very young days for this great wine and I would aim to keep it in the cellar for at least a few years and allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. Sheer brilliance. 2012-2035+. **96+.**

2002 Deutz “Cuvée William Deutz” Brut Millésime Rosé

The 2002 Cuvée William Deutz” Rosé is really a beautiful and supremely elegant glass of Rosé. The color is a very pale, copper salmon and the nose is a very discreet and impressively complex mélange of melon, wild strawberries, orange zest, sourdough, a very complex base of soil, gentle smokiness and a touch of dried rose petals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very young, with brisk acids, lovely focus and balance, good mid-palate depth, frothy *mousse* and superb length and grip on the still quite primary finish. If one were to nitpick, this wine is currently does not show quite the same precision on the backend of the palate as it promises on the nose, but I would assume that this issue will work itself out nicely with a bit more bottle age. Fine juice, but I would be inclined to tuck it away in the cellar for a few years and let it fully blossom. 2015-2030+. **93.**

CHECKING IN ON THE EVOLUTION OF THE 1990 AND 1989 BORDEAUX VINTAGES



The absolutely gorgeous façade of Château Margaux on a bright spring afternoon.

It is quite inevitable that the 1989 and 1990 claret vintages will be forever linked in the minds of Bordeaux lovers, as the two vintages beautifully brought to a close one of the finest decades in the region in centuries, as the spate of top quality vintages in the 1980s was truly remarkable and really has defined Bordeaux since that time. Out of the blocks, it was the 1990 vintage that seemed to be destined for a slightly higher level of overall quality than the initially more opulent 1989s, as the '90s looked clearly to be the more classic of the two vintages in the early days after these two fine years found their way across the water to the US market. Both vintages were marked by torrid summers and great ripeness, and interestingly enough, as the two years have evolved with time in the cellar, it is the fleshier and more opulent 1989s that seem to be pulling ahead of the now more obviously roasted style of the 1990s- which today are nowhere near as deep, intensely flavored, long or pure as their '89 counterparts. This is almost the inverse of what I would have expected when the two vintages arrived in the US during my merchant days, when both vintages were a very important part of the wine trade here in the states. This was prior to the "Bordeaux as an investment vehicle" mentality that really arrived around the time of the 2000 vintage, so the '89s and '90s were primarily purchased by wine lovers who actually had

every intention of consuming the wines that they bought- though over the years I have seen some obscenely large piles of both vintages in warehouses here in New York owned by single owners who clearly have intended to cash in on an eventual surge up in prices for the two vintages.

Interestingly, it was the 1990 vintage that appeared significantly more classic out of the blocks than the more overtly roasted and opulent style displayed by so many young 1989s, but as time has gone on, the 1989s have shown more purity, mid-palate density and promise than the 1990s, which now do not generally exude the same precision and depth that they seemed to offer early on. The 1990s are clearly defined now by their torrid mid-summer heat, as both July and August of 1990 were extremely hot and dry, with the drought conditions only assuaged by substantial rains at the end of the month of August. September of 1990 was cooler, but for the most part calm (with only a few isolated thunderstorms popping up during the month, with a biggie hitting Pessac-Léognan mid-September), and the very large crop was brought in with great expectations and the wines were initially quite strongly hyped by the wine trade. In fact, the vintage still continues to garner a great deal of respect from Bordeaux specialists in the trade, but the wines have gotten decidedly less interesting to my palate as they have aged and it now seems pretty clear that this is a vintage that was certainly over-praised out of the blocks. These days, it is quite evident that the drought conditions under which the vines suffered (and most shut down) during July and August clearly caused a lack of density in many of the wines down at the core, which was not immediately apparent, due to the glossy and very lovely puppy fat of fruit when the wines were first shown to the market. The 1990 clarets have also gotten progressively more “roasted” in character as they have aged, moving from what seemed like a fleshy classicism in their youth to wines that are clearly marked by their “sun vintage” characteristics and are nowhere near as interesting today as they were over the first ten to fifteen years of their lives.

1989 had also been a very hot year in Bordeaux, with another large crop of super-ripe grapes being brought in during an early harvest, which started on August 31st. Everything had been advanced in the beautiful weather of 1989 in Bordeaux, with flowering, budbreak and *veraison* all at least two weeks ahead of schedule. The drought conditions of 1989 do not appear to have been anywhere near as severe as was the case the following year, so the biggest concern of 1989 was that the tannins were lagging behind the accumulation of sugars in the berries, so that there was a fear that physiological ripeness was not going to be achieved in the grapes before the sugars soared to the point of potentially unwieldy alcohol levels (by the standards of the time- today, 1989’s potential alcohol levels look like child’s play in comparison to vintages such as 2010 and 2011). 1989 was also a vintage where the cabernet sauvignon lagged very decidedly behind the merlot in ripening, so that it was not uncommon to be harvesting merlot at some Left Bank properties and having to wait still for the cabernet to get up over the mark and be ready to harvest. There were some Left Bank properties who did not finish gathering their cabernet until mid-October in 1989! Famously, Château Margaux was noted for having picked very, very ripe, borderline overripe merlot in 1989 and trying to counter this by bringing in their cabernet a bit on the underripe side to try and compensate for the jammy and high octane merlot in their vats. Other than in Pomerol and at Haut-Brion (which made a legendary 1989) and La Mission Haut-Brion, it seemed pretty clear out of the blocks that the 1990s were going to be at least marginally superior over the long haul to the 1989s.

However, things are not always as they seem at first blush, and the two vintages have aged in surprising directions since their releases and today, it is the 1990s that seem to be lagging a bit behind their 1989 counterparts. Both vintages, of course, still are quite marked by their very hot growing seasons, but the 1990s have lost a bit of their initial luster and now are clearly the more “roasted” of the two years on both the nose and palate. The drought conditions of July and August of 1990 are also now starting to be felt in many of the wines from this vintage, with a bit less underlying concentration in their mid-palates, and the wines are maturing faster than their 1989 counterparts as a result. In contrast, many of the 1989s are beginning to seem decidedly more pure than their respective 1990 version, as the fruit components in the ‘89s are maturing along a slower evolutionary curve and are continuing to buffer the structural elements in the wines far better than in the corresponding 1990. I never would have anticipated this juxtaposition of the two vintages based on my early tastings of the vintages, when it seemed very clear to me that the 1990s were the more classic and ultimately more interesting of the two vintages. But, across Europe, the 1990 vintage has not seemed to age with the same promise it initially showed, and in many other wine-producing regions, the 1989s have overtaken the 1990s as well and are the superior wines. On the Gironde, a couple of examples might demonstrate how the surprising evolutions of these two vintages have taken place.

Two of the most highly-praised wines of the 1990 vintage were the two First Growths of Château Latour and Château Margaux. Both of these wines were initially lauded for being far more successful than their counterparts in 1989. As alluded to above, the ’89 Margaux was initially quite controversial for Paul Pontallier’s reported decision to pick the cabernet a bit early to try and synthesize better with the overripe merlot they had at the property in this vintage. Indeed, to my palate, the 1989 Margaux out of the blocks did seem a bit disjointed, with a slightly sweet-sour disequilibrium on the backend of the wine from the very plush and chocolaty tones of the merlot and the slightly green edge to the tannins from the cabernet. At that point in time, it seemed decidedly behind the quality of the velvety and utterly suave style of the 1990 Margaux, which was dubbed one of the wines of the vintage and one of the greatest vintages at this estate to date in the Mentzelopolous era. Likewise, the 1989 Château Latour was not initially praised as highly as many of the other top wines of the vintage, as there was a distinctive weediness to the cabernet fruit tones in this young vintage of Latour and the fairly substantial tannins could also have been deemed a bit green-edged out of the blocks. The 1990 Latour in contrast, was almost universally praised as a “return to form” for the estate and one of the greatest wines produced at Latour since the great 1970. However, recent tastings of both wines from both vintages have brought some surprises.

The seemingly classic 1990 Latour has gotten a bit soft-centered and easy-going at a fairly young age (at least by the very long-lived standards of Latour), and today, the 1990 Latour may well be more advanced than the twenty years older 1970 Latour! It is still a very fine wine by any stretch of the imagination, but at a recent comparative tasting of ‘89s and ‘90s, it was hard to believe that the 1989 Latour had not only caught up to the 1990, but it seems to be in the process of passing by its younger sibling and moving past it on the ultimate quality chart. The ’89 has better acidity than the ’90, firmer grip, greater precision to its expression of underlying *terroir* and more delineation on the palate. It is also the more tannic of the two vintages of Latour, and I have little doubt that today it is the far more classic of the two wines. At this same tasting, hosted by the Chicago-based auction house and merchant firm of Hart-Davis-Hart, the

difference in quality between the '89 and '90 Margaux was even more striking. The 1990 Margaux was simply starting to show the first signs of structural collapse, with the great plushness of beautiful fruit that the wine exuded in spades in its youth now long gone and the wine getting a bit thin, simple and roasted on both the nose and palate. In contrast, the 1989 Margaux had lost much of its angularity from youth, and while it is still a bit green and shows a slightly bitter edge to its tannins on the backend, it is now every bit as interesting as its 1990 counterpart. No one in their right mind back when these two vintages were first released would have ever imagined this being a possibility!

In any case, a great many of the following notes were taken during a fascinating tasting comparing several of the top wines of the 1989 and 1990 claret vintages, which was organized by Hart-Davis-Hart here in New York in the spring of this year. I have augmented their lineup with recent notes I have in my files from the last year or so of either 1989 or 1990 claret, so that there is not a perfect matching of tasting notes of wines from each vintage, as some wines I may have only tasted recently in either 1989 or 1990. As the notes below will attest, there is not a dramatic difference of the two vintages in terms of the number of outstanding wines, as there are some success stories in each vintage. What is surprising is that, when one looks at the two vintages *en masse*, the 1989 vintage looks now to be decisively moving ahead of the 1990s, which was certainly not be expected when the two vintages were in the bloom of youth. Given the shape and style of the wines in each vintage today, I would expect that this qualitative gap will widen and the '89s will pull further ahead as time goes by, as it is pretty clear today that the 1989s simply have more stuffing than the vast majority of their 1990 counterparts. The following report is far from comprehensive, as this is a large region and one cannot hope to taste everything of importance from each vintage more than twenty years out, but I suspect that there are sufficient notes here of major wines from both vintages to be able to use them to ascertain the patterns of comparison and contrast between the two years. The notes are arranged geographically within each vintage, with Right Bank appellations listed first and the Left Bank appellations following and listed from south to north. Within each subset, the wines are listed alphabetically.

Recently Tasted 1990 Claret- Right Bank

Pomerol

1990 Château La Conseillante

The 1990 La Conseillante was one of the prettiest examples of the vintage shown at the Hart-Davis-Hart tasting in New York. The nose is deep, impressively pure and quite floral in its aromatic blend of black raspberries, black cherries, cigar smoke, herb tones, gravel and a judicious base of toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely complex, with modest tannins, a good core of fruit, fine balance and good length and grip on the ripe, but elegant finish. The ripeness of the 1990 vintage contributes a bit of blurriness on the backend here that is not typical of La Conseillante, but in the context of the vintage, this is a pretty svelte example. I would give this wine a few more years in the cellar to more fully blossom. 2015-2040+. **91.**

1990 Château l'Évangile

The 1990 l'Évangile is a lovely example of the vintage that is just now entering its plateau of peak drinkability. The deep and complex nose offers up a fine mélange of plums, red

berries, new leather, game tones, fresh herbs, a lovely base of soil, a touch of peppercorn and a stylish coating of toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with lovely complexity, modest tannins, fine focus and very good length and grip on the ripe and well-balanced finish. This is a fairly elegant 1990, but it still shows just a touch of the roasted quality of the vintage today. 2012-2040. **92.**

1990 Château Gazin

I really liked the style of the wines that were made here at Château Gazin back in the decade of the 1980s, and wish that the wines were not quite so modern and oaky in style today, as there is really good *terroir* to be found here. The 1990 Gazin is a lovely example of the vintage, offering up a fairly ripe blend of plums, a hint of the vintage's pruniness, chocolate, coffee, nutty tones, a fine base of soil and just a bit of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with good complexity, fine focus and grip and still a bit of ripe tannin to resolve on the long finish. This is not quite as pure as the 1995 Gazin (which was served at the same dinner), but it is a very good example of this vintage and avoids nearly all the overtly roasted or pruney tones that can be found in some 1990s. 2011-2035+. **90.**

1990 Château Trotanoy

I am not sure if this was a representative bottle, as this wine was served in a blind flight with 1990 Lagrange and 1990 Pape Clément and placed a bit behind the other two, which would have certainly been contrary to my expectations if I had seen the labels prior to tasting the wines. In any event, this particular bottle offered up a lovely nose of cassis, plums, a bit of horsiness, tobacco leaf, earth and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and poised, with good mid-palate depth, ripe tannins and good length and grip on the slightly unclean finish. Normally I associate a bit more refined elegance and inner mouth perfume with a nearly twenty year-old vintage of Trotanoy, which is what makes me question the provenance of this bottle. 2012-2040+. **87+?**

1990 Vieux Château Certan

Prior to this most recent tasting, I had not tasted a bottle of the 1990 VCC since soon after its release, and I was very pleased to see this wine aging beautifully. (Subsequent to this bottle I crossed paths with the 1990 on three more occasions- fortuitous timing should never be discounted!) At age nineteen it is just beginning to come into its own, as it delivers a superb (albeit still rather adolescent) nose of dark berries, coffee bean, black cherries, tobacco leaf, herb tones, espresso and a very pronounced, lovely base of gravelly soil. Aromatically this is still a fairly young wine, and there remains lots of sweetness that will emerge here as the wine blossoms fully with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and still quite youthful, with a lovely core of fruit, ripe tannins, beautiful focus and great length and grip on the palate-staining and impeccably balanced finish. This may well age along the lines of the beautiful 1959, as like that wine, the 1990 VCC possesses very impressive elegance to go along with the ripeness of the vintage. A lovely, lovely wine that I would still give at least a handful more years in the cellar before beginning to drink it in earnest. 2013-2050+. **93.**

St. Émilion

1990 Château la Dominique

The 1990 la Dominique is quite deep-pitched and roasted, with the torrid conditions of the vintage very much in evidence on both the nose and palate. The slightly overripe bouquet is a blend of baked plums, black cherries, chocolate, a touch of prune, damp earth, eucalyptus and tobacco leaf. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit flat, with a rather heavy-

handed personality, moderate tannins and good length and grip on the finish. Slightly ponderous in style, but not bad. 2009-2020+. **88.**

1990 Château Figeac

I have been having more and more examples of 1990 claret that leave me rather cold stylistically, and at this point in time, it really seems that this is a very overrated vintage. The '90 Figeac is quite marked by the torrid conditions of the vintage, offering up scents of ripe plums and black cherries, roasted herb tones, cigar ash, a bit of barnyard, leather, dusty soil tones and cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and a touch roasted in personality, with moderate tannins, not particularly impressive mid-palate depth and a distinctly herbal finishing note on the long finish. Perhaps these bottles were not spot on, as Monsieur d'Aramon has said that there was a batch of the wine in 1990 that had some TCA issues. However, I have had several other '90s in the last year or two that have performed rather similarly and far below expectations based on how the wines showed in their youth. This is not a bad wine per se, but not up to the customarily high quality of most top vintages of Figeac. 2011-2035+? **87?**

1990 Château Magdelaine

The 1990 Magdelaine is a flat out brilliant bottle of wine that delivers much the same aromatic and flavor fireworks of the 1990 Figeac, albeit in a potentially more transparent and ethereal package than the Figeac. The celestial bouquet soars from the glass in a mélange of cherries, toasted nuts, menthol, tobacco leaf, beautiful herb tones, chalky soil nuances and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, elegant and refined, with great intensity of flavor, laser-like focus, ripe and supple tannins, and endless length on the long, complex and suave finish. While the '90 Magdelaine is already a great glass of wine, I would still try and give it at least another eight to ten years of cellaring to really let it blossom fully. Believe me, I will not be touching any of mine until a decade has passed. It is a great bottle in the making. 2015-2060. **95.**

1990 Château Simard

I used to really like the old school style of marketing of Château Simard, as the domaine used to hold back vintages until they were ready to drink prior to release, so they were always six or seven vintages behind wines released on the standard Bordeaux cycle. The 1990 Simard is quite a nice wine, offering up a lovely nose of roasted cherries, menthol, tobacco ash, soil and a bit of saddle leather. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and velvety, with good focus, modest tannins and sneaky length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Good, solid juice that is now fully mature and should continue to drink well for another decade or so. 2010-2020+. **88.**

Recently Tasted 1990 Claret- Left Bank

Graves

1990 Château Haut Bailly

The 1990 Haut Bailly is an excellent example of the vintage, but at the present time the wine remains still quite closed and in need of a few more years in the cellar to really reach its zenith. The nose is already offering up a lovely nose of cassis, dark berries, Cuban cigar smoke, gravel, fresh herbs and a touch of blood orange in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just beginning to blossom, with a lovely core of fruit, perfect focus, seamless balance, still a bit of ripe tannin to resolve and excellent length and grip on the very classy finish. 2015-2045. **92.**

1990 Château Haut-Brion

A lot has seemingly changed at Haut-Brion since I wrote my historical piece on the estate back in 2007, with a quest for more ripeness and power in this wine (sadly) now quite well established in the last several vintages. That chimeric quest was inconceivable back in 1990, and this wine is a beautiful testament to just how magical this *terroir* can be when it is the focal point of the wine. This is one of the top 1990s to my palate, soaring from the glass in a beautifully youthful nose of cassis, dark berries, tobacco leaf, a whisper of leather, fresh herb tones, a complex base of gravelly soil tones, cigar smoke and a suave base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, seamlessly complex and still quite closed, with a fine core of fruit, superb focus and balance, ripe, beautifully integrated tannins and outstanding length and grip on the refined and very intensely flavored finish. A great 1990 in the making. 2020-2075+. **95.**

1990 Château La Mission Haut Brion (served from magnum)

The 1990 La Mission is a very top example of this vintage, and out of magnum it is just beginning to blossom. The deep, complex and classy nose offers up a very ripe blend of cassis, spit-roasted game, saddle leather, cigar ash, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with just a touch of La Mission's youthful medicinal tones still in evidence. The wine is rock solid at the core, modestly tannic and beautifully balanced, with outstanding focus, length and grip. The 1990 vintage in general has not aged anywhere as well as I had initially anticipated, but this is one 1990 that does not disappoint. 2012-2065+. **94+.**



The small and elegant chateau of Ste. Estèphe's classical superstar, Château Montrose.

Margaux

1990 Château Margaux

The 1990 Margaux was purported to be one of the wines of the vintage and this wine was indeed impressive out of the blocks, offering up great complexity on the nose, coupled to a plush and silky opulence on the palate that seemed the stuff from which legends are made. However, as has been the case with both the 1983 and the 1986 Margaux that I have tasted recently, time has not been kind to the 1990 Margaux and today this is a shell of its former beauty, offering up a roasted and simple nose of cassis, damp herbs, cigar smoke and toasty new oak. On the palate the wine seems to be breaking apart, as its fullish palate impression lacks complexity, mid-palate depth and length. The tannins here are still present in a chewy format, but the wine no longer possesses adequate mid-palate stuffing to adequately buffer them today and the wine is far cry from the greatness it seemed destined for when tasted back in 1995 or 1996. I am not sure how a wine such as this can seem so good out of the blocks and not age well, but this seems clearly to be the case with the 1990 Margaux. Clearly, this is not a special vintage for Margaux. 2016-2040? **87.**

1990 Château Palmer (served from half bottle)

The 1990 Palmer is a very good example of the vintage, but it does not possess the purity and precision that are the hallmarks of the very top vintages of this château in this era. That said, I would gladly take this wine over the tough and broad-shouldered Palmers in the 1996 to 2000 stretch of vintages. The bouquet of the 1990 is blossoming beautifully (particularly in half bottle), as it offers up a classy blend of cassis, mulberry, a touch of mint, tobacco and a discreet framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full and only moderately concentrated at the core, but with lovely focus and length, and an almost exotic note of allspice perking up the long, meltingly tannic finish. The 1990 Palmer is a very lovely bottle that just misses a bit of precision and reserve to be truly extraordinary. 2010-2040+. **90.**

St. Julien

1990 Château Beychevelle

I tasted a couple of bottles of the 1990 in preparation for this article, with one at the estate showing more open and clearly emerging from its adolescent phase, and the other at our vertical in New York still just a bit bound up in its structural elements. In either case, this is a good wine, but, like so many of its counterparts in the Médoc, it is not quite in the same league as the property's 1989. The nose is deep and fairly roasted in style, as it offers up scents of backed cherries and dark berries, signed tobacco, coffee, a nice base of soil, nuttiness, lovely smoky tones and a bit of iron in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full and quite broad-shouldered on the attack, with very respectable depth in the mid-palate, moderate tannins and good length on the finish. There is a possibility that this wine has still not quite blossomed and I could be underrating it a bit, but my gut instincts tell me that the torrid summer of 1990 has produced a slightly more roasted style of Beychevelle that will prevent it from ever being ranked in the top division of recent vintages from this fine property. 2016-2040. **88.**

1990 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

The 1990 Ducru was one of the last vintages here to be affected by what I assume was the TCA contamination in the cellars, and it shows as bit of shortness and a pinched aspect on the backend from this affliction. That said, the wine is still not a bad drink by any stretch of the imagination, offering up scents of cassis, black cherries, tobacco leaf, a lovely base of gravel and

perhaps, just a whisper of mustiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and nicely complex, with a fine sense of transparency on the attack, modest tannins and good focus and balance. The finish just tails off, which is more of a sign of the TCA issues here than the very, very faint touch of mustiness on the nose. I would still be happy to drink this bottle (it was in fact one of the favorites amongst the non-professionals at our vertical- do not doubt to the lovely resolution of the 1990), but it is clearly not all that it might have been. 2015-2045. **87.**

1990 Les Fiefs de Lagrange

The 1990 Les Fiefs de Lagrange has been fully mature for several years, but it continues to drink very well indeed. The bouquet offers up a complex, sweet and tertiary blend of dark berries, espresso, sweet Cuban tobacco, woodsmoke, earth and a bit of dark chocolate. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and *à point*, with soft tannins, nice framing acids, a good core of fruit and impressive length and grip on the classy and palate-staining finish. This is another outstanding second label that has rewarded those with the foresight to both buy the wine out of the blocks and to defer gratification long enough for the wine to reach full maturity. Lovely juice- especially when one considers that many of the cabernet sauvignon vines included here were quite young at this time. 2008-2015+. **89.**

1990 Château Gruaud-Larose

1990 is one of my least favorite vintages for Gruaud in the decade of the 1980s, as the wine is a bit marred by a raw oak component and really is a bit lacking in mid-palate depth. This most recent bottle offered up a complex nose of red berries, coffee, tobacco leaf, a touch of roasted meat, mint and plenty of toasty oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and broad-shouldered, but a touch hollow at the core, with still some chewy tannins to resolve on the complex, but slightly clipped finish. This is not a bad wine *per se*, but it is not up to the standards of wines such as the '81, '82, '83, '85 and '86 Gruaud. 2009-2035+. **88.**

1990 Château Lagrange

The 1990 Lagrange is a terrific wine, and clearly one of the top vintages to be produced at the estate since Suntory purchased it in 1983. The bouquet today is deep and beautiful, as it offers up a mélange of very pure black cherry fruit, cigar ash, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil, espresso and a deft framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and very pure, with great refinement to its balance and focus, very classic structure, fine-grained, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex and elegant finish. A superb wine that only needs a few more years to really reach its apogee, but which should offer up a very long plateau of maturity. Fine juice. 2010-2060. **93+.**

Pauillac

1990 Château Latour

I can still recall vividly the hype that surrounded the 1990 Latour, which was purported to be the first truly great vintage from this estate since the 1982 and a “return to form” for this great First Growth. The wine was admirably constituted out of the blocks, but at this tasting I was quite surprised to not see it particularly superior to the 1989 Latour (which was disparaged at the time as emblematic of the slight slump at this estate). The 1990 Latour does not seem to have quite the same mid-palate intensity that it boasted out of the blocks, but is still a very good wine on both the nose and palate, as it offers up a complex and (surprisingly) wide open bouquet of cassis, roasted tobacco, dark soil tones, cigar smoke, fresh herbs, espresso and toasty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows off plenty of sappy fruit at the core, with firm, ripe tannins, fine focus and balance and a very long, complex and nearly mature finish. Great

Latours of the decades prior to this would never have been accessible to this degree at such a relatively young age, but the 1990 Latour is really only a few years away from its prime. It is a lovely bottle of wine, but probably not quite in the league of the greatest Latours of the '40s, '50s, '60s or early 1970s. 2015-2060+. **94.**

1990 Château Lynch Bages

The 1990 Lynch Bages is a very good example of the vintage that shows off the differences between '90 and '89 quite well in its lack of mid-palate depth *vis à vis* the 1989 version. The nose on the 1990 Lynch is excellent, wafting from the glass in a blend of cassis, black cherries, a touch of saddle leather, gravelly soil tones, fresh herbs and plenty of toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very long, with good, but not great depth at the core, moderate tannins and lovely length and grip on the complex finish. While approachable today, the 1990 Lynch could still do with a few years in the cellar to allow it to more fully blossom. It is a very good wine, but it does not possess the same sappy depth of the superior 1989 Lynch Bages. 2016-2045+. **90+.**

1990 Château Pichon-Lalande

The 1990 Pichon-Lalande is a very fine example of the vintage. The deep, complex and vibrant nose delivers a classy mélange of dark berries, coffee, fresh herb tones, cigar smoke, a fine base of dark soil tones and plenty of smoky, toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very long, with admirable complexity, fine focus and balance, melting tannins and impressive grip on the very long and refined finish. This is a classic example of Pichon-Lalande from its glory days, as the wines the estate was turning out in the decade of the 1980s were a significant step up in quality from what had been produced here in the previous few decades. 2012-2040. **93.**

1990 Château Pichon Longueville Baron

The 1990 Pichon Baron is a superb example of the vintage and a wine that has the depth of fruit at the core to age very gracefully. The deep, complex and still quite youthful nose offers up scents of cassis, black cherries, cigar smoke, gravelly soil, coffee bean and toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively pure on the attack, with fine complexity, a superb core, melting tannins and outstanding length and grip on the focused and classy finish. This wine is fresher and less roasted than many of the 1990s are today, and is already starting to drink very well indeed. Fine juice and one of the stellar successes from the vintage. 2012-2050. **94.**

Ste. Estèphe

1990 Château Montrose

Despite all of the over the top superlatives bestowed on the 1990 Montrose elsewhere, I have always found this vintage to be a bit too roasted and marked by the torrid nature of the vintage to rank better than very good, and this most recent bottle was consistent with my past experiences with the wine. The nose is deep, complex and roasty, offering up scents of cassis, saddle leather, a bit of brett, fresh herb tones, cigar ash, gravel and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and impressively tangy for the vintage, with a fine core of fruit, ripe tannins and a long, still quite primary finish. This is a very good vintage of Montrose by any stretch of the imagination, but it is no better than the 1989 Montrose, which sells for a modicum of the price. And if I had to choose, I would take the svelte thoroughbred of a vintage of the '70 Montrose in a heartbeat over either of these two years! 2020-2070. **94.**

1990 Château Phélan-Ségur (served from magnum)

The 1990 Phélan-Ségur is really a very pretty example of the vintage and is fully into its apogee of maturity. It is not as complex as the big boys of the vintage, but there is an awful lot of charm and complexity to be found with this wine. The deep and complex nose shows a bit of the roasted character of the vintage, as it offers up scents of cassis, new leather, cigar ash, dark soil tones and coffee bean. On the palate the wine is medium-full, suave and complex, with lovely focus, perfectly passable depth and lovely focus on the long and velvety finish. I would have loved to have had a chance to compare this with the 1989. 2012-2025. **89.**

Recently Tasted 1989 Claret- Right Bank

Pomerol

1989 Château La Conseillante

The 1989 La Conseillante seems decidedly riper than the 1990, when the two vintages are served side by side, and it is one of the few examples where I have a slight preference for the younger of the two vintages. That said, I have seen some wide swings in the style and point of evolution of the '89 La Conseillante over the last couple of years, so perhaps this is just a reflection of the travel histories of individual bottles, rather than a reflection of the wine in general, as this is probably the most hyped vintage of La Conseillante of the decade of the 1980s. The bouquet on this most recent bottle was ripe and buxom, offering up scents of chocolate, plum, black raspberries, a touch of prune, coffee, damp herb tones, soil and plenty of toasty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and borderline overripe, with plenty of fat, but not a whole lot of structural integrity on display. The finish is long, sumptuous and fruit-driven, with melting tannins and not a whole lot of grip. This is a good wine, but it does not exude the elegance that is so typical of this great estate in classic vintages, and will probably not be as long-lived as the 1990. 2012-2035+. **90.**

1989 Château Certan-Giraud

This was one of the last vintages produced of Certan-Giraud, before the Cruse family sold the property off to Christian Moueix and the filet section of the vineyard eventually became Hosanna. The '89 Certan-Giraud is quite nice, but not in the top division of '89 Pomerols, as there was simply not the possibility back in these days for the Cruse family to take the same care with the wine as would be the case today, if they still owned the estate. The bouquet is deep and complex, showing off the roasted style of the vintage in its aromatic blend of plums, dark berries, woodsmoke, a touch of sealing wax, coffee and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a touch rustic in style, with a good core of fruit, melting tannins and a long, complex finish that closes with a touch of leather. A very good, slightly old-fashioned bottle that is drinking well now and has decades of life still ahead of it. 2012-2040. **87.**

1989 Château l'Enclos

This was always one of my favorite vintages of l'Enclos, and though I was not smart enough to buy the wine back in my merchant days, I did have the good sense to at least drink it a handful of times in its youth. I was very impressed recently to see how well the wine was evolving with cellaring, as it now offers up a deep and complex nose of roasted plums, mocha, a nice touch of blood orange, singed tobacco, a lovely base of soil and a nice framing of nutty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and moderately complex, with a plush core of fruit, melting tannins, impressively tangy acids and lovely focus and grip on the velvety and long finish. This does not possess the complexity of '89 Pomerols that hail from the greatest *terroirs*

in the commune, but this is a very, very enjoyable glass of Pomerol that has now reached its apogee of maturity. 2010-2025+. **90.**

1989 Château l'Église-Clinet

I was a big fan of the '85 l'Église-Clinet, but found that the property did not sustain the same excellence over the ensuing vintages. The 1989 is a very oaky example of the vintage, and I have concerns that it may never fully resolve its new wood component. Underneath the heavy veneer of toasty oak is a pretty wine, offering up scents of plums, chocolate, fresh herb tones and a nice dollop of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, fat and still relatively young, with a good core, not much complexity yet, firm tannins and good length and grip on the slightly woody finish. This is okay, but it may always be a bit dominated by the heavily charred wood. 2012-2030? **87.**

1989 Château l'Évangile

This note dates back a few years, but I very much loved the elegance of the '89 l'Évangile when I last crossed paths with this wine. The deep and complex nose is the picture of refinement in its mélange of mulberries, red plums, woodsmoke, a hint of gamebird, lovely soil tones, coffee and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full, round and complex, with a sappy core of fruit, fairly gentle remaining tannins and lovely length and grip on the focused and complex finish. This is not a blockbuster by any means, but it delivers lovely aromatic and flavor complexity in a velvety format that is most enjoyable. 2006-2035+. **90.**

1989 Château Trotanoy

It had been many, many years since I last tasted the 1989 Château Trotanoy, and the wine has evolved beautifully from those youthful days. The bouquet is deep, complex and just beginning to blossom at age twenty, as it offers up a lovely blend of dark berries, a touch of blood orange, tobacco smoke, a touch of Pomerol nuttiness, coffee and a touch of new wood that comes across as lead pencil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and still fairly primary, with a lovely core of fruit, lovely focus, a fair bit of ripe tannin still to resolve, tangy acids and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. I would still give this vintage of Trotanoy at least another five or six years in the cellar to really open up, and in reality, this wine is going to be decidedly better to drink ten or twelve years further down the road. A lovely vintage of Trotanoy that still deserves some extended cellaring. 2015-2060. **93+.**

1989 Vieux Château Certan

The 1989 VCC is from another very ripe vintage, such as 1982, and initially I feared that the wine might be a bit unstructured and more typical of its vintage than its *terroir*. In fact, for the first hour that this wine was opened this was indeed the case, with a plush, almost chocolaty personality that is hardly archetypical VCC, though absolutely delicious. But at the one hour mark the inimitable soil of this estate began to take over and a much more classic aromatic silhouette appeared, as the wine offered up a beautiful bouquet of black cherries, bitter chocolate, herb tones redolent of fresh rosemary, dark berries, a bit of blood orange, cigar smoke and gravelly soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and very pure, with great structure emerging from behind its generous fruit as the wine evolves in the glass, and great length and grip on the still fairly primary finish. The tannins here are moderate, but still present, and the wine seems with sufficient air to be a bit more pure and focused than the more opulent and equally enjoyable 1982. This is a really superb vintage of VCC that is still in need of a few more years to really hit its apogee. 2015-2060. **94+.**



Chanel's crack P.R. team of Sandrine Bégaud of Ch. Rauzan-Ségla and Géraldine Leger of Ch. Canon at Canon.

St. Émilion

1989 Château Canon

This is another vintage of Canon I had not tasted in several years prior to our vertical tasting in early May of 2010, and I was very impressed with how the '89 has evolved. The emerging bouquet is fantastic, as it offers up scents of black cherries, dark berries, a touch of chipotle pepper, tobacco leaf, coffee, a touch of menthol, a great base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and very complex, with fine mid-palate depth, just a hint of jamminess to the fruit tones on the attack, but great focus and balance on the modestly tannic and very long finish. A very classy '89. 2010-2050. **93+**.

1989 Château Cheval Blanc

The 1989 Cheval Blanc is a beautiful example of the vintage, offering a deep, complex and utterly classic nose of dark berries, black cherries, menthol, cigar ash, gravelly soil tones, woodsmoke and a base of toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a rock solid core of sappy fruit, outstanding soil inflection, superb complexity and a very, very long, youthful and ripely tannic finish. While this wine is not particularly far away from fully blossoming and will be quite drinkable with another four or five years of cellaring, I would be very strongly inclined to not touch a bottle for at least another decade, as I would love to see this wine in the same magical spot as the 1983 Cheval is today. 2016-2050+. **94+**.

1989 Château la Dominique

The '89 la Dominique is a step up from the 1990, but it too is a pretty ripe wine that is borderline heavy in style. The deep and complex nose offers up scents of black cherries, eucalyptus, tobacco leaf, damp soil tones, coffee grounds, fresh herbs and plenty of toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite powerful in style, with a sappy core of ripe fruit, still a fairly primary profile and good length and grip on the still slightly chewy finish. This has decidedly more mid-palate depth than its 1990 counterpart, and there is a bit more freshness to the fruit component as well. 2010-2030+. **90.**

1989 Château Figeac

The more I drink 1989 and 1990 Bordeaux these days, the more I am convinced that the '89s are far superior across the board. There is a depth and purity to the ripe fruit of the 1989s that cannot be matched by the more roasted and slightly hollow 1990s, and the '89s are almost all universally younger than their 1990 counterparts. This is certainly the case with the beautiful '89 Figeac, which offers up a deep and very pure bouquet of red and black cherries, a bit of plum, incipient notes of black truffle, gentle notes of menthol, St. Émilion nutskin, Cuban cigars and a beautifully complex base of soil that shows more than a trace of iron. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully structured, with a lovely core of sweet and pure fruit, moderate tannins, lovely focus and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly balanced and still fairly young finish. This is a fairly low acid vintage for Figeac, but the wine is aging gracefully and is still on the young side for primetime drinking, though the tannins are not particularly obtrusive at this point in time. But, further patience will be rewarded with decidedly more complexity and perfume in what will ultimately be a very velvety vintage of Figeac. A beautiful wine. 2012-2050. **94+.**

1989 Château Magdelaine

The 1989 Magdelaine is another *tour de force*, which is a bit more powerfully built than the transparent 1990, but offers up the same sense of intensity tied to grace and elegance. The bouquet offers up a stunning blend of black cherries, plums, tobacco, incipient notes of cigar, earth, herb tones and a judicious framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and just a touch tarry, with a very deep and powerful core of fruit, plenty of ripe, well-integrated tannins, and a very long, complex and profound finish. This will take a few more years than the 1990 to reach full maturity, but should drink magically for at least forty years once it reaches its plateau. Another great wine. 2020-2060. **95.**

Recently Tasted 1989 Claret- Left Bank

Graves

1989 Domaine de Chevalier

The 1989 DDC was showing brilliantly the last time I crossed paths with the wine, back in January of 2010. The nose is deep, pure and very expressive, offering up a fine mélange of cherries, blood orange, nutskins, a very complex base of soil tones, tobacco leaf, incipient notes of cocoa powder and a deft touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very pure, with lovely mid-palate depth and vinosity, modest tannins and truly exceptional elegance on the very long, focused and soil-driven finish. In a vintage where the fruit can sometimes get in the way of the *terroir* in each wine, the 1989 Domaine de Chevalier is noteworthy for its lovely transparency and very classic profile. 2010-2050. **93.**

1989 Château Haut-Brion

It had been more than a decade since I last tasted a bottle of the 1989 Haut-Brion (having absolutely zero interest in opening any bottles out of my cellar before this wine has fully apogee), so I was very happy to see it on display at the Hart-Davis-Hart tasting. This is a brilliant wine that has not lost an iota of its luster as it has aged, soaring from the glass in a brilliantly pure and bottomless bouquet of cassis, dark berries, cigar smoke, a very complex base of dark soil tones, Cuban cigars, fresh herbs and a refined base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and stunningly plush on the attack, with a sappy core of pure fruit, stunning soil signature, ripe, firm tannins and simply brilliant length and grip on the still very young, seamless and boundless finish. This wine has often been compared to the 1959 Haut-Brion, but I have to believe that the 1989 will be even better when it reaches its peak of maturity! This is still a very young wine (far less evolved than the superb 1990) and I would not touch a bottle for at least another dozen years or more. It should last close to a century. 2025-2100+. **100.**

1989 Château La Mission Haut Brion

The striking difference in purity between the top wines of 1989 and their counterparts in 1990 is very readily apparent in the magical 1989 La Mission Haut Brion, which is a significant step from the very fine 1990 paired up with it at this tasting. The brilliant and vibrant nose soars from the glass in a sappy blend of black cherries, blackberries, cigar wrapper, gravelly soil tones, smoke and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and nascently complex, with a rock solid core of sappy fruit, stunning soil inflection, ripe tannins and stunning purity on the beautifully focused and endless finish. This is one of the greatest young vintages of La Mission I have ever had the pleasure to taste. 2020-2100. **97+.**

1989 Château Pape-Clément

Pape-Clément made a beautiful example of the vintage in 1989, with the plushness of ripe fruit that characterized the vintage beautifully displayed across the lovely soil-driven personality of the estate in this epoch. The wine is still quite youthful, but offers up a deep and classy nose of black cherries, tobacco leaf, nutskins, gravelly soil tones, fresh herbs, a judicious touch of new oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and developing very well indeed, with lovely secondary complexity already emerging, a fine core of fruit and very good length and grip on the complex and still fairly tannic finish. This is still early days for this lovely '89. 2015-2050+. **93+.**

Margaux

1989 Château Margaux

At the time of its release, the 1989 Margaux was a wine of a fair bit of controversy, as it was reported that Paul Pontallier had found the merlot a bit overripe in this year, and consequently opted to try and pick the cabernet sauvignon on the early side to try and compensate a bit for the overripe nature of the merlot in the blend. Many tasters at the time had found the resulting wine to be both a bit pruney and a bit green- not an ideal combination for long-term cellaring or garnering early accolades from claret critics! In any event, at the Hart-Davis-Hart tasting, I was very surprised to see that the wine was every bit as good today as the far more highly-praised 1990 Margaux, as the wine offers up a deep and complex nose that shows off a bit of a greenness in its blend of cassis, violets, cigar smoke, plenty of herb tones, soil and spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with the early-picked cabernet adding a bit of underripeness to the palate impression. The tannins are moderate and still a bit chewy in style, with the long finish showing a bit of backend bitterness.

This is not a great Margaux by any stretch of the imagination, but the surprise is that it is every bit as good as the 1990! I would opt to drink this wine up over the relative near-term, as I suspect that the greenness here is only going to become more pronounced as time goes by. 2012-2025+? **87.**

1989 Château Palmer

At our vertical tasting in October of 2007, the '89 was corked, so I have had to go back to a note on this wine that is a few years old. I have always liked the 1989 Palmer quite well, but have never ranked it quite in the same league as the greatest vintages of this château. The nose on the '89 offers up scents of ripe plums, mulberries, dark chocolate, tobacco, minerals, violets and toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and quite lush and voluptuous on the attack, with a firm tannic structure kicking-up in the mid-palate, and a long, complex and chewy finish. While there is plenty of depth in the mid-palate, I do not find quite the reserves of fruit at the core as found in vintages such as the 1983 at a similar stage of development. The tannins here are ripe and quite buried in the fruit, and while it is more than drinkable today, it clearly will need another decade to allow some of the secondary layers of complexity to emerge. 2014-2050. **92+.**

St. Julien

1989 Château Beychevelle

In contrast to the warm vintage character of the 1990 Beychevelle, the 1989 delivers absolutely classic aromatic and flavor profiles and is a top vintage in the making for this property. The bouquet is deep, pure and still quite youthful, as it soars from the glass in a beautiful mélange of red and black cherries, tobacco leaf, fresh herb tones, incipient notes of the chipotles to come, a beautiful base of soil and a smoky topnote redolent of a fine Cuban cigar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite closed in personality, with a velvety attack, a superb core of sweet fruit, still a good dollop of ripe tannins and outstanding length and grip on the poised and soil-driven finish. A dynamite vintage of Beychevelle in the making, but I would opt to keep it tucked in the cellar for at least another four or five years and really let it start hitting on all cylinders. 2015-2060. **93.**

1989 Château Lagrange

This most recent bottle of the 1989 Lagrange, which was tasted at the estate at the end of March of this year, did not show quite as well as the last bottle I sampled a couple of years ago. It is still a very good wine, but seemed a touch more four-square on the palate than I remember the wine. The nose is deep, ripe and still quite youthful in its mélange of black cherries, a touch of meatiness, cigar smoke, still a bit of youthful cabernet weediness, saddle leather, dark soil tones and a slightly roasted element that was very emblematic of the vintage in its youth, but which has receded from most '89s in recent years. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and has a powerful core of fruit, with very good focus and nascent complexity, but just a hint of chunkiness keeping down the score a bit on the very long, ripely tannic and youthful finish. It is still a lovely glass of claret in the making, but the a few years ago this wine looked destined for even better things. Perhaps I just caught this bottle at an awkward stage. 2016-2050. **91+.**

Pauillac

1989 Château Clerc Milon

The '89 Clerc Milon is an okay example of the vintage, but the wine is a bit subsumed by its rather overly generous coating of heavily toasted new wood. The new oaky nose offer sup

scents of cherries, herbs, tobacco leaf, some weedy cabernet tones and plenty of toasted oak. On the palate the wine is fullish and suave on the attack, with good complexity and delineation, soft tannins and sneaky length and grip on the finish. If one does not mind this typical heavily toasty oak style (which reminds me a lot of the Opus One bottlings being made in this era as well), then this is not a bad drink. To my palate, too much complexity of soil was sacrificed at the altar of toasty oak. 2008-2020+? **87.**

1989 Château Latour

The 1989 Latour was really quite overlooked at the time of its release, with much of the wine world's focus absorbed by the 1990 vintage from this great property. However, at the Hart-Davis-Hart tasting, the 1989 Latour was the marginally superior wine of these two vintages, and also decidedly the younger of the two. The deep, youthful and very pure nose offers up a fine blend of cassis, dark berry, a touch of mint, cigar ash, gravelly soil tones, fresh herbs and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with nascent complexity, great focus and transparency, tangy acids (notably higher than the more velvety 1990 version) and great length and grip on the old-fashioned, chewy and ripely tannic finish. This wine is developing brilliantly and is clearly going to be the longer-lived of the '89-'90 pair, and I would not be surprised to see the 1989 Latour open up its lead over its 1990 counterpart more profoundly as the years go by. A superb and very much under-appreciated Latour. 2020-2100. **94+.**



The tower at Château Latour seen looking out over the vineyards of Château Haut-Bages-Libéral.

1989 Château Lynch Bages

The 1989 Lynch Bages is one of the finest recent vintages of this wine that I have ever had the pleasure to taste, with a beautiful depth of fruit that only the greatest vintages of this fine estate have been able to boast in the past. The deep and superb nose soars from the glass in a vibrant mélange of black cherries, cassis, incipient notes of petroleum jelly (which are so prevalent in the 1961 and 1959 versions of this wine today), complex gravel soil tones, cigar ash and toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a sappy core of fruit, impeccable focus and balance, with ripe, moderate tannins and absolutely stunning length and grip. The 1989 Lynch is a beautiful wine and one of the reference point vintages for this superb estate in the last fifty years. Surprisingly, it is one of the few 1989s that is at the same stage of evolution as its 1990 counterpart and is only a few years away from primetime drinking. Given its superior mid-palate depth, I would expect it to outlive the very good 1990. Impressive juice. 2016-2060. **94.**

1989 Château Pichon-Lalande

As fine as the 1990 Pichon-Lalande showed at our tasting, the 1990 was a decided step up in terms of depth and vibrancy of fruit tone. The stunning nose soars from the glass in a complex blend of cassis, dark berries, coffee bean, tobacco leaf, gravelly soil tones, cigar smoke and toasty new oak. There is just greater delineation and purity to each aromatic element here *vis à vis* the 1990. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and sappy at the core, with outstanding soil signature, melting tannins, lovely focus and grip and a very, very long, refined and complex finish. This is one of the few 1989s that is not demonstrably younger than its 1990 counterpart, but it is a slightly finer, deeper and more pure example of its *terroir*. 1989 is a great vintage of Pichon-Lalande. 2012-2045. **94+.**

Ste. Estèphe

1989 Château Cos d'Estournel

The 1989 Cos d'Estournel is a very good example of the vintage, but one that does not show quite the purity of the top wines of '89. The nose is deep and quite roasted in its aromatic profile, delivering scents of dark berries, roasted cherries, woodsmoke, saddle leather, soil and toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a touch rustic, with a good core, moderate tannins and a long, complex finish that shows off fine grip and balance. This is not the most elegant rendition of the 1989 vintage, but it is not a bad wine by any stretch of the imagination. I would give the '89 Cos a few more years of cellaring to allow its tannins to more fully fall away. 2015-2050. **90+.**

1989 Château Montrose

The 1989 Montrose may not be quite as deep as the 1990, but it is a purer wine of precise definition and classic proportions. The superb nose offers up a refined mélange of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, gravelly soil tones, espresso, fresh herbs and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with firm tannins, tangy acids and outstanding focus and grip on the very young, pristine and old school finish. Some may prefer the more overtly powerful style of the 1990 Montrose, but for me, though the two vintages are qualitatively equivalent, I prefer the superior transparency of the 1989. 2020-2070. **94.**

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ARRIVES IN US WITH A PLETHORA OF LOW OCTANE BEAUTIES**



The sun going down over the vineyards in Bierzo- time to fire up the grill and break out the tapas.

Long-time Spanish wine expert and journalist, Gerry Dawes has finally tossed his hat back in the ring of the wine trade here in the United States, creating a new Spanish wine import company that is focused on searching out old school Spanish wines of great character that have resisted (or studiously ignored) the modern trend towards high alcohol and over-oaked wines that have plagued many of the most well-known properties on the Iberian peninsula during the last couple of decades. Señor Dawes is probably the most vociferous opponent of excessive new oak to be found in the world of wine since the passing of Bartolo Mascarello, and he is no fan of the very heady and overripe style of winemaking that has been championed in many other journalistic circles behind the banner of Spain's "Mediterranean Wine" fiction, which argues unpersuasively that Spain's natural wine proclivity is to make overripe and alcoholic wines due to the limitations of its Mediterranean climate. Spain's important native wine critic, Victor de la Serna of the publication, El Mundo, has long argued for this fantasy in the face of an historical legacy to the contrary, which helped provide the propaganda program behind which so many Spanish wineries sought to maximize profitability by fashioning wines solely for the over the top tastes of Robert Parker's associate, Jay Miller, who has just retired from covering Spain for the Parker empire. Gerry Dawes has long been a journalistic counterpoint to the "Mediterranean Wine" armada, and in the last several months has created an import company to search out traditionally-styled Spanish wines that steer clear of the alcoholic hubris that has marred so many new and formerly great wine-producing estates in Spain in the last fifteen or twenty years.

I have now had a handful of opportunities to taste through the wines in Gerry's new import portfolio, which he has dubbed The Spanish Artisan Wine Group. Not surprisingly, given Gerry's long history of visiting in Spain and knowing the wine regions of the country inside out, his roster of small and very serious winegrowers is as fine a group of classic Spanish wines as one is likely to find under one umbrella. I had intended to feature these wines as part of a larger piece on Traditionally-styled Spanish wines in a coming issue, but thought the breadth and depth of selections in the Dawes' portfolio was sufficiently exciting to warrant a feature on their own—particularly since many of these wines are made in very, very small quantities, and if I sat on the notes for a few months and included them in the upcoming feature, it is quite likely that many of these superb wines would already be sold out of the market. So, I have decided to get these notes published as quickly as possible to ensure that readers who are so inclined might have the opportunity to track down some of these truly exceptional wines prior to their disappearing from the market.

The heart and soul of the Spanish Artisan Wine Group's lineup are superb bottlings of Mencía on the red side of the ledger, and a great set of producers making stunning Albariño on one hand, and another group working their magic with Godello on the white wine side of the ledger. This is not to say that there are not some equally superb wines to be found here amongst Señor Dawes' selections that are not made from one of these three grapes (in fact, there is a simply stunning, old vine Garnaxta from Camino del Villar Viña Aliaga that Gerry is not particularly fond of—given its riper style in comparison to most of the wines found in his portfolio— but which should absolutely not be missed!), so one would be foolish to focus exclusively on the small growers producing Mencía, Godello and Albariño in the roster of tiny estates represented here. But, that said, there is no denying that the Spanish Artisan Wine Group's lineup of producers of Mencía, Godello and Albariño are all absolutely exceptional and every bit as fine as anything I have ever tasted from these three grape varieties. In particular, his roster of Albariño producers are spectacular, with each estate emphatically showing just how great the wines from this grape can be when produced from low yields and old vines. Along with Albariño producers represented here in the US by José Pastor, such as Pedralonga, Raul Perez and Do Ferreiro, the likes of Spanish Artisan Wine Group producers such as Lagar de Broullón, O Forollo, Avó Roxo, Cabaleiro do Val and Rozas are redefining just what Albariño can and should be and are amongst some of the most exciting new (at least to me) dry white wines that I have tasted in several years. In fact, Gerry's roster of Albariño producers is so superb that he generally saves them for the end of tastings, starting with reds and Rosado bottlings and letting the Albariño producers finish off the festivities at the two events I attended!

I first tasted several of these wines at the start of March of this year, as the wines were just scheduling to depart from Spain (and I for a month-long swing through France and Germany), and then followed up with a second tasting in late May when the wines had fully arrived here in New York. Both tastings emphasized that Señor Dawes' lineup is chock full of outstanding producers new to the export markets and who are fashioning absolutely stellar, old school wines that are long on *terroir*, purity of fruit, tangy acids and great personality that are derived from their traditional places of origin, rather than from a tony French *tonnelier* or trendy international winemaking consultant. While I have not yet had the pleasure to visit and taste in the cellars with these producers, it is now at the top of my list for future tasting trips and it will

not be long until I have the pleasure to meet these *vignerons* in person and get a better feel for their philosophies and vineyard landscapes. For, these are really superb wines and some of the most exciting new producers to cross my path in several years. For subscribers not located here in the states, I am sure that these small artisan producers would be delighted to be contacted directly about the availability of their wines, as there is little doubt that they are currently swimming upstream from the more “typical” Spanish wine market at home (still seemingly enamored of alcoholic clout and tons of new wood) and would be amenable to sharing a few of their great bottles with sympathetic private clients from around the continent.

Can Festis Cava (Jaume Giró et Giró)

While I will be doing a full-fledged feature on Cava in the next issue, I wanted to include notes here on The Spanish Artisan Wine Group’s fine Catalan producer, Jaume Giró et Giró and their excellent label of Can Festis Cava. Like virtually all of the top producers I have tasted in recent months, Jaume Giró et Giró is part of the “Six Percent Club” who own their own vineyards and produce Cava solely from their own grapes. As I will elaborate on in my article on Cava, in my experience, this is one of the fundamental building blocks for producing truly world class Cava, and if one were to simply limit one’s consumption of Cava to producers who grow their own grapes and make their own wines, one could steer clear of disappointingly bland examples and come to appreciate just how beautifully delicate and complex top flight Cava can be from members of this “Six Percent Club”. Señor Giró produces three levels of Cava, all fermented in the bottle like Champagne, with the three levels neatly reflecting the Bronze, Silver and Gold medals of the Olympics. These are outstanding sparkling wines that are every bit as interesting as top examples of Champagne in the classic, dancing style of great Cava.

Can Festis Cava “Bronze Label” Brut Nature- Jaume Giró et Giró

The “Bronze Label” Cava from Can Festis is comprised of a blend of ten percent Chardonnay, twenty percent Macabeu, and thirty-five percent each of Xarel-lo and Parellada and is aged for twelve months on the lees prior to disgorgement. The wine is really a beautifully vibrant and racy glass of Cava, offering up a complex nose of lime zest, green apple, gentle notes of bread dough and a beautiful base of Catalan soil tones (similar to *garrigue*, only more floral in nature). On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and dancing, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, brisk acids and really lovely length and grip on the complex finish. This is an ideal *aperitif* Cava that is a perfect lead-in to tapas. 2012-2017+. **88.**

Can Festis Cava “Silver Label” Brut Nature Reserva- Jaume Giró et Giró

The “Silver Label” Reserva Cava from Can Festis is really a beautiful wine, having aged on its lees for eighteen months prior to disgorgement and preparation for labeling. It is a similar blend to the Bronze Label (ten percent chardonnay, twenty percent Macabeu, and thirty-five percent each of Xarel-lo and Parellada) and offers up a deeper and more complex nose and palate than the vibrant Bronze Label. The bouquet is a fine and classy blend of apple, tangerine, warm bread, lovely, complex soil tones, citrus peel and a touch of lavender in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rounder than the above, with a fine core of fruit, lovely complexity and focus, lovely, pinpoint bubbles, bright acids and superb length and grip on the perfectly balanced finish. This is lovely wine. 2012-2019+. **90.**

Can Festis Cava “Gold Label” Brut Nature Grand Reserva- Jaume Giró et Giró

The Gold Label from Can Festis is an identical blend to the other two fine bottlings from this lovely Cava specialist (ten percent chardonnay, twenty percent Macabeu, and thirty-five

percent each of Xarel-lo and Parellada) and is aged fully thirty months on the lees prior to disgorgement. This is really a stunning bottle of Cava- light on its feet and very vibrant, but with superb complexity on both the nose and palate. The outstanding bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of tart orange, lime zest, warm bread, wonderful Catalan soil tones, lime blossoms, sea salts and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is very pure, complex and full-bodied, with a rock solid core of fruit, bright acids, very elegant *mousse*, superb focus and balance and a very long, classy and complex finish. Just a lovely, high class bottle of Cava! 2012-2020+. **93.**

Assorted Viña Blanco

2011 Finca Teira Blanco - Bodegas Manuel Formigo (Ribeiro)

The 2011 Finca Teira Blanco from Bodegas Manuel Formigo is a blend of sixty-five percent Treixadura, twenty percent Godello and fifteen percent Torrontés, making it a slightly different mix than the 2010 reviewed below. The wine tips the scales at 12.7 percent alcohol and offers up a fine bouquet of white peach, lemon, a beautiful base of white soil tones, a touch of candied lemon peel (think mature Raveneau Chablis), pretty spice tones and a beautifully musky floral topnote redolent of honeysuckle. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and beautifully balanced, with lovely, ripe acids, fine focus and grip and a very long, classy finish that really does its best work at the table. A really lovely bottle of Ribeiro white wine. Fine juice that is still fairly young and will clearly develop secondary layers of complexity with further bottle age. 2012-2018. **91+.**

2010 Finca Teira Blanco - Bodegas Manuel Formigo (Ribeiro)

The 2010 Finca Teira is a blend of seventy percent Treixadura, twenty percent Godello and ten percent Alvilla. It weighs in at a cool 12.5 percent alcohol and is a lovely middleweight, offering up a complex nose of lemon, grapefruit, salty soil tones, citrus peel and a touch of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and very well-balanced, with perfectly respectable depth in the mid-palate, good focus and fine length and grip on the finish. This is not exactly snappy today, but it remains fresh and vibrant for near-term drinking. 2012-2015. **89.**

2010 Teira X- Bodegas Manuel Formigo (Ribeiro)

Young Manuel Formigo de la Fuente is the winegrower now in charge of his family's vineyards in Ribeiro, tucked in a corner of Galicia just above the Portuguese border in northwestern Spain. The estate's "Teira X" bottling hails from some of their oldest vines in their top vineyard site, Finca Miño Teira, and is a blend of sixty percent Treixadura, fifteen percent each Albariño and Alvilla and ten percent Loureira. Only a few hundred cases are produced each vintage. This is a more structured and slightly riper (thirteen versus 12.5 percent) wine than the estate's Finca Teira Blanco, with more mid-palate depth and a superior backbone of acidity. The 2010 is an absolutely superb wine, jumping from the glass in a vibrant mélange of lemon, fresh bay leaf, stony white soil tones, orange peel and a dollop of petrol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully soil-driven, with sound acids, lovely focus and simply exceptional length and grip on the finish. A superb bottle. 2012-2018. **92.**

2010 Camino Blanco- Terro Remota (Empordá- Costa Brava)

Terra Remota is owned by the husband and wife team of Marc and Emma Bournazeau, who are residents of Perpignan, France (just over the border), as Marc's family was forced to emigrate from Spain to Perpignan during the Civil War. This very pretty and stylish white wine is a blend of forty-five percent Garnaxta Blanco, thirty-five percent Chenin Blanc and twenty percent Chardonnay. The nose is deep and complex, offering up a very classy blend of lemon,

pear, white soil tones, a hint of green olive and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and nicely transparent, with sound framing acids and good length and grip on the focused finish. This is not the most complex white in the portfolio, but it is a very satisfying bottle that offers up good depth and breadth of flavor, which, I suspect, will grow exponentially in complexity as the vines get older here. Very elegant juice. 2012-2016+. **88.**

2010 Sabatellus Godello-Treixadura Blanco (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2010 Sabatellus Blanco is a blend of sixty percent Godello and forty percent Treixadura and is a terrific bottle. The stylish and complex nose wafts from the glass in a blend of pink grapefruit, beeswax, tart melon, lemon peel, salty soil tones, a touch of green olive and a topnote of resinous herbs. On the palate the wine is vibrant, medium-full and complex, with a fine core of fruit, bright acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, pure and transparent finish. Fine juice. 2012-2018. **92.**

Godello

2011 Don Bernardino Godello (Ribeira Sacra)

Don Bernardino is the wine label for restaurateur, Emilio Rodríguez Díaz, whose O Grelo restaurant is located in the town of Monforte de Lemos- effectively the capital of the Ribeira Sacra region. His 2010 Godello is excellent, weighing in at a ripe and pure thirteen percent and offering up a beautiful nose of peach, lime peel, a lovely base of soil, just a whisper of honeycomb and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and very classy, with excellent mid-palate depth, fine focus, crisp acids and outstanding balance and grip on the snappy and soil-driven finish. Just a superb bottle of Godello. 2012-2020. **92.**

2010 D. Berna Godello- Adegas D. Berna (Valdeorras)

Adegas D. Berna is owned by the young husband and wife team of Berna Guitián and Elena Blanco, who together with their talented consulting enologist, José Luis Murcia, produce an absolutely lovely bottle of Godello. The deep, complex and very pretty nose wafts from the glass in a mix of lime, tart orange, salty soil tones, a hint of white peach, olives, white flowers and a bit of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and vibrant, with lovely intensity of flavor, a fine core, crisp acids and lovely length and grip on the beautifully focused finish. This is a really lovely bottle. 2012-2018. **91+.**

2010 A Silveira Godello- Adegas O Barreiro (Valdeorras)

Adegas O Barreiro is owned by Pepe Rodriguez, who retired from his first career to tend vines and make wine in this isolated corner of Valdeorras which looks down upon the Sil River valley. Señor Rodriguez's 2010 Godello is flat out stunning, offering up a deep and classy bouquet of tart peach, orange peel, beeswax, white soil tones, a touch of green olive and a lovely, delicate topnote of fresh rosemary. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very pure on the attack, with impressive complexity and mid-palate depth, laser-like focus, sound acids and outstanding length and grip on the bouncy and very refined finish. This is a superb example of Godello and one taste of this wine makes it very easy to see why so many Spanish wine aficionados argue that Godello is the country's greatest indigenous white wine grape. 2012-2020. **93.**

2010 Viña de Neira Godello (Ribeira Sacra)

While Ribeira Sacra is obviously best-known for its outstanding red wines based on Mencía, this lovely Godello shows that the steep slate vineyards here are also a fine location for Godello and other white wine varieties. The 2010 Godello from Viña de Neira is a lovely middleweight, offering up an impressively complex and vibrant bouquet of lemon, bread fruit,

beeswax, salty soil tones, lemon peel and dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, crisp and complex, with a lovely base of soil, fine focus and good, but not great length on the bouncy finish. If this were a bit longer on the backend it would rate outstanding, but there is an awful lot to like in this classy and complex wine. 2012-2016. **88**.



Importer Gerry Dawes (right), enjoying a glass of Cabaleiro do Val Albariño with winegrower Paco Dovalo López.

Albariño

Albariño has long been considered one of Spain's finest white wine grapes, but much of its history has been marked by unfulfilled potential, as the low prices that most of these wines sold for on the international market simply dictated that the grape had to be cropped high in order for winegrowers to survive economically and make a living sufficient to keep their families fed and sheltered. Happily, one is beginning to see more examples of Albariño these days that are clearly focused on maximizing the potential quality of the varietal by keeping yields much lower and searching out blocks of old vines, with the resulting wines showing a dramatically different profile of complexity and depth of flavor than was the case when the only way for a winegrower to survive with this variety was to over-crop and try to get by on volume. Much the same phenomenon can be seen in a French appellation such as Sancerre, where there continues to be oceans of rather dilute, simple and easy-drinking wine produced from very high crop yields, but where the greatest producers of the region- people such as Edmond and Anne Vatan,

the Cotat cousins, Gérard Boulay and others have shown just how profound a wine can be produced from sauvignon blanc in the best terroirs of Sancerre when yields are kept down and the wines are crafted to maximize quality and complexity, rather than simply aiming to make a profit through volume. A similar push upwards in quality can be seen in the region of Rías Baixas with Albariño, and the last couple of years have seen some absolutely brilliant examples cross my path from some of the top producers in the region. Prior to tasting these wines, I never imagined that Albariño could produce such profoundly complex, intensely flavored and ageworthy wines, and this new trend may well be one of the most exciting today in all of Spain. Two decades ago, a group of fourteen growers who specialize in Rías Baixas Albariño decided to form a quality-oriented growers' association, which they dubbed the "Asociación de Bodegas Artesanas", and six of these estates are now part of Señor Dawes' portfolio. One of the chief tenets of the producers in this association, besides low yields and old vines is the use solely of indigenous yeasts for the fermentation of their wines. These top estates also differ from much of the more commercially-oriented Albariño out there in choosing to bottle their wines significantly later than is customary in the more quantity-oriented houses, allowing the wines to nurture on their fine lees typically until mid-summer of the following year after the harvest. The growers reported on below from The Spanish Artisan Wine Group are certainly amongst the very finest of this new genre of "quality over quantity" Albariño producers, and there are very few other vignerons working with this grape with whom I have experience that can match the stunning quality of these wines.

2010 Albariño-Avó Roxo (Rías Baixas)

Adega Avó Roxo is currently run by Antonio Gondar Moldes, who took over the management of the family estate only in 2007. His grandfather, Serafin Gondar began production here in the 1930s and this was at one time one of the most famous wineries in the region, winning several awards as late as the 1970s. The family vineyard is one and a half hectares in size and planted entirely to Albariño and Antonio Gondar Moldes is dedicated to taking the quality here to the highest level, and Avó Roxo is one of the most recent inductees into the growers' association in the region. His 2010 Albariño is a stunning wine, soaring from the glass in a blaze of tart orange, lime, stony, salty minerality, a touch of green olive, ocean breeze and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very transparent, with a great core of fruit, crisp acids, outstanding focus and balance and superb grip on the very, very long finish. This is a stunning example of Albariño! 2012-2020. **95.**

2010 Albariño- Cabaleiro do Val (Rías Baixas)

The Adega of Cabaleiro do Val is owned by Francisco "Paco" Dovalo López, who founded and is the current president of the Growers' Association here. While the winery was only officially incorporated in 1989, the family winegrowing traditions here go back centuries and Señor Dovalo López has some extremely old vines in his vineyard. He has taken *selection massale* cuttings from some of his one hundred and fifty year-old vines to use for replanting purposes, thus retaining the unique character of his outstanding Albariños. The 2010 offering from Cabaleiro do Val is absolutely outstanding, jumping from the glass in a deep, complex and gently leesy mélange of grapefruit, orange peel, stony minerality, lemongrass and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with snappy acids, laser-like focus and simply exquisite length and grip on the perfectly balanced and soil-driven finish. This is a brilliant Albariño! 2012-2020+. **94+.**

2010 Albariño- Lagar de Broullón (Rías Baixas)

Lagar de Broullón is owned by José Pintos, who farms this two and a half hectare vineyard in the village of Meaño, which is one of the very finest for Albariño in the Val de Salnés section of Rías Baixas. The vineyard is situated with a south by southwest exposition, allowing the grapes to reach fine ripeness each year and still maintain a great base of minerality. The 2010 from Señor Pintos is a beautiful wine, offering up a deep and vibrant nose of fresh lime, green apple, salty oceanic tones, citrus peel, a bit of lemongrass and a great base of stony minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and classy, with a superb core of fruit, crisp acids and lovely length and grip on the perfectly focused finish. High class juice! 2012-2020. **93.**

2010 Albariño- Lagar de Candes (Rías Baixas)

Eulogio Gondar is the owner and winegrower at Lagar de Candes, and he represents the fourth generation of his family to head this small estate, which is also located in the village of Meaño, in the Val de Salnés section of Rías Baixas. The soils here are granitic in nature, producing beautifully mineral expressions of Albariño. The 2010 from Lagar de Candes is a lovely wine, wafting from the glass in a complex mix of tangerine, elegant leesy tones, pulverized stone, lime zest and a saline topnote of the ocean. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and zesty, with lovely complexity, very good mid-palate depth, sound framing acids and lovely length and grip on the focused and classy finish. This does not quite possess quite the same “electricity” on the backend as the very best Albariños in this lineup, but it is a superb bottle of wine. 2012-2016. **90+.**

2010 Albariño “O’Forrollo”- Bodega Meis Otero (Rías Baixas)

Bodega Meis Otero is owned and operated by the Fernando Meis Otero, who is one of the very youngest members of the Asociación de Bodegas Artesanas. He took over the reins of the family bodega in 2001. Like many of his fellow members of the growers’ association, his vineyards are located in the Val de Salnés. The family’s one and a half hectares of vines used to be planted to a mix of regional grapes, but Fernand Meis Otero’s father took the step to plant exclusively Albariño here in the early 1980s. Thus, the vineyards are just now coming into their prime as they close in on thirty years of age. The 2010 O’Forrollo Albariño is an outstanding wine, delivering a deep and very complex nose of sweet grapefruit, pulverized stone, orange peel, briny oceanic overtones, lemongrass and a touch of acacia blossom in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, complex and very classy, with a superb core of fruit, laser-like focus, outstanding intensity of flavor and superb length and grip on the beautifully-balanced finish that closes with a distinct note of orange peel. Lovely juice. 2012-2020. **93.**

2010 Albariño- Rozas (Rías Baixas)

Adega Rozas is located in the village of Meaño in the Val de Salnés and is run by winegrower Manolo Dovalo. This family estate goes back several generations, and its 6.3 hectares of vineyards are loaded with old vines- many dating back more than two generations! Señor Dovalo insists that it is the very high percentage of old vines in this very favored section of the Val de Salnés that allows him to make such outstanding Albariños. The 2010 Rozas is simply stunning, soaring from the glass in a complex blaze of lime zest, tart orange, kaleidoscopic minerality, lemongrass, gentle leesy tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very racy, with a rock solid core of fruit, brisk acids, laser-like focus and simply stunning length and grip on the very mineral and magically complex finish. This is as magical a glass of Albariño as I have ever had the pleasure to taste! 2012-2020+. **96+.**



Rosado

2011 Lagrima de Garnacha Rosado- Bodegas Camino del Villar Viña Aliaga (Navarra)

The 2011 Rosado from Viña Aliaga is a beautiful bottle of dry Rosé that is drinking superbly out of the blocks, but shows every indication of improving with a year or two of bottle age. Made from one hundred percent Garnacha, with its color arrived at by a bit of skin contact, the 2011 offers up a deep and stunning nose of blood orange, cherries, rose petals, lovely, chalky soil tones and a bit of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a lovey core of fruit, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and classy finish. Just a beautiful bottle of Rosado, with great purity and no “candied” aspects on either the nose or palate. 2012-2016. **92.**

2011 Viña Catajarros “Elite” Rosado- Bodegas Hermanos Merino (Cigales)

The Viña Catajarros Rosado from Bodegas Hermanos Merino is made up of a blend of eighty percent tempranillo, five percent Garnacha, and fifteen percent of two white wine grapes, Verdejo (ten percent) and alvillo (five percent). This winery is run by two brothers, Eugenio and his brother Merino, and the estate is a Rosado specialist, with the vast majority of their production comprised of dry rosé (augmented by a bit of red wine). The 2011 Viña Catajarros Rosado offers up a superb and vibrant nose of cherries, orange peel, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried roses. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a superb base of soil, excellent focus and bounce and a very long, complex and classy finish. I would give this superb wine another year of bottle age to really let it blossom, as the 2010 shows that there is

more yet to come as this wine develops with a bit of cellaring. High class Rosado here! 2013-2018. **93.**

2010 Viña Catajarros “Elite” Rosado- Bodegas Hermanos Merino (Cigales)

The 2010 Viña Catajarros Rosado from Bodegas Hermanos Merino is made up the same blend as the 2011, and the additional year of bottle age has really let this wine come into its own. The 2010 version is a superb bottle of rosé, jumping from the glass in a complex and classy nose of cherries, melon, pomegranate, a touch of spiced meats, orange peel, complex, soil tones and a nice touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core of fruit, with gentle framing acids, superb soil signature and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. High class and serious Rosado that shows every indication of continuing to drink well for several more years. 2012-2016+? **93+.**

Assorted Viña Tinto

2010 Tempranillo- Camino del Villar Viña Aliaga (Navarra)

Carlos Aliaga’s tempranillo never sees any oak and is raised entirely in stainless steel tanks. It hails from the family’s limestone-based vineyards located in the center of Navarra and is a superb value. The 2010 tips the scales at a very civilized 13.5 percent alcohol and delivers a lot of aromatic and flavor complexity for its very modest price tag. The bouquet is a blend of black cherries, new leather, a touch of chocolate, lovely spice tones, a bit of meatiness and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and has a bit of ripe tannins on the backend, with a sappy core of fruit, good focus and fine length and grip. This will be even better with a year’s bottle age, but it is already an awful lot of wine for a bargain price! 2012-2020. **87+.**

2009 Camino Vi Negre- Terro Remota Camino (Empordá- Costa Brava)

The 2009 Camino Vi Negre from Terro Remota Camino is a lovely red wine from Empordá, with its alcohol nicely scaled at fourteen percent and the beautiful *terroir* found here front and center in the wine. The blend on the 2009 is comprised of forty percent Garnaxta, thirty percent Syrah, twenty percent Cabernet Sauvignon and ten percent Tempranillo. The outstanding nose offers up a deep, pure and very refined blend of cherries, blood orange, a touch of cocoa, lovely spice tones, fresh nutmeg and a violet topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full, bright and tangy, with lovely intensity of flavor, melting tannins and a long, complex and beautifully focused finish. This is a beautiful bottle that shows off just how special this region can be when new oak is not the focal point of the equation. 2012-2020. **92+.**

2008 Dhuoda Tinto (Catalunya)

This lovely red is a fifty-fifty blend of Carignane (which is known locally as Samsó) and Garnaxta. The vineyards lie at an altitude of nine hundred meters above sea level, which keeps the nights cool and the alcohol level down a bit. The 2008 Dhuoda Tinta weighs in at a very civilized 13.1 percent alcohol as a result. The soils here are brown slate and very similar to those found in Priorat, but the evenings are cooler here. The 2008 Dhuoda was fermented in stainless steel tanks and aged in a mix of new, one wine and two wine barrels of French origin. The 2008 Dhuoda Tinto offers up a deep and classy bouquet of red and black cherries, new leather, nutskins, *garrigue*, a lovely base of soil and a nice touch of fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with a lovely core of fruit, soft tannins and a long, complex and very classy finish. This is quite low octane by Catalan standards and shows little influence from its one third new wood. Lovely juice. 2012-2020+. **92.**

2008 Montsant Vi Negre- Herestat Navas (Montsant)

Montsant is the mountainous region that surrounds Priorat and shares many of the same grapes with its better known neighbor. There is very good potential here, but it is a hot region and there is, of course, still more incentive these days to fashion wines of power that might capture the attention of Priorat fanciers looking for a bit better value in this neighboring region, rather than try to harness the ripeness here and look for a Montsant version of elegance. This 2008 from Herestat Navas is one of the more restrained examples I have tasted from Montsant-which admittedly is a very small sampling. The 2008 Montsant Tinto from Herestat Navas is comprised of a blend of forty percent Garnacha, twenty percent Cariñena (Carignan), twenty percent Cabernet Sauvignon and twenty percent Syrah. It is a deep, ripe and classy wine on the nose, offering up scents of cassis, *garrigue*-like spice tones, baked black cherries, a bit of tariness and a nice base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with good focus and a bit of uncovered wood tannin currently poking out on the complex backend. There is enough stuffing here to eventually carry its new wood and the wine is not particularly out of balance, but this is a wine that would have been dramatically better with a bit less oak. But, not bad. 2012-2020. **87+**.



Vineyards overlooking the Mediterranean Sea in Empordá- one of the most beautiful vineyard areas in Spain.

2007 Garnacha Vieja- Camino del Villar Viña Aliaga (Navarra)

The Aliaga family's old vine Garnacha bottling, which hails from forty to fifty year-old vines is outstanding. Not particularly ripe by contemporary grenache standards, the 2007 weighs in at 13.9 percent alcohol and is raised in a blend of French and American oak- a small percentage of which is new- for six months. Gerry Dawes is quite funny in commenting that he really does not like this wine, but his customers keep asking for it! It is really an exceptional bottle of Garnacha, offering up a deep, impressively complex and sappy nose of crushed raspberries, a touch of meatiness, gentle notes of chocolate, *garrigue*, bonfires and a lovely base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with melting tannins, a fine core of fruit, superb focus and balance and lovely length and grip. This is a high class bottle of grenache that never strays over the line into jammy obsequiousness and is another dynamite value from this superb producer. 2012-2020+. **92.**

2007 Colección Privada Tinto- Camino del Villar Viña Aliaga (Navarra)

The 2007 Colección Privada Tinto from Camino del Villar Viña Aliaga is a blend of eighty percent tempranillo and twenty percent cabernet sauvignon and is aged again in a blend of French and American oak, this time for twelve months duration, and with the percentage of new wood slightly higher than for the Garnacha Vieja. The nose on the 2007 is deep and complex, with a nice, old school feel to its mélange of black cherries, grilled meats, coffee grounds, cigar some and a lovely base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and “nobly rustic”, with a superb core of fruit, modest tannins and excellent length and grip on the backend. This is not quite as complex as the Garnacha 2007, but it too is a very good bottle of wine. 2012-2020. **89.**

Ribeira Sacra (and other Mencía-based Reds)

2011 Don Bernardino Mencía (Ribeira Sacra)

As noted above, Don Bernardino is the wine label for restaurateur, Emilio Rodríguez Díaz, whose O Grelo restaurant in the town of Monforte de Lemos. The steep vineyards for his red wine lie in the village of Amandi, overlooking the Sil River. I tasted two vintage of this terrific Mencía, with the 2011 being the slightly riper of the two vintages at thirteen percent (in comparison to the 12.5 percent of the 2010), but with both wines proving to be absolutely outstanding. The 2011 Don Bernardino offers up a vibrant nose of pomegranate, black cherries, a beautiful base of slate, a touch of lead pencil and a gentle topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very classy, with excellent intensity of flavor, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the focused and bouncy finish. Just a classic example of Mencía. 2012-2020. **92+.**

2011 Décima Amandi Mencía- José Manuel Rodríguez (Ribeira Sacra)

José Manuel Rodríguez is the head of the growers' association and regulatory agency of Ribeira Sacra, and makes one of the finest examples of Mencía I have ever had the pleasure to taste. Like the Don Bernardino Mencía, these two lovely vintages of Décima hail from very steep vineyards overlooking the Sil River in the village of Amandi. The 2011 Décima weighs in at a very classic octane of 12.5 percent and roars from the glass in a sophisticated and utterly classic nose of pomegranate, lead pencil, slate, a nice touch of gamebird, coffee bean and a gentle medicinal topnote that is vaguely reminiscent of Hermitage. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and very intensely flavored, with laser-like focus, fine mid-palate depth, tangy acids and great length and grip on the very softly tannic finish. Utterly classic Mencía! 2012-2020+. **94.**

2011 Toalde Mencía- Roberto Regal (Ribeira Sacra)

Roberto Regal's production is miniscule, as he owns only about one hectare of Mencía vines here in a very steep vineyard overlooking the Miño River. There are just a handful of older indigenous varieties also in the vineyard here, so Señor Regal makes a field blend of these with his Mencía to produce this superb wine. The 2011 Toalde is outstanding, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of black cherries, pomegranate, a touch of nutskin, a lovely base of slate and granitic minerality, smoke and a gentle topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, long and very sappy in the mid-palate, with fine focus and balance and a long, suave and bouncy finish. This is a lovely wine. 2012-2018. **91+**.

2010 Viña Barroca Mencía- Bodegas Adriá (Bierzo)

The Viña Barroca Mencía bottling from Bodegas Adriá hails from thirty to sixty year-old vines grown on hillside vineyards that range from 450 to a 1000 meters above sea level. The soils here in Bierzo are not the pure slate one finds in Ribeira Sacra, but rather a mix of quartz, clay and slate. The 2010 Viña Barroca Mencía was aged entirely in stainless steel and given four months additional bottle age prior to release and weighs in at a ripe 13.5 percent alcohol. The nose is deep and classy, offering up a youthful mélange of dark berries, medicinal black cherries, a touch of tree bark, graphite, *garrigue* and a fine base of soil that seems to show a slightly ferrous complexity. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and intensely flavored, with lovely transparency, a solid core, fine focus and excellent length and grip on the complex and classy finish. I should note that I tasted this wine twice, with the wine once popped and poured and on the other occasion given one hour in decanter prior to serving. The additional aeration made a world of difference in allowing this young wine to blossom fully and decanting is very much recommended for this fine wine. This is a stunning value! 2012-2020. **92**.

2010 Mencía d'Berna- Adegas D. Berna (Valdeorras)

Adegas D. Berna is a specialist in Godello, but their 2010 Mencía d'Berna is also a splendid wine and not to be overlooked with all the white wine fireworks being crafted in the cellars and vineyards here by the estate's (regionally) well-known and very talented consultant, José Luis Murcia. This is an absolutely classic example of Mencía, offering up a superb aromatic mélange of dark berries, pomegranate, a touch of tree bark, spice tones redolent of cumin, a bit of bitter chocolate and a lovely base of complex, stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very intensely flavored, with a sappy core of fruit, tangy acids, excellent focus and grip and a very long, complex finish that stays light on its feet all the way to the conclusion. There is just a faint touch of volatile acidity to this beauty when it is first opened, so a short stint in decanter is quite beneficial. Fine, fine juice. 2012-2017. **92+**.

2010 Don Bernardino Mencía (Ribeira Sacra)

I am not sure if it is the extra year of bottle age or the slightly lower octane level, but the 2010 Don Bernardino Mencía is even a small step up from the excellent 2011 version. The stunning nose soars from the glass in a blaze of black cherries, dark berries, a touch of tree bark, dark chocolate, smoky overtones and a gloriously complex base of slate soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and superbly complex, with outstanding focus and balance, tangy acids and truly exceptional length and grip on the scintillating finish. This is a beautiful bottle of Ribeira Sacra! 2012-2025. **94**.

2010 Décima Amandi Mencía- José Manuel Rodríguez (Ribeira Sacra)

2010 Décima Mencía from José Manuel Rodríguez is another absolute classic in the making. The deep and utterly refined nose soars from the glass in a mélange of black cherries,

pomegranate, a touch of road tar, bonfires, fresh herb tones, cracked pepper and a gloriously pure and complex base of slate. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very intensely flavored, with a sappy core, tangy acids, exquisite balance and a very, very long, focused and refined finish. The 2010 Décima Mencía is a beautifully crafted, complex and refined wine that is very pure and precise on both the nose and palate. It is still a young wine that will continue to blossom with further bottle age, but there is nothing structurally forbidding about the wine today and it will be a very difficult task keeping this wine in the cellar and not drinking it right away. Great juice. 2012-2025. **94.**

2010 Sabatellus Mencía- Primitivo Lareu (Ribeira Sacra)

Primitivo Lareu is a superb winemaker on the far western end of Ribeira Sacra, located in the sub-region of Chantada, which happens to be the coolest vineyard area in all of Ribeira Sacra. In addition to his winegrowing responsibilities, Señor Lareu is also a sculptor and painter, but first and foremost these days, he is a serious viticulturist bent on extracting as much *terroir* from his vineyards and producing as transparent a glass of wine as possible. His 2010 Mencía is outstanding, offering up a stunning and sappy nose of pomegranate, black cherries, woodsmoke, beautifully complex herbal tones, espresso and a superb base of stony, slate soil. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and dancing on the palate, with superb lightness of step coupled to excellent intensity. The wine is impressively complex and focused, with bright acids, little tannin and outstanding length and grip on the bouncy finish. Superb juice. 2012-2020+. **93+.**

2010 Toalde Mencía- Roberto Regal (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2010 Toalde from Roberto Regal is excellent, wafting from the glass in a smoky mélange of dark berries, black cherries, espresso, tree bark, stony soil tones, fresh herbs and woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and intensely flavored, with lovely transparency, very good mid-palate depth and superb length and grip on the focused and complex finish. This wine is very light on its feet and yet packs plenty of intensity. I suspect it will prove to be a touch longer-lived than the equally fine 2011 Toalde bottling. Classic Ribeira Sacra. 2012-2020+. **92.**

2010 Viña Cazoga Mencía- Jorge Carnero (Ribeira Sacra)

Viña Cazoga has a long history of fine wine production in the Ribeira Sacra and was once one of the largest and most important estates in the area, but during the nadir of the region's fortunes- which really started at the dawn of the twentieth century, when so many of these steep vineyard sites were abandoned and young people emigrated *en masse* in search of more profitable work- Jorge Carnero's family's vineyard holdings in the village of Amandi dwindled down to almost nothing. Jorge's grandfather, Raimundo Vidal, was instrumental in starting to resurrect the Ribeira Sacra region in the 1970s and today the family owns a single, 3.9 hectare parcel of vines right above the Sil River that was long recognized as the finest vineyard in Ribeira Sacra. Almost the entire vineyard is planted with vines in excess of one hundred years of age, with ninety-five percent planted to Mencía and the balance made up of a mix of Tempranillo and Merenzao. The 2010 Viña Cazoga Mencía is a beautiful wine, offering up a deep, very intense and complex nose of black cherries, pomegranate, black pepper, a touch of spiced meats, slate soil tones, espresso and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very sappy at the core, with great focus and grip, excellent balance, bright acids, virtually no tannins and outstanding length and grip on the dancing and palate-staining finish. Great Ribeira Sacra! 2012-2020. **94.**

2008 Viña Cazoga “Don Diego” Mencía- Jorge Carnero (Ribeira Sacra)

The Don Diego bottling from Jorge Carnero spends six to twelve months of its elevage in four year-old, five hundred liter French oak barrels prior to bottling and is released after further bottle age. Even using four year-old barrels, the Mencía grape still shows a fair bit of wood influence in this wine, which does make for a markedly different impression than the stainless steel-aged regular bottling. The 2008 offers up a very deep and classy nose of black cherries, bitter chocolate, woodsmoke, lovely soil tones and a nice, generous touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite suave on the attack, with a bit less overtly *terroir*-derived soil tones in evidence. The finish is very long and moderately tannic, and though the wine is focused nicely, there is not quite the same purity and blazing transparency here as is found in the 2010 regular bottling. This is still a very well-made wine, but it seems that the oak takes away a bit more than it adds to the final blend. 2012-2025. **90.**

GREAT OLD BURGUNDIES TASTED IN RECENT TIMES



It has been almost five years since I last wrote an article on various old Red Burgundies that I have tasted along the highways and byways of the wine world in the last few years. While many notes on older red Burgundies have appeared in the newsletter since my last report on this genre of wines appeared back in the fall of 2007 (most of them in vertical reports of a specific cuvée or in an historical piece on one of my favorite producers), I have also been accruing a fairly sizable number of tasting notes on wines that have not fit into the editorial flow of other pieces I may have been working at the time, and subsequently, they have just been moldering away in my office waiting for another compendium such as this to see the light of day. So I thought it was high time to put a compendium together of old Burgundy notes in this issue, so that these notes could also find their way into the database for future reference. While I do not drink as much Burgundy today as I did at one time (given the pile of samples always in my cellar, it would be hard to do so, even if my cellar was not a bit less well-endowed with older vintages these days in any case), it is still one of my absolute favorite wines and I do get to drink mature examples with some regularity still. The following notes have been collected during the last three years or so (the age of the tasting note can be ascertained by looking at the first year of the projected window of drinkability for the wine), and of course, many of them appear due to the generosity of friends in the wine world, whose cellars are a bit deeper than mine these days

when it comes to old vintages of Burgundy. Some of the notes have been taken at bigger events such as the Paulée de New York or the Paulée de Beaune, but as the years have gone by, I have found these giant old Burgundy tastings less attractive to me personally, as I get a sense that an awful lot of great old wine gets wasted in larger settings such as these, with the generosity of each participant tending to overwhelm the allotted time for tasting, and I often find myself racing from glass to glass to make room for the next round of great bottles circulating around the room, rather than having the opportunity to savor the wines properly. Most of the wines reported on below are great, great old wines that deserve time for reflection, and whenever possible these days, this is how I prefer to drink my old bottles.

I have arranged the notes which follow chronologically by vintage, commencing with the 1985s, and working backwards from there. Within each vintage subset, the wines are listed geographically from north to south (starting with Gevrey-Chambertin), and within each village grouping, I have listed village wines first, followed by premier crus and finally grand crus. As so many of these bottles were shared with very good friends, putting the article together has been for me a nice time to think back on the specific tasting where the wine was shared, and in many ways this article is a tribute to the very warm and generous people with whom I have had the pleasure to drink these magical old Burgundies.

The 1985 Vintage

After seeming for quite a few years to be starting to get towards the further side of their plateaus of maturity, the 1985 red Burgundies have seemingly deepened and shown more structural integrity in the last four or five years, and this is now a vintage that shows the potential for plenty more positive evolution in bottle. I drank the lion's share of my 1985s up a decade ago, when they seemed a touch too low in acid and easy-going on the palate to offer up long-term cellaring prospects, but true to the non-linear evolutionary arc of red Burgundy, these wines are now as good today as they have ever been in their lives. For those shrewder than me, who have not consumed all of their 1985s, this is a vintage to approach with some restraint, as they now appear to have several decades more life ahead of them and to still be improving!

1985 Gevrey-Chambertin “Combes aux Moines”- Domaine Philippe LeClerc

I remember very well the hype that surrounded the release of this wine back in 1987, as I was a wine merchant at the time and the 1985 vintage was the first Burgundy vintage where I was responsible as a buyer for the store I was working for and I put a lot of effort into sourcing some of this wine for our clients, as it was one of Robert Parker's favorites from the vintage. Back in the latter half of the 1980s Philippe LeClerc was making very extracted and heavily-oaked wines (he probably still is today for all I know, as I have not paid a visit to his cellars to taste since trying the 1993s in barrel), and this is a style that does not seem to age with a whole lot of success- or at least this has been my impression with the examples I taste from this genre when they cross my paths. Needless to say, this is not a style of red Burgundy that ever finds its way into my own personal cellar, so I have a lot less experience with these types of wines in general. In any event, the '85 Combes aux Moines from Philippe LeClerc has evolved into a dense, inky and pretty dull wine that offers up a nose of cassis, bitter chocolate, grilled meat, muddy soil and plenty of almost sawdusty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and inky, with a rather pounded personality, still some wood tannins on the backend and no grace, complexity or charm on the murky and pedestrian finish. This wine will continue to live on (if

living is what this wine is doing today!) for many more years to come, but it seems to me to have been a conceptually flawed wine from the outset and no amount of cellaring time can repair that. 2009-2025+? **70.**

1985 Gevrey-Chambertin “Clos St. Jacques”- Maison Louis Jadot

The 1985 Clos St. Jacques from Maison Jadot is a beautiful example of the vintage that has just now begun to truly blossom and is drinking very well indeed. The deep and beautiful nose offers up scents of cherries, red plums, woodsmoke, summer truffles, a beautifully complex base of soil, fresh herbs, a touch of sweet nutskin and just a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully delineated, with a fine core of fruit, lovely complexity and very good acidity for the vintage. The finish is very long, shows just a bit of melting tannin and is beautifully balanced and classy. It is interesting to see how this wine has evolved, as it was quite black fruity for much of the first twenty-odd years of its life, but is now blossoming into a beautifully red fruity example of Clos St. Jacques. Lovely juice. 2012-2050+. **94.**

1985 Latricières-Chambertin- Maison Faiveley

The 1985 vintage at Maison Faiveley represented a transition at the domaine- or at least this has always been my impression. I am not sure of what changed here, but I have never found the 1985s at Faiveley quite in the same league as the wines that were produced here from the 1980 vintage back. The '85 Latricières-Chambertin is a good, solid wine, but it seems to lack just a bit of vibrancy in its bouquet of cherries, mustard seed, coffee, dried herbs, earth and oak leaves. On the palate the wine is medium-full and slightly dry-edged, with good, but not great depth at the core, modest tannins and good length and grip on the complex and tangy finish. Is it possible that the domaine starting using a higher percentage of new oak between 1980 and 1985, and the wines gave up a bit of freshness as a result during the *elevage*? This is not bad, but it probably should have been a bit better. 2009-2025+. **88.**

1985 Ruchottes-Chambertin- Maison Leroy

I have always been a bigger fan of the Maison Leroy *négociant* bottlings than I have been of the Domaine Leroy wines since its inception in 1988. Stylistically, the *négociant* bottlings have just been more up my alley than the more heavily new oaky and extracted style of the very well-made Domaine Leroy wines. This '85 Ruchottes-Chambertin is a fine example of the vintage, delivering a complex and quite refined nose of cherries, plums, grilled meats, chocolate, forest floor, lovely soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and impressively complex, with lovely shape and focus, modest tannins and excellent length and grip on the tangy and very pure finish. Fine, fine juice. 2009-2025+. **92.**

1985 Clos St. Denis “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine des Chézeaux

The 1985 Clos St. Denis from Domaine des Chézeaux is a good, robust example of the vintage, but it is still a tad on the young side and showing a bit of a four-square character on the palate at the present time, but the nose is certainly complex. The fine nose offers up scents of cherries, orange peel, strawberries, venison, coffee, forest floor and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, with a good core of fruit, modest tannins and good length and grip on the chunky finish. More delineation may come here with further bottle age, but right now this is a good, solid wine that is not really up to the expectations one attaches to a Clos St. Denis fabricated by Laurent Ponsot. 2009-2030? **89+?**

1985 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Dujac

I have never tasted the 1985 Dujac Bonnes-Mares before, so I am not sure if the bottle we had of this wine was representative. The wine showed lovely depth and complexity, but had an odd, almost “pickle-like” edge to the fruit on both the nose and palate that was a bit atypical-

though surprisingly, this element was not really off-putting and was not particularly strident. Along with this touch, the nose was packed with other classic notes of red berries, cherries, vinesmoke, herb tones, earth, coffee and game. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and tangy, with a fine core of fruit, melted tannins, bright, well-integrated acids and fine complexity on the long and bouncy finish. I like the complexity on both the nose and palate found here quite well, but this touch of pickle is a bit beyond my range of experience and I do not know if this is typical of the wine, or just our particular bottle. ???

1985 Vosne-Romanée “les Petits Monts”- Maison Joseph Drouhin

This was the very first vintage of Véronique Drouhin’s Petits Monts, which was made from one small parcel of very old vines. Subsequently, Véronique was able to buy a second parcel to augment the production from this plot of vines, making for a significantly larger cuvée. As this was the very first vintage, and these old vines were not in particularly good shape when the Drouhins took them over, it is not surprising that this wine is not quite in the same league as what is being produced here today, but this is still a tasty bottle. It is now fully mature and probably getting towards the end of its plateau, offering up scents of cherries, strawberries, *sous bois*, coffee, duck, heather and a nice base of autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and intensely flavored, with nice focus and bounce, little remaining tannin and good length and grip on the complex and tertiary finish. This is getting just a bit cuspy now and is probably best drunk up in the next several years- at least in regular-sized format. 2010-2020. **89.**

1985 La Romanée- Maison Bouchard Père et Fils

The ’85 La Romanée from Bouchard Père et Fils is a very pretty wine, but it is really not quite up to the inherent quality of this magical *terroir*. The deep and quite evolved nose offers up scents of plums, red berries, chocolate, herb tones, earth and new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and a bit lacking in vibrancy, with an almost “leafy”, autumnal personality, fairly low acids, good, but not great depth at the core, and a long, silky and completely mature finish. This is not a bad drink, but one expects a little more from La Romanée in a fine vintage such as 1985. 2009-2020+? **88.**

1985 Grands Echézeaux- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 1985 Grands Echézeaux from Joseph Drouhin is a very pretty and fully mature wine that offers up a tertiary bouquet of cherries, raspberries, game, *sous bois*, a touch of clove and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and autumnal, with lovely complexity, a sound core of fruit and fine focus and grip on the very long, resolved and bouncy finish. This is a lovely ’85 that may well be a touch fresher and younger than our particular bottle showed, as this had just been recently shipped into New York prior to my friend bringing it over to share at a dinner at my home. 2012-2030+? **91+?**

1985 Grands Echézeaux- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti

The 1985 Grands Echézeaux from Domaine de la Romanée-Conti is a beautiful example of the vintage, soaring from the glass in a vibrant blend of plums, cherries, woodsmoke, coffee, *sous bois* and toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just blossoming into its full apogee, with a voluptuous core of fruit, melting tannins, fairly modest acids and lovely focus and balance on the very long, complex and velvety finish. This is a superb 1985 that is still climbing in quality and will be even better with a few more years of bottle age, but it is already a superb glass of Burgundy. 2008-2040+. **94.**

1985 Chorey-lès-Beaune- Maison Leroy

The 1985 Chorey-lès-Beaune from Maison Leroy is really a lovely wine and the kind of classy, mature Burgundy from a less exalted appellation that I find so enjoyable to drink. The deep and fully mature nose offers up an impressively complex blend of cherries, red plums, cocoa, gamebirds, soil and a nice touch of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and complex, with a good core, melted tannins, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the *à point* finish. This is a lovely bottle at its apogee, but still with plenty of life ahead of it. 2011-2025+. **89.**

1985 Savigny-lès-Beaune- Domaine Anne-Marie Guillemot

The 1985 Guillemot Savigny-lès-Beaune is a fine example of the vintage that is drinking very well indeed and is now at its apogee. The complex and beautifully developed nose offers up a classic Savigny profile of red currants, sweet cranberries, woodsmoke, coffee, gamebirds and *sous bois*. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and tangy, with lovely intensity of flavor, good acids and fine complexity and grip on the long and *à point* finish. 2009-2022+. **90.**

1985 Pernand-Vergelesses “Croix de Pierre”- Maison Louis Jadot

The 1985 Croix de Pierre from Maison Jadot is a lovely wine that is still a touch on the youthful side and could do with a few more years of cellaring! The deep and complex nose delivers scents of dried black cherries, curry, woodsmoke, venison and a fine base of stony, autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very soil-driven, with a youthful core of fruit, still a bit of ripe tannin and fine length and grip on the focused finish. I would give this four or five more years to fully blossom- it should prove to be quite long-lived. 2015-2040+. **89+.**

1985 Volnay “Clos de la Bousse d’Or”- Domaine de la Pousse d’Or

Gérard Potel made absolutely stunning wines at Pousse d’Or in 1985 and his Clos de la Bousse d’Or is a superb example of the vintage. The wine has just started to reach its apogee and offers up a magically complex bouquet of cherries, red plums, beetroot, fresh herb tones, espresso, woodsmoke and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a superb core of red fruit, great transparency, modest tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and very pure and classy finish. This wine has years and years of life ahead of it, but if one has more than a few bottles in the cellar, now is a great time to be drinking it. 2011-2035+. **93.**

The 1983 Vintage

In my own cellar of red Burgundies, 1983 was never a vintage that I bought in much depth, as they had already principally come and gone from the market by the time I was getting actively involved in starting to cellar red Burgundy. It was a drought vintage that also saw relatively widespread incidence of hail, so some wines are rather roasted and scarred with hail issues, but others have turned out decidedly better and can now be really pleasant surprises. I do not taste them with great frequency, but the last couple I have crossed paths with have turned out to be quite pleasant.

1983 Latricières-Chambertin- Avery’s

In notable contrast to the 1959 Corton “Clos du Roi” bottled by Avery’s (please see below), the 1983 Latricières-Chambertin is a lovely example of the vintage that is impressively pure, complex and elegant. The deep and classy nose wafts from the glass in a blend of cherries, grilled meat, coffee, soggy soil tones, woodsmoke and a nice touch of cocoa powder in the upper

register. On the palate the wine is fullish, fresh and nicely transparent, with no rough edges, modest tannins and lovely length and grip on the complex and focused finish. This is a lovely 1983! 2008-2020. **91.**

1983 Grands Echézeaux- Domaine Gros Frères

The 1983 Grands Echézeaux from Domaine Gros Frères is a pretty fair example of the vintage, offering up a deep and complex nose of black cherries, plums, a bit of charred wood, forest floor and a topnote of cigar ash. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite clean for an '83, with a very solid core of fruit, lovely soil complexity, melting tannins and very good length and grip on the focused and well-balanced finish. While this shows some of the roasted character of the vintage, there is nothing pruneey or raisiny about the fruit tones here and this is a very solid example of Grands Echézeaux. 2010-2030. **88.**

1983 Bourgogne Rouge- Maison Leroy

I do not taste too many '83 Burgundies these days, but the Bourgogne rouge from Maison Leroy was surprisingly fresh and nicely resolved when I was served this double blind a couple of years ago. The mature and impressively complex nose offers up scents of black cherries, just a touch of prune, bonfires, game, coffee and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and tertiary, with solid depth, melted tannins and impressively complexity on the fully resolved and reasonably long finish. This is really not a bad drink, and while I would be inclined to drink it up in the next several years, there is no denying that it has aged quite well for its level and its vintage. 2008-2015+? **86.**

The 1980 Vintage

The 1980 vintage in Burgundy tends to be stronger in the Côte de Nuits than the Côte de Beaune, but I have had a few strong wines from the south. The vintage is generally fully mature, but shows no signs of imminent decline and is one of the great sleepers still out there in the over-heated realm of mature red Burgundy.

1980 Pommard “Rugiens”- Domaine Henri Boillot

The 1980 Rugiens from Domaine Henri Boillot is a lovely middleweight that has clearly been mature for many years, but is very well-balanced and shows no signs of slowing down any time soon. The deep, complex bouquet offers up a red fruity mélange of cherries, quince, delicate autumnal tones, coffee, gamebirds and roses in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full and very nicely transparent, with nice intensity of flavor, rather modest mid-palate depth, but lovely bounce and complexity on the long and perfectly resolved finish. This is a very good wine, rather than a great example of Rugiens, but it has aged splendidly and really is a lovely drink, if one is content to trade transparency and complexity for depth. 2010-2025. **89.**

The 1979 Vintage

The 1979 vintage was a very large crop, which robbed the wines of some mid-palate depth, but the wines were initially well-balanced and tangy. There was a bit of hail during mid-summer in the area between Chambolle and Nuits St. Georges, but I have never noticed any hail taint in the '79s which I have crossed paths with over the years. The wines of 1979 drank very well in the first half of the 1980s and they seemed likely to be very short-lived, but more than twenty years on, I continue to cross paths with some really lovely and vigorous 1979 reds. This is a vintage that does not offer a lot of fleshiness on the palate, as it cannot escape from its essentially high yield origins, but the '79s I have had in the last couple of years from top

producers have compensated for their lack of mid-palate depth with truly stunning aromatic complexity and fine transparency on the palate. This is a vintage that continues to age on its fine acidity, and as long as the acids stay integrated into the bodies of the wines, it seems likely that the 1979s will continue for quite some time to be very pleasant surprises.

1979 Ruchottes-Chambertin- Domaine Georges Mugneret Gibourg

The 1979 Ruchottes-Chambertin from Dr. Georges Mugneret is a beautiful bottle of wine at its apogee of peak drinkability. The deep, complex and stunning nose jumps from the glass in a blend of black cherries, *sous bois*, porcini, Cuban tobacco, a lovely base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very vibrant, with a good core of fruit, beautiful complexity, tangy acids and superb length and grip on the finely focused and softly tannic finish. Just a beautiful example of the vintage. 2007-2020+. **92.**

1979 Chambertin- Domaine Trapet

The 1979 Trapet Chambertin is a beautiful example of the vintage and a superb middleweight for current consumption. The deep and stunningly perfumed nose wafts from the glass in a very refined blend of cherries, red plums, cocoa powder, a touch of grilled meat, orange peel, gentle notes of *sous bois* and coffee. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and tangy, with a very good core of fruit, excellent intensity of flavor, great transparency, excellent grip and a very, very long, complex and tangy finish. This is a beautiful and supremely elegant bottle of Chambertin that has been at its apogee for years, but still easily has at least a couple of decades of life ahead of it, as it is so cunningly balanced that I would not be surprised to see this wine cruise along for a very long time to come at this very fine plateau. 2011-2030+. **94.**

1979 Morey St. Denis “Clos Sorbés”- Domaine Truchot-Martin

Jacky Truchot’s ’79 Clos Sorbés is still drinking beautifully and shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. I never had the chance to see this wine in its relative youth, so I do not have any sense of how it has evolved over time, but I suspect that it has, along with many of the top 1979s, continued to cruise on and put on a bit of mid-palate weight as the years have gone on. Today the nose is complex and utterly classic, jumping from the glass in a fresh and soil-driven mélange of strawberries, beetroot, mustard seed, *sous bois*, black trumpet mushrooms, a touch of Morey weediness and coffee. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and tangy, with lovely intensity of flavor and transparency, perfect balance and lovely length and grip on the complex and vibrant finish. This is a classic middleweight at its apogee. 2008-2020+. **92.**

1979 Volnay “les Soixante Ouvrées”- Domaine de la Pousse d’Or

The 1979 Soixante Ouvrées” from Domaine de la Pousse d’Or is a beautiful wine at its apogee. The nose is deep, tertiary and vibrant, delivering a very complex and sophisticated nose of cherries, beetroot, woodsmoke, a touch of orange zest, gamebirds, forest floor and coffee. On the palate the wine is a tangy, focused and complex middleweight, with superb intensity of flavor, superb length and grip and very well-integrated acidity on the transparent and completely resolved finish. This is a fine bottle at its peak of maturity, but it should continue to drink very well on into the foreseeable future. The tannins have no doubt been gone for decades, but as long as the acidity remains buried into the body of the wine, it will continue to drink with great style and complexity. Gérard Potel really made some great wines in his heyday! 2009-2020+? **90.**



Looking out from the northern edge of the Clos Vougeot at the Clos Blanc de Vougeot and the village below.

The 1978 Vintage

The 1978s are some of my favorite all-time red Burgundies, and many of the wines really continue to be rather youthful in style and in my estimate this is a legendary vintage that is still climbing in quality and it is not a crime to continue to hold off drinking the 1978s. It is a low yield vintage that produced outstanding depth and concentration, as well as glorious expressions of terroir, and I cannot think of a vintage I would rather have in my cellar today than the 1978s. For those with really well-endowed cellars of '78s, it is of course a lovely vintage for current consumption, but, if you are like me and do not have as many 1978s as you would really like in the cellar, then this is a vintage to hold off on drinking now, as the wines continue to climb in quality as they evolve. The top examples probably still have fifty years of future life in them!

1978 Bonnes-Mares- Maison Joseph Drouhin

I had not seen a bottle of the '78 Drouhin Bonnes-Mares since 2006, so I was delighted to have a chance to taste a bottle during a recent trip to Burgundy. This is an utterly classic example of this great vintage, with the wine soaring from the glass in a brilliant and still quite youthful mélange of cherries, plums, heather, venison, a touch of mustard seed, a beautifully complex base of soil, coffee and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with modest tannins, outstanding acids, great focus and grip and a very, very long, peacock's tail of a finish. Maison Drouhin does not make a lot of Bonnes-Mares, so the

wine is not as well-known as some of their other top grand cru cuvées, but this is as fine an example of this great *terroir* as anyone could ever hope to find. 2010-2050. **95.**

1978 Romanée-St-Vivant “les Quatre Journaux”- Maison Louis Latour

I have had so many fine old red Burgundies from Louis Latour that it pains me to think how much potential has been wasted in the last decade or two, when Burgundy has been on a hot streak in terms of vintage quality, but this venerable house has seemed somewhat adrift. Their 1978 RSV “les Quatre Journaux” is a superb example of the vintage, soaring from the glass in a blaze of black cherries, black raspberries, a touch of graphite, bonfires, duck, autumnal soil tones and a nice touch of mustard seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a lovely core of black fruit, superb soil inflection, lovely complexity and superb focus and balance on the very, very long, tangy and modestly tannic finish. Impressively, this is still a fairly young wine and has decades of life still ahead of it. It is a beautiful bottle of RSV. 2008-2030+. **93+.**

1978 Grands Echézeaux- Maison Remoissenet Père et Fils

If memory serves me correctly, this was not a very good era for Remoissenet, as I seem to recall that someone in the family was punished for adulterating wines in the cellars here with the addition of a bit of younger juice to purportedly older wines. In any case, their '78 Grands Echézeaux was not particularly inspiring, offering up a rather vaguely pinot nose of cherries, a touch of mushroom, chocolate and damp soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, four-square, short and flat, with a distinctly tired and short finish. In my opinion, this is probably all pinot noir, but I would be very surprised if it were really all comprised of 1978 Grands Echézeaux! Drink up. **77.**

1978 Corton “Clos des Cortons”- Maison Faiveley

The decades of the 1960s and 1970s are my favorites for the wines of Maison Faiveley and this 1978 Clos des Cortons was just coming into its peak period of maturity. The deep, vibrant and very complex nose offers up a fine and spicy mélange of cherries, orange zest, coffee, iron-like soil tones, dried herbs and a nice touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very soil-driven, with a superb core of fruit, tangy acids, excellent focus and balance and still a bit of backend tannin in need of resolution on the very long finish. This is a beautiful bottle of Corton that has decades of life still ahead of it. 2011-2040+. **93.**

1978 Corton “Clos Rognet”- Domaine Méo-Camuzet

This bottle of the 1978 Corton “Clos Rognet” hailed from the family cellars at Domaine Méo-Camuzet and was brought by Jean-Nicolas Méo to a dinner I attended in Beaune. This is a beautiful and still quite youthful example of the vintage, offering up a stunning bouquet of raspberries, *sous bois*, bonfires, a lovey base of soil, roasted venison, coffee and just a touch of tea leaves in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with superb focus and grip, a rock solid core of fruit, excellent complexity and fine acids and grip on the very long, poised and meltingly tannic finish. Just a beautiful bottle of Corton that is just entering its plateau of peak maturity and will continue to drink superbly well for decades. 2007-2035+. **93+.**

1978 Beaune “Grèves”- Domaine Michel Lafarge

The 1978 Beaune “Grèves” from Michel Lafarge is a beautiful bottle of wine at its absolute apogee, and with plenty of life still ahead of it. The beautifully pure nose jumps from the glass in a blend of cherries, red plums, woodsmoke, summer truffles, a touch of cocoa powder and a lovely base of gently autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-

bodied and very pure on the attack, with a great core of fruit, melting tannins, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the complex and very classy finish. Fine juice. 2011-2040. **93**.

1978 Pommard “Pezerolles”- Domaine Robert Ampeau

This is one of the finest red wines that I have had the pleasure to taste from Robert Ampeau. The nose is deep and impressively elegant (not always a descriptor I would think of for the sturdy reds from this domaine), offering up a lovely mix of red berries, coffee, citrus zest, gamebirds, smoke and a fine base of both mineral and autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and tangy, with a good core, superb transparency, very modest tannins and a long, complex and dancing finish. This is a beautiful wine at its absolute apogee of maturity. 2008-2025+. **92**.

1978 Volnay “Clos des Chênes”- Domaine Michel Lafarge

Since I last tasted the 1978 Clos des Chênes from Domaine Lafarge, the wine has begun to blossom into its more red fruity stage of peak drinkability and is really a beautiful glass of wine for current drinking. The deep and really pure nose soars from the glass in a mélange of red and black cherries, *sous bois*, gamebirds, orange zest, woodsmoke and a gorgeous base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with a sappy core of fruit, melting tannins, bright, perfectly-integrated acids and stunning length and grip on the glorious finish. Just a beautiful wine that is just reaching its zenith and where it should continue to delight the senses for the next thirty or forty years. 2011-2050. **95+**.

1978 Volnay “Clos des Ducs”- Marquis d’Angerville

The 1978 Clos des Ducs is a beautiful wine that is now nearly into its apogee of maturity, but is already drinking with great breed and complexity. As fans of Clos des Ducs are aware, during the era of Jacques d’Angerville at the helm of this great estate, the wines here were made in a very traditional and structured style that certainly takes its time to unfold, so it is not too surprising that a top vintage like 1978 is still not quite at its peak more than thirty years out from the vintage. The glorious nose here soars from the glass in a blaze of cherries, cocoa powder, orange zest, dried autumn leaves, a beautifully complex base of soil, gamebirds and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and tangy, with superb purity on the attack, a rock solid core of fruit, outstanding focus and balance, and a very, very long, complex finish that still shows a bit of backend tannin and good bounce from a bright spine of acidity. This is probably the greatest vintage of Clos des Ducs I have ever had the pleasure to taste, but I would be inclined to still give it just a few more years to allow the wine to fully blossom before drinking it in earnest. 2015-2040+. **95**.

1978 Volnay “Santenots”- Domaine Robert Ampeau

The 1978 Santenots from Domaine Robert Ampeau is a very good, meaty and mature example of the vintage that is quite typical of the slightly more rustic style of the red wines from this estate, but with all of the depth and structural integrity that one finds from this vintage. The nose is deep and meaty, offering up scents of raspberries, grilled venison, coffee, herb tones and singed heather. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ever so slightly four-square, with very good mid-palate depth, still a touch of tannin and very good length and grip on the complex and autumnal finish. This is good juice in that old-fashioned red wine style that prevailed at Domaine Ampeau back in the day. 2008-2025. **89+**.

The 1976 Vintage

The drought vintage of 1976 produced very sturdy wines out of the blocks, with roasted fruit character, plenty of meatiness and very firm tannins and acids. The wines were almost

mouth-searing with tannic clout when I first started to taste them a bit in the mid-1980s, as seemingly a decade of bottle age had done nothing to soften them up. But, these days, while not exactly elegant wines, one can find a lot of pleasure in the better 1976s, which have now dropped much of their tannins and are not bad drinks by any stretch of the imagination. They are quite autumnal in profile, but often with good cores of fruit and still plenty of length and grip. It is a vintage of sturdy vigor, rather than dancing elegance, but when paired with the right cuisine, they can still be very pleasant surprises, as there is no shortage of complexity in the best '76s. But, not all '76s managed to sidestep the vagaries of the vintage.

1976 Charmes-Chambertin- Domaine Truchot-Martin

Jacky and Liliane Truchot saved a fair bit of the 1976 Charmes-Chambertin in their cellars, which was uncharacteristic of them at the time, when they would generally drink the new vintage up over the course of year following the harvest. This was still a couple of years before the domaine officially began to be known as Truchot-Martin, as Monsieur Truchot was still working with his cousin, Henri Mauffré at this time. This note hails from the very last bottle in the Truchot cellars, as Jacky brought it along to a dinner we shared in Nuits St. Georges a couple of years ago. It is a lovely bottle, offering up a fine mélange of the roasted character of the vintage and Jacky Truchot's very elegant winemaking style. The complex bouquet is a blend of roasted cherries, grilled venison, intense notes of *sous bois*, espresso, bonfires and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very complex, with an autumnal personality, very good mid-palate depth, sound acids and still a bit of tannin perking up the long and mature finish. I suspect there will always be a touch of tannin in this wine, but this is a lovely drink for now and on into the foreseeable future. 2008-2025+. **89.**

1976 Chambertin- Maison Leroy

This is back in the good old days when the Leroy family did not have their own domaine in Vosne that needed to compete with DRC, so that they could focus on sourcing out great *négociant* bottlings. The '76 Chambertin is a fine example of the vintage, offering up a complex nose of charred wood, cassis, espresso, damp earth, herb tones and hung game. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and autumnal in profile, with a lovely, sweet core of fruit, tangy acids, melting tannins and very good length and grip on the focused and classy finish. This is a lovely example of the '76 vintage, with the tannins perfectly resolved and the wine showing no signs of pruniness. 2008-2020+. **90.**

1976 Nuits St. Georges "les Chaignots"- Domaine Mugneret-Gibourg (magnum)

I am sure that the Mugneret sisters do not remember this, but on one of my very first visits to the domaine, they opened a bottle of this wine blind for myself and a friend to taste after we had worked our way through the new vintage in barrel, and out of sheer luck, we guessed the wine exactly! This is a magnum that they brought to a Paulée de New York tasting a few years ago and it was showing beautifully, offering up a deep and complex nose of roasted plums, red berries, gamebirds, *sous bois*, woodsmoke, earth, coffee and a touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and now perfectly resolved, with faded tannins, lovely focus, tangy acids and really lovely length and grip on the complex and tertiary finish. This was still a bit fiery with '76 tannins when it was served blind to us (one of the reasons it was fairly easy to peg it as a 1976 red Burgundy at the time), but it has evolved very gracefully and is a lovely example of the vintage. 2007-2025. **91.**

1976 Le Corton- Maison Bouchard Père et Fils (served from magnum)

The '76 Corton from Bouchard Père et Fils is a fine example of this vintage, with the year's generally rather tough tannins now nicely melting away and the wine showing lovely complexity on both the nose and palate. The warm vintage nose offers up a complex blend of roasted black fruit, bonfires, venison, a fine base of soil tones and a touch of coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite broad-shouldered, with very good mid-palate depth, fine complexity, tangy acids and a long, soil-driven and still modestly tannic finish. This is resolving very nicely and will continue to drink well for many years to come. Good juice. 2010-2030+. **91.**

1976 Pommard "Grands Epenots"- Domaine de Courcel

Some of the greatest bottles of Pommard I have tasted have hailed from Domaine de Courcel back in the old days, before they switched their style to a more "Guy Accad-inspired" direction of jammy black fruit of little shape or distinction. However, in the '60s, '70s and '80s, this was one of the great estates in the Côte de Beaune and I have tasted some great wines from here. Sadly, these two 1976 Pommards were not amongst their most noteworthy from this era. The '76 Grands Epenots is fairly barnyardy in its aromatic blend of cherries, tar, sweaty saddle leather, hung game, fresh basil, bay leaf and some autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, rather astringent and tarry, with little mid-palate depth and a dry-edged, tannic and bitter finish. If this bottle is pristine, this is pretty poor fare. ??? **72.**

1976 Pommard "Rugiens"- Domaine de Courcel

Aromatically, the '76 Rugiens from Domaine de Courcel is far more promising, but it too gets pretty dry and astringent on the backend- particularly as the wine gets a bit of air and the rather harsh tannins have a chance to build. The nose is hardly typical, but intriguing in its mélange of cherries, roses, tar, bay leaf, autumnal soil tones and a bit of cinnamon in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and fairly transparent, with good attack, a solid core, blossoming complexity, but quite rigid tannins that dry out the finish. This gets more and more astringent as it aerates. ??? **77.**

1976 Volnay "Santenots"- Domaine Robert Ampeau

The 1976 Santenots from Domaine Robert Ampeau is a very good example of the vintage that has resolved its tannins quite well and now shows no rough edges on the backend. The deep, complex and slightly roasted nose offers up scents of baked black cherries, dark berries, bonfires, damp earth, coffee bean, game and forest floor. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced for a '76, with tertiary flavors, melted tannins and good length and grip on the complex finish. Good juice in the Ampeau house style. 2010-2025+. **90.**

The 1972 Vintage

The 1972 vintage started out life so acidic that they were almost impossible to taste, and it took fully twenty years for the wines to start to stir from behind their strident girdles of acidity. During the decade of the 1990s, the 1972s rose from the dead and really delivered some spectacular drinking. However, these days, I find the vintage a bit more of a mixed bag, as some 1972s have now started to fray a bit structurally and the same tangy acids that gave the wines such vibrancy and bounce when they suddenly blossomed around age twenty or twenty-five, can sometimes now have peeled away from the other structural elements in the wine and can be quite volatile. But, the last few '72s with which I have crossed paths have all been delightful wines, with a few of them absolutely stunning. 1972 was a very big crop, which did not help when the summer stayed stubbornly cool, but good warmth in September brought the grapes up to better

ripeness prior to harvest. It is a vintage that I would now want to be able to purchase at a discount at auction, as some wines are clearly now starting to crack up, but if they can be bought at the right price, it is well worth taking a flyer on well-stored bottles.

1972 Chambertin “Clos de Bèze”- Maison Bouchard Père et Fils

The 1972 Chambertin “Clos de Bèze” from Bouchard Père et Fils is a very pretty wine that is cut in the old school style of slightly too much chapitalization to put it in the very top division from this vintage, but with still plenty of complexity and interest. The complex nose offers up scents of cherries, raspberries, *sous bois*, coffee, mustard seed, a touch of beetroot and a gentle topnote of game. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and shows a nice core of red fruit, with lovely balance, but not a great deal of transparency on the long and tangy finish. This is a pretty good drink today and still has plenty of life ahead of it. It is a pity the folks at Bouchard could not have been just a touch more conservative with the chapitalization, but this was the style of a lot of Burgundy back in this era. 2008-2025. **89.**



1972 Chambertin “Clos de Bèze”- Maison Joseph Drouhin

I have only had a few examples of the 1972 vintage from Maison Drouhin, but they have all been excellent and their '72 Clos de Bèze is no exception. I have been lucky enough to taste this wine on a few occasions and it continues to dazzle. The beautifully pure and vibrant nose jumps from the glass in a blaze of cherries, strawberries, game, chocolate, *sous bois*, mustard

seed and a nice touch of almost clove-like, gentle spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and sweet at the core, with beautiful complexity and transparency, tangy, well-integrated acids, melted tannins and stunning length and grip on the utterly poised finish. This is a '72 red Burgundy that is still at its peak of maturity and shows no signs of slowing down any time soon. 2009-2025+. **94.**

1972 Bonnes-Mares- Maison Joseph Drouhin

This was my last bottle of '72 Drouhin Bonnes-Mares out of my cellar, and it was every bit as lovely as the last few I had tasted over the eight or ten years which I owned this wine. The deep and beautifully refined nose seemed a touch higher-toned than the last couple of bottles, offering up a red fruity bouquet of cherries, red berries, citrus zest, heather, venison, mustard seed, *sous bois*, coffee and a nice touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and very intensely flavored, with great focus and transparency, little remaining tannin and superb length and grip on the beautifully balanced and complex finish. This is a really superb example of the vintage, and for those that may still have a few bottles, it has plenty of life ahead of it. 2009-2025+. **93+.**

1972 Volnay “Les Soixante Ouvrées”- Domaine de la Pousse d’Or

Gérard Potel, in his heyday, was one of the most talented winegrowers in all the Côte d’Or and I wish I still had more bottles of his great wines from the vintages of the 1960s and 1970s. His 1972 Soixante Ouvrées is a lovely and classic wine that may have been even better a few years ago, as it now seems to be starting to get just a touch four-square on the palate as it closes in on its fiftieth birthday. The lovely, tertiary and very refined nose offers up a blend of cherry, bonfires, gamebirds, nutskins, coffee, lovely soil tones and a bit of autumnal forest floor. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and autumnal, but still with lovely vivacity, well-integrated acids and very good length and grip on the complex finish. This was served right after the 1979 Clos Sorbés from Jacky Truchot, and it came across as just a touch heavy-handed in comparison to that lovely wine. But, still a good drink. 2008-2020. **89.**

1972 Volnay “Clos des Chênes”- Domaine Michel Lafarge (served from magnum)

Having been absolutely enthralled with a bottle of this wine back in 2008, I was a touch disappointed in this magnum, which was certainly complex enough on both the nose and palate, but seemed to have the high acids of the vintage just beginning to peel away a bit from the body of the wine. The nose is beautiful and vibrant, offering up scents of cherries, blood orange, wild strawberries, fresh herb tones, lovely minerality and a gentle topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and red fruity to the sappy core, with tangy acids, fine focus and complexity, but with the structural elements just starting to fray a bit on the long backend. Perhaps it was simply a single magnum getting a bit volatile, but I suspect this wine is best drunk up in the not too distant future. It is still a lovely glass of mature Volnay, but the bottle I had a few years back was a step up! 2011-2025+. **91.**

The 1971 Vintage

The 1971 vintage is a ripe and classy vintage- particularly in the Côte de Nuits, and the wines continue to drink beautifully. In the Côte de Beaune, this was a vintage with hail damage in several villages from a ferocious storm in August, so one has to be a bit more careful selecting wines from the south. The wines reportedly started out quite firm, but they were already plush and robust when I really began to drink Burgundies with regularity in the late 1980s. The vintage has continued to drink well from that point on and is still one of the reference point

vintages for red Burgundy in the post-war period. There is no rush today to be drinking up the 1971s, which continue to have decades of life in them.

1971 Gevrey-Chambertin “Cazetiers”- Domaine Armand Rousseau

I had never previously had the pleasure to taste such an old vintage of the Rousseau Cazetiers and I was very, very impressed with this wine. This is not a powerful wine by any stretch of the imagination, but a stunningly complex and transparent middleweight at its zenith. The beautiful nose wafts from the glass in a mix of strawberries, cherries, heather, mustard seed, a touch of venison, mustard seed, a bit of cinnamon and a beautifully autumnal base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and tertiary, with superb elegance and complexity, fine intensity of flavor and lovely freshness and bounce on the long and classy finish. This really is delicious! 2011-2030. **90.**

1971 Gevrey-Chambertin “Clos St. Jacques”- Domaine Armand Rousseau

This was the very first time I had ever crossed paths with the '71 Rousseau Clos St. Jacques and the wine was stunning. The deep and beautifully resolved nose delivers a complex blend of cherries, raspberries, *sous bois*, a touch of meatiness, mustard seed, woodsmoke a lovely base of minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and utterly suave on the attack, with a sappy core of fruit, great soil drive, just a touch of remaining tannin and stunning complexity on the very, very long and complex finish. This is everything one could imagine of a fully mature example of Rousseau Clos St. Jacques in a great vintage. 2011-2035+. **94+.**

1971 Chambertin- Maison Camille Giroud

The 1971 Chambertin from Camille Giroud is not a bad wine by any stretch of the imagination, but it is a bit chunky in style and probably was given just a bit too generous of a chapitalization back in the day. The complex nose offers up a very red fruity mélange of strawberries, cherries, coffee, chocolate, lovely soil tones and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, plush and tangy, with a rather four-square personality, but very respectable length and grip on the velvety finish. The tannins have fully fallen away here, but the wine retains good acids and should continue to cruise along for several decades. Not bad. 2011-2035+. **88.**

1971 Chambertin “Clos de Bèze”- Maison Joseph Drouhin

While I have been fortunate enough to taste several older vintages of Drouhin's Clos de Bèze, this was the first time that I had ever tasted the 1971. Needless to say, this is an utterly brilliant wine, soaring from the glass in an aristocratic aromatic mélange of strawberries, cherries, coffee, mustard seed, heather, cinnamon and an absolutely stunning base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very, very pure and transparent, with a great core, magical intensity of flavor, still a touch of tannin and great acidity on the laser-like, extremely long and dancing finish. This is one of the most beautiful bottles of 1971 Burgundy I have had the pleasure to taste, and one looks at this and the supernatural '71 Musigny, it is hard not to come to the conclusion that the Drouhins have made some of the greatest wines of their careers in this vintage! 2011-2050. **96.**

1971 Chambertin “Clos de Bèze”- Maison Faiveley

The 1971 Faiveley Clos de Bèze is a superb bottle that has now reached its apogee of peak maturity. The deep, very complex and black fruity nose offers up a mix of cassis, black cherries, woodsmoke, a touch of fresh rosemary, balsam boughs, hung game, lovely soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly youthful for a forty year-old wine, with a fine core of fruit, melting tannins, good acids and fine focus and grip

on the very long and soil-driven finish. A lovely example that may yet improve a touch with further bottle age. 2011-2035+. **93+**.

1971 Chambertin “Clos de Bèze”- Caves Nicolas

I have never had particularly good luck with Nicolas Burgundy bottlings and this was no exception. In my experience, I would generally pass on any Nicolas bottlings from Burgundy and focus exclusively on their selections of Bordeaux, which have always been of far finer pedigree. The '71 Nicolas Clos de Bèze offers up a slightly juiced up nose of cherries, raspberries, hickory smoke, herbs, game and soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, chunky and grenache-like, with a chunky personality, still some life on the backend, but no breed. The wine is okay as a red wine, but as a bottle of '71 Clos de Bèze, this leaves a lot to be desired. **82.**

1971 Morey St. Denis “Clos de la Bussière”- Domaine Georges Roumier

I wish I had crossed paths with this superb wine back when I was writing up a feature on the Clos de la Bussière from Domaine Georges Roumier, as this is a stellar vintage for this fine cuvée. The deep and perfectly *à point* bouquet offers up a very complex and refined blend of red and black cherries, venison, mustard seed, hints of cinnamon, heather and an absolutely gorgeous and complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant, with a fine core of pure fruit, superb soil inflection, lovely acids and perfect focus and balance on the very long and tangy finish. This is fine, fine juice! 2011-2035+. **93.**

1971 Bonnes-Mares- Maison Camille Giroud

The 1971 Bonnes-Mares from Camille Giroud is a very good bottle that continues to drink at its apogee. The very classy nose wafts from the glass in a blend of cassis, black cherries, forest floor, new leather, oak leaves, game and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very soil-driven, with a good core of fruit, fine focus, melted tannins and lovely length and grip on the finish. There is not quite the complexity on the palate here to make this a first division Bonnes-Mares, but this is a very good bottle that still has a couple of decades of fine drinking ahead of it. 2011-2030. **90.**

1971 Musigny- Maison Joseph Drouhin

I had not crossed paths with a bottle of the 1971 Drouhin Musigny since I was preparing my article on the wine all the way back in Issue Three in 2006. It was a long, six year drought, but this utterly stunning bottle (shared at a New Year's Eve *fête* here in New York with a very generous subscriber) more than made up for the lost time. The hauntingly brilliant nose soars from the glass in a blaze of cherries, red plums, a touch of heather, orange zest, coffee, *sous bois*, mustard seed, woodsmoke and a glorious base of Musigny's iron-laced soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and magically pure on the attack, with a sappy core of fruit, brilliant transparency, tangy acids, melting tannins and simply stunning length and grip on the glorious finish. This timeless beauty has decades of magic ahead of it. Man, I love Musigny! 2010-2050. **98.**

1971 Vosne-Romanée “les Suchots”- Maison Joseph Drouhin

I had crossed paths with the '71 Suchots from Maison Drouhin several years ago at a Paulée in Beaune, but that particular bottle was not pristine, so I was very happy to have a chance to taste a well-stored bottle. This is a lovely Vosne premier cru at its apogee, offering up a complex aromatic mélange of cherries, fresh nutmeg, heather, gamebirds, *sous bois* and fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and tangy, with a fine core of fruit, a classic Suchots touch of *sauvage* and lovely length and grip on the focused and complex finish. The tannins have fallen away fully here, but the wine retains lovely acids and balance and will have

no trouble continuing to drink at a fine level for at least another decade and perhaps longer. Fine juice. 2010-2020+. **91.**

1971 Corton “Grancey”- Maison Louis Latour

The 1971 Corton “Grancey” is a simply beautiful bottle of fully mature Corton, offering up a red fruity aromatic mélange of cherries, a touch of blood orange, bonfires, venison, stony minerality, coffee, *sous bois* and fresh herb tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and tangy, with lovely transparency, impressive complexity and very good remaining depth at the core. The finish is long, autumnal and beautifully tertiary, with fine soil signature, melted tannins and fine grip. This is a lovely bottle at its apogee of peak drinkability.. 2008-2025. **92.**

1971 Beaune “Centes Vignes”- Maison Champy

The 1971 Beaune “Centes Vignes” from Maison Champy is really a beautiful bottle of fully mature Beaune that offers up impressive complexity on both the nose and palate. The very fine and tertiary nose wafts from the glass in a classy mix of cherries, blood orange, woodsmoke, coffee, a touch of gamebird and *sous bois*. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and impressively soil-driven, with a fine core of fruit, melted tannins, sound acids and lovely length and grip on the *à point* finish. Fine juice that remains at its apogee. 2011-2025+. **89.**

1971 Pommard “Pezerolles”- Domaine Hubert de Montille

The 1971 Pezerolles from Domaine Hubert de Montille is fully mature and really is an outstanding example of the vintage. The vibrant nose jumps from the glass in a very complex mélange of cherries, pomegranate, heather, coffee, porcini, a nice touch of marjoram, beautifully refined soil tones and a gentle topnote of cinnamon. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and tangy, with a fine core, superb complexity, melting tannins and outstanding length and grip on the focused and tertiary finish. The wine closes with a lovely and quite distinct note of porcini, and while there is just a whisper of volatile acidity here (which decanting blows off), this is really a beautiful bottle of mature Pommard. 2011-2030. **93.**

The 1969 Vintage

The 1969s, having drunk well for several decades already, are now a bit less interesting than they were a fifteen years ago. They can still be truly delightful wines, but they can also show a bit of raisiny character to their fruit components these days as well. The growing season featured very warm weather in July and August, followed by a cold and dreary September and then a return to fine weather in October for the harvest. In the second half of the 1980s and during the decade of the 1990s, the top ‘69s were really exceptional red Burgundies at their apogees, but my notes on them have been a tad less consistent since that time. I once considered this clearly the finest vintage of the superb decade of the 1960s, but now, I would place it behind the 1966s, 1961s, 1964s and 1962s. There are still some very good wines to be found from 1969 and the vintage in general shows no signs of slowing down any time soon, but many seem to have lost just a bit of refinement as the years have gone by.

1969 Griotte-Chambertin- Domaine Ferinand Pernot

Domaine Ferinand Pernot is the precursor of Domaine Fourrier in Gevrey-Chambertin and the family’s 1969 Griotte-Chambertin was drinking absolutely splendidly. There is a purity and refinement to this wine that is very much akin to the wines Jean-Marie Fourrier is crafting here at the domaine today, and which is quite remarkable for a 1969 Burgundy, as this vintage can sometimes come across as a bit “roasted” in style today. The nose is deep, pure and beautifully tertiary, offering up a lovely mélange of crushed red fruits redolent of strawberries

and cherries, mustard seed, gentle notes of *sous bois*, coffee and woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and very suave on the attack, with lovely transparency, melted tannins, good acids and lovely length and grip on the focused and dancing finish. Lovely wine. 2012-2030+. **93.**

1969 Clos de la Roche- Maison Joseph Drouhin

This was my last bottle of the Drouhin '69 Clos de la Roche, which I had given to the Mugneret sisters a few years back for a tasting and they generously held onto the bottle until I could also be available to share it with them. I have consistently enjoyed this wine in the past and this most recent bottle was also excellent, but seemed to be showing just a touch more of the more "roasted" character of the '69 vintage than the previous couple of bottles that I had tasted. The very complex nose is deep, autumnal and gamey, offering up scents of cherries, beetroot, forest floor, spit-roasted gamebirds, coffee, heather and a topnote of mustard seed. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very complex, with plenty of *sous bois*, lovely mid-palate depth, fine focus and very good length and grip on the tertiary and classy finish. This is a lovely bottle, but it showed even more precision and purity a few years back. 2010-2025+. **92.**

1969 Musigny- Maison Joseph Drouhin

This was the first time I had ever crossed paths with the 1969 Drouhin Musigny and the wine was absolutely singing. The deep and magical nose soars from the glass in a mélange of cherries, strawberries, orange zest, heather, woodsmoke, iron-infused, chalky soil tones, *sous bois* and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a superb core of sweet red fruit, fading acids, stunning complexity and absolutely exceptional grip on the very, very long, peacock's tail of a finish. A beautiful vintage for this great bottling of Musigny. 2007-2025+. **94.**

1969 Volnay "Clos des Chênes"- Maison Ropiteau Frères

The 1969 Volnay "Clos des Chênes" from Maison Ropiteau Frères is getting a bit long in the tooth, but still retains lovely aromatic complexity and some flavor interest on the palate. The autumnal nose offers up scents of strawberries, baked cherries, beetroot, game, *sous bois* and a bit of dried oak leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and quite complex, but beginning to thin out a bit in the mid-palate. The finish is not particularly long anymore, and the wine has no tannin left and not a whole lot of acidity either. This needs to be drunk up, as it is more interesting on the nose than the palate these days. 2008-2015. **85.**

The 1966 Vintage

I love the 1966 red Burgundy vintage, which today is truly a great vintage to drink. It was not a particularly warm summer, but the weather improved towards the end of the season and the Burgundians brought in a normal-sized crop of high quality grapes. Back when I was really first falling in love with Burgundy in the late 1980s, the '66s were a touch leaner and tighter than the more flamboyant and "à point" vintages of '64 and '69, but in hindsight, it may well have been that the 1966s were still just a touch on the young side. Today, I very much love this vintage for current drinking, and the wines possess sufficiently fine balances to promise still many years of fine drinking ahead of them.

1966 Chapelle-Chambertin- Maison Bouchard Père et Fils

The 1966 Chapelle-Chambertin from Bouchard Père et Fils is a really lovely example of this vineyard. The complex and perfumed bouquet offers up scents of cherries, *fraises du bois*, cocoa powder, a nice touch of grilled meat, vinesmoke, fresh herbs and forest floor. On the

palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and tangy, with a lovely core of fruit, impressive depth and vigor for its age and a lovely girdle of acidity adding focus and grip on the lovely, long finish. Back in these days the Trapet family was selling most of their production still of to *négociants*, and it would not surprise me if this wine originated with them. Fine juice. 2010-2025+. **92.**

1966 Volnay “Clos des Chênes”- Domaine Michel Lafarge

It had been five or six years since I last crossed paths with this beautiful vintage of the Lafarge family’s Clos des Chênes, and it was drinking absolutely stunning when I last tasted the wine. The deep, pure and utterly beautiful nose offers up a perfumed mélange of strawberries, cherries, summer truffles, coffee, gentle notes of *sous bois*, a touch of fresh porcini, orange zest and a beautiful topnote of spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and tangy, with a lovely core, stunning focus and grip, superb complexity and a very, very long, meltingly tannic finish. This glorious vintage of Lafarge Clos des Chênes is at its absolute apogee. 2011-2040. **95.**



Premier cru vineyards in Pommard in the post-harvest quiet of November.

The 1964 Vintage

The 1964 red Burgundies were popular right from the outset and have continued to age well and offer up superb drinking today. This was a warm summer that produced ripe and fleshy wines out of the blocks, with lower acids that at one time looked to be the Achilles’ Heel of the

vintage. In the late 1990s, several 1964s tasted seemed to be just a tad too voluptuous on the palate, without the underlying acidity to give the wines precision and grip on the backend. But, in true, non-linear Burgundian fashion, I have not noticed this characteristic in the 1964s which I have crossed paths with in the last several years, and much like the 1985s, they seem fresher and more vibrant today than was the case a decade ago! This is a lovely vintage for current consumption, but like the 1966s, there is no reason to rush.

1964 Gevrey-Chambertin “Clos St. Jacques”- Domaine Clair-Daü (magnum)

The 1964 Gevrey-Chambertin “Clos St. Jacques” from Domaine Clair-Daü is a nice, pleasant example of the '64 vintage that is now quite velvety and laid back on the palate, with fairly modest structural integrity, but still a fair bit of aromatic and flavor interest. The nose is deep and ripe, offering up scents of black cherries, plums, a touch of mocha, lovely soil tones, a bit of venison and a topnote of hazelnuts. On the palate the wine is medium-full, forward and easy-going, with still a bit of plump fruit at the core, reasonable complexity and the soft, gentle finish of a wine that has been softly sliding down the far side of its plateau of maturity for a while now. Not a bad drink by any means, but not great either. 2011-2016. **86.**

1964 Chambertin- Maison Louis Latour

I have had some great bottles of Louis Latour red Burgundies from the decades of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, and this stunning '64 Chambertin certainly ranks right up there with the finest of these that I have had the pleasure to taste. The deep and utterly brilliant nose soars from the glass in a blaze of cherries, strawberries, smoked meats, *sous bois*, a bit of bonfire, chocolate and fresh herb tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and velvety, with a great core of sweet fruit, beautiful soil inflection, melted tannins, sound acids and simply superb focus and balance on the very, very long, pure and magically complex finish. This is a great, great bottle of Chambertin at its absolute apogee! 2009-2030. **95.**

1964 Clos de la Roche- Maison Faiveley

I had the good pleasure to share this wine with some very good friends from Germany at a fine little restaurant in the ancient city of Worms. The proprietor is a passionate Burgundy lover and one simply asks what he might have of interest in the cellar, and he digs around and comes up with some fun options- which he insists on serving double blind! The '64 Faiveley Clos de la Roche is excellent, offering up a deep and fully mature nose of black cherries, roasted venison, bonfires, espresso, a lovely base of complex soil tones and a nice autumnal topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully resolved, with a good core of fruit, melting tannins and fine length and grip on the poised and complex finish. This bottle has been at its apogee for years and is probably getting towards the far side of its plateau, though it will probably slide down into decline very gentle when the time comes. 2008-2025? **92.**

1964 Vosne-Romanée- Maison Reine Pedauque

The 1964 Vosne-Romanée AC from Reine Pedauque is a very tasty bottle, but it does not quite possess the precision on the nose and the palate that one would find in higher caliber appellations. The deep and tertiary nose offers up a good mix of red and black cherries, game, forest floor, charred wood and damp earth. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and autumnal, with still pretty good mid-palate depth, but just the first signs of maltiness starting to crop up on the backend- probably a good indicator that now is a fine time to be finishing up bottles of this wine. But, for a village wine that is nearly fifty years of age, this is still a pretty good glass of wine! 2011-2020+? **86.**

1964 Grands Echézeaux- Maison Leroy

I have no idea who Maison Leroy's source was for Grands Echézeaux back in this era, but I have previously had some absolutely stellar bottles of this wine from both the 1959 and 1964 vintages. This most recent bottle of the 1964 Grands Echézeaux was outstanding, offering up a deep and classy nose of red and black cherries, plums, venison, beautiful Vosne spice tones, forest floor, a touch of chocolate and a nice, delicate framing of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a lovely core of fruit, melting tannins, nice, bright acids for a '64 and excellent length and grip on the complex and utterly classic finish. This is a beautiful bottle of wine with years and years of life ahead of it. It may not be quite as good as the greatest examples of the '59 Grands Echézeaux from Maison Leroy that I have been fortunate enough to taste in the past, but this is an utterly complete and compelling glass of wine. 2011-2040+. **94.**

1964 Volnay "Clos des Ducs"- Marquis d'Angerville

This is one of the oldest pristine bottles of Clos des Ducs that I have had the pleasure to taste (older vintages that I have crossed paths with have sadly not been perfect bottles) and it is a brilliant wine at its absolute apogee of peak drinkability. The deep, pure and almost youthfully vibrant nose jumps from the glass in a beautiful mélange of cherries, coffee, orange zest, a gloriously complex base of soil, gamebirds and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and beautifully focused, with a lovely core of fruit, beautiful transparency, sound acids, excellent length and grip and still a bit of backend tannin that will keep this great wine cruising along many, many years still. This has simply stunning acidity for a 1964, as this is of course a riper vintage. A simply superb Clos des Ducs at its zenith. 2008-2035+. **94+.**

1964 Beaune "Cuvée Maurice Drouhin"- Hospices de Beaune (Maison Joseph Drouhin)

Maison Joseph Drouhin buys the Cuvée Maurice Drouhin each year from the Hospices. I was fortunate to come across a half case of this wine about a decade ago and have had great pleasure from each and every bottle that I have opened. This is a blend of les Avaux, Champs Pimonts, Grèves and Boucherottes, and the '64 has consistently drunk with fine vigor over the course of the seven or eight years that I still owned bottles of this wine. The last bottle of the six pack, which I served a couple of years ago was still at its peak, offering up a deep and vibrant nose of cherries, a touch of red plum, woodsmoke, fresh herbs, gamebirds, forest floor and coffee. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and still generous at the core, with melted tannins, still quite tangy acids and lovely length and grip on the complex and tertiary finish. A lovely bottle of fully mature Beaune, I have little doubt that this wine will continue to cruise along beautifully for years to come. 2008-2025+. **92.**

The 1962 Vintage

The 1962 vintage produced a stellar crop of wines, with a relatively long growing season culminating in a lovely and very classic year. Throughout the decade of the 1990s, when I drank a great many 1962 red Burgundies, this was the vintage of the superb decade of the 1960s, and it was pretty clear that it was superior to the other outstanding years of this span: 1961, 1964, 1966 and 1969. Today, the '62s have faded a bit, and while top examples can still be absolutely brilliant bottles of wine, it is hard not to rank some of these other vintages from the 1960s a half step of the '62s today.

1962 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Clair-Daü (magnum)

This magnum of '62 Bonnes-Mares from Clair-Daü was quite high-toned on both the nose and palate and seemed to indicate that drinking up would not be a bad idea. The deep and very stylish nose offers up scents of dried berries, cherries, coffee, woodsmoke, heather, forest floor and a bit of roasted venison. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and intensely flavored, with fairly modest mid-palate density, but lovely complexity and grip. The finish is long and classy, with fine balance, but it seems to be thinning now just a bit on the backend and I would be strongly inclined to drink this wine up in the next several years. It is still a very lovely glass of wine, but, though its demise is not imminent, its days are numbered. 2008-2020? **89.**

1962 Volnay “Clos des Chênes”- Domaine Emile Boulay

The 1962 Volnay “Clos des Chênes” from Domaine Emile Boulay is a lovely, fully mature Burgundy that has certainly been at its apogee for decades, and it remains very fine on the nose, but it is starting to get just a touch volatile now on the palate and probably should be drunk up in regular-sized formats. The deep and tertiary nose offers up scents of cherries, vinesmoke, *sous bois*, orange peel, a touch of dirty diaper and coffee. On the palate the wine is deep and reasonably full, with still a good core, but with the tangy acids starting to peel away a bit from the structure of the wine and with the wine getting a bit malty as it evolved with air. Drink up. 2011-2016. **87.**

The 1961 Vintage

For the first two decades of my deep Burgundy-drinking life, the 1961s were pretty, high-toned wines that were not up to the quality of the other top vintages of this decade. I enjoyed them, but felt that their best days might have already been behind them, or that they were a bit overrated back in the day. However, the wines really started to blossom at age forty or so, seemingly deepening both on the nose and palate, and today, this vintage vies with the 1966s for top honors in the decade of the 1960s. The 1961s benefited from an early and beautiful spring, but flowering was purported to be uneven and the summer was not ideal. September was perfect however, and the grapes came in with fine concentration and potential. However, according to Michael Broadbent, the wine trade raised the prices fifty percent over the superb 1959s, so there was a lot of grumbling and perhaps the '61s suffered a bit at the time from this initial period of “over-hyped” pricing. Today, with the pricing dislocations of release now long in the past, the wines can be judged on their own and there is an awful lot of excellence to be found in the Côte d’Or reds from 1961.

1961 Gevrey-Chambertin- Domaine Louis Trapet

I cannot overemphasize just how beautifully this 1961 village Gevrey-Chambertin from Domaine Trapet has aged, and it fully underscores that those of us who focus solely on premier cru and grand cru bottlings for long-term cellaring can miss out on some superb old village wines. The deep, tertiary and beautifully vibrant nose offers up a complex blend of cherries, cigar wrapper, heather, a touch of venison, beautiful spice tones, a wonderfully complex base of “singed” dark soil tones and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and magically complex, with a fine core, superb focus, tangy acids, little remaining tannin and excellent length and grip on the transparent finish. This is a beautiful wine that has plenty of life still ahead of it. 2010-2025. **93.**

1961 Echézeaux- Domaine Henri Jayer

I had never previously tasted a wine this old from Henri Jayer, as of course, back in these days, much of what he was producing was being sold off to *négociants*. The wine is very pretty, but also very delicate and is clearly getting to the end of its plateau of peak drinkability. The tertiary bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex mélange of desiccated cherries, mocha, *sous bois*, orange zest, dried leaves and a nice vein of minerality. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, tangy and beautifully focused, with lovely, autumnal complexity and very good focus and balance on the long, bouncy finish. Some of the wine's mid-palate depth has certainly faded away with age, but the sound acids of the wine remain beautifully integrated into the body and there seems to be no reason that the wine will not continue on for several more years. 2007-2020? **90.**

1961 Grands Echézeaux- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti

DRC's 1961 Grands Echézeaux is a lovely example of both the vintage and this fine *terroir*, jumping from the glass in a classic blend of plums, cherries, a bit of cognac-like spice tones, venison, Coca-Cola and a beautiful complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plummy, with superb complexity, melting tannins and excellent focus and grip on the well-balanced, velvety and very refined finish. This is a beautiful bottle of Grands Echézeaux at its peak of maturity, but still with plenty of life ahead of it. 2011-2035+. **93.**

The 1959 Vintage

1959 was a relatively warm and ideal year for ripening pinot noir and the red Burgundies from this vintage have been legendary for many, many years. I have drunk them with great pleasure for several decades, and the most recent examples I have tasted from '59 have shown no signs of slowing down any time soon. I may have a very slight stylistic preference for the '61s and '66s these days, but I would be the last person in the world to say "no" to a bottle of plush '59 red Burgundy. There is absolutely no rush to drink up this vintage, will continues to cruise along beautifully.

1959 Musigny- Maison Faiveley

The 1959 Faiveley Musigny is a beautiful bottle of wine that perfectly captures the sturdier and smokier style of this bottling in the era of the 1950s and 1960s. The deep, stunning nose offers up a black fruity mélange of marinated black cherries, dark berries, woodsmoke, juniper berries, venison, new leather and a gloriously complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and smoky in profile, with superb complexity, a rock solid core of fruit, just a whisper of remaining tannin and outstanding length and grip on the marvelous finish. A great, great old bottle of Faiveley Musigny. 2008-2025+. **93.**

1959 La Tâche- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti

The 1959 La Tâche is a brilliant bottle of wine at its absolute zenith of perfection. The deep and heart-breakingly beautiful nose soars from the glass in a blaze of plum, blood orange, roasted duck, bonfires, an intense base of complex soil tones and Vosne spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and voluptuous, with stunning complexity and purity, a sappy core, melting tannins, stunning focus and balance and profound length and grip on the kaleidoscopic finish. Just a magical vintage of La Tâche. 2008-2050. **97.**

1959 Corton "Clos du Roi"- Avery's

I have had some very good English merchant bottlings of Burgundy from this era (The Wine Society bottlings in particular stand out), but this was utterly mediocre. The impressively

creative nose seems to me to have had something other than Corton added along the way, as the bouquet is a blend of black cherries, game, woodsmoke, damp earth, chocolate and a bit of tree bark with air. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, fat and a touch inky, with good (albeit rather artificially induced) length and grip. To my palate, these seems like the old school of “blended Burgundy” was in session when this wine was bottled. ??? **81.**

1959 Corton “Clos Rognet”- Domaine Méo-Camuzet

1959 was of course long before Domaine Méo-Camuzet was bottling on its own, but the family had always retained a stock of their wines for family consumption, before selling off the balance of their production to various *négociants*. This particular bottle came out of the family cellars and was brought to a dinner at Véronique Drouhin-Boss and Michel Boss’s home just outside of Beaune. The wine is deep and very lovely, offering up a fully mature mélange of desiccated cherries, red currants, game, *sous bois*, orange rind, bonfires and coffee. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, fresh and impressively complex, with lovely focus, excellent length, melted tannins and tangy acids that in this particular bottle are just threatening to start to come unglued. But, this is still a very lovely bottle of old Corton. 2007-2025+? **93.**

1959 Beaune “Clos des Ursules”- Maison Louis Jadot (served from magnum)

I had the pleasure to taste this beautiful bottle of Beaune at one of the farewell dinners hosted for Jacques Lardière, Louis Jadot’s retiring Cellar Master, during this spring. The wine is a beautiful bottle that is at its absolute apogee in magnum, wafting from the glass in a superbly complex mélange of black cherries, plums, chocolate, gamebirds, a great base of soil, charred wood, *sous bois*, sweet nutskin and a touch of cocoa powder in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and vibrant, with a great core of fruit, still a touch of tannin and outstanding complexity on the very, very long finish. Just a beautiful bottle of Beaune, the ’59 Clos des Ursules will last for decades. 2012-2050. **94.**

The 1955 Vintage

Obviously, I am way too young to remember this vintage in its relative youth, as I was born five years after the vintage. According to Michael Broadbent, this was a year where the wines had great early appeal, and he notes that he drank most of his ‘55s in the decade of the 1960s. However, the top ‘55s I have crossed paths with the in last couple of years were still quite fine and holding well, though this was not the case with less exalted cuvées. I have not had enough 1955s in the last several years to generalize, but I suspect that the ‘55s are most interesting today at the grand cru level, or with the longest-lived premier cru bottlings such as Michel Gaunoux’s Rugiens or Grands Epenots.

1955 Chambertin “Clos de Bèze”- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 1955 Clos de Bèze from Joseph Drouhin is a beautiful and quite ethereal bottle of fully mature Burgundy today, with stunning complexity and a dancing, delicate palate that is most impressive. The utterly haunting nose wafts from the glass in an aristocratic blend of cherries, orange zest, gamey tones, dried herbs, woodsmoke, a hint of fresh cocoa and *sous bois*. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and very, very complex, with lovely intensity of flavor, sound acids and glorious transparency on the long, transparent and peacock’s tail of a finish. The wine closes with touches of nutskin and dried herbs, which suggests that its best years in regular-sized format are now probably in the rear view mirror, but the wine is still a beautiful glass of Burgundy and should stay that way for at least another decade or so. I would dearly love to cross paths with this wine in magnum! 2008-2020. **93.**

1955 Bonnes-Mares- Maison Bouchard-Âiné

I do not have a lot of experience with the older wines from Bouchard-Âiné, but this '55 Bonnes-Mares was not bad in a slightly old-fashioned style that was certainly generous in its chapitalization. Fifty-five years on, this has translated into a slightly malty wine that offers up scents of black cherries, forest floor, malty tones, roasted game and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit four-square, with a good core, no rough edges and sneaky length on the velvety finish. This is more “good, solid old Burgundy” that is slightly generic in nature, rather than a top example of the *terroir* of Bonnes-Mares. 2009-2020. **87.**

1955 Vosne-Romanée “Clos des Réas”- Maison Bouchard Père et Fils

This was the first time I had ever seen the Gros family’s premier cru monopole of Clos des Réas bottled by anyone other than themselves. Sadly, this wine was already descending down the far side of its plateau and was starting to fade, but still offered up some interest in its tertiary nose of fallen leaves, strawberries, Vosne spice tones, a bit of meatiness and bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and tiring briskly, with a bit of fruit still in residence on the attack, but with a thin, short finish that shows no grip or backbone. Drink up. 2010-2015. **83.**

The 1953 Vintage

I have only seen a couple of examples of the '53 vintage in recent times, and they have been lovely. The 1953 wines out of the blocks were very elegant (mirroring the '53 clarets) and approachable, and I am sure that the vast majority of the vintage was drunk up in the first couple of decades after the wines were bottled. But, it is a vintage that is still worth looking out for if one can find the wines at a reasonable price (in relative terms of course, as old Burgundies in general are rather ludicrously over-priced these days).

1953 La Tâche- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti

I had only tasted the 1953 La Tâche on one previous occasion, nearly a decade before, and I was thrilled to have an opportunity to try another bottle in the summer of 2008. This is a supremely elegant La Tâche that perfectly captures the style of the 1953 vintage, offering up a brilliantly complex nose of raspberries, cherries, duck, fresh nutmeg, coffee, *sous bois*, Vosne spice tones, orange zest and a nice framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is medium-full, round and silky, with a very pretty core of complex red fruit, a stunning signature of soil, tangy acids and a fine, long and stunningly complex finish. This is the quintessential, middleweight vintage of La Tâche, and it is a beautiful bottle of wine with plenty of life ahead of it. 2008-2030. **94.**

1953 Pommard “Epenots”- Maison Reine Pedauque

The 1953 Pommard “Epenots” from Reine Pedauque is excellent and still at its plateau of peak maturity. The deep and classy nose offers up an autumnal blend of plum, cherries, woodsmoke, forest floor, a touch of mocha, porcini and a bit of roasted game. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and impressively complex, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and very good length and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. This is a lovely wine that still has at least another dozen years of fine drinking ahead of it and it may prove to last far longer than that projection, as it really is exquisitely balanced. Fine juice. 2008-2020+. **92.**

The 1952 Vintage

The 1952 vintage was purported to be far more structured out of the blocks than the '53s, as cool weather at the “fin de saison” damped excitement for what had been a truly lovely

growing season during the first few months of ripening. I have only had one '52 in recent times, to which I must thank Jacques Lardière, who kindly supplied the bottle. If all the top '52s remain this fresh and structurally sound, this is a vintage to keep an eye out for, as they sell for significantly less than the better-known '59s.

1952 Clos Vougeot- Maison Louis Jadot

The 1952 Clos Vougeot from Louis Jadot is a great example of the vintage that is still deep and sappy on both the nose and palate and has decades of life still ahead of it. The exceptional nose jumps from the glass in a deep and complex blend of red and black cherries, bonfires, venison, *sous bois*, a touch of heather, balsam boughs and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and *à point*, with superb mid-palate depth, impressive complexity, still a bit of remaining tannin and outstanding length and grip on the focused and soil-driven finish. A beautiful bottle of Clos Vougeot. 2011-2050. **93.**

The 1949 Vintage

The 1949 vintage is one of my all-time favorites, as I find this one of the most beautiful and classic years for red Burgundy in the twentieth century. The flowering in '49 took place (again according to Monsieur Broadbent) under rainy conditions, but the remainder of the growing season was ideal and the crop came in from the fields in absolutely splendid shape. The '49s I have enjoyed over the years are absolutely classic, with supreme elegance and glorious transparency to their underlying terroir. I have not tasted too many in the last few years, but pristine bottles of top wines should still have several decades of life in them.

1949 Musigny- Maison Camille Giroud

The 1949 Musigny from Camille Giroud is certainly a very powerful example of this *terroir* and the vintage. The deep, complex and mature nose offers up scents of dried dark berries, malty tones, a touch of plum, forest floor and coffee. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and vigorous, with melting tannins and good length and grip on the solid finish. This is an okay bottle of old Burgundy, but it lacks the breed and multi-dimensional personality one would expect in a top example of 1949 Musigny. 2011-2025+. **87.**

1949 Musigny- Maison Joseph Drouhin

Ironically, after never having the 1949 Drouhin Musigny before, I crossed paths with two bottles of it in the last couple of years. One bottle, tasted in Germany, had ullaged about six or seven centimeters and was a very good bottle, but not one hundred percent of what it might have been. The other bottle was in better condition and absolutely lovely- this is the bottle I report on forthwith. The bouquet is deep and absolutely beautiful in its mélange of red berries, cherries, gamebirds, heather, *sous bois*, mustard seed, a nice dollop of coffee, gingery spice tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and intensely flavored, with lovely complexity and delineation, little remaining tannins, lovely acids and superb length and grip on the ethereal and gorgeous finish. Just a lovely, lovely bottle of Musigny. 2008-2025+. **95.**

The 1947 Vintage

In contrast to the utterly classic 1949s, the 1947s are the product of a fine, hot summer and absolutely torrid temperatures during harvest. The heat in mid-September meant that the grapes were brought in to the cellars in extreme heat, and there was no temperature control back in those days, so some fermentations were a bit problematic. That said, there are some

superb '47s out there, but showing a bit of a "roasted" edge to them these days. They are big, strapping, old-fashioned Burgundies that are the paradigm of old vintages for some tasters, but I have always gravitated to the more elegantly styled vintages. That said, at least the last few '47s I have tasted have shown no signs of slowing down any time soon and continue to drink very well.

1947 Musigny- Domaine des Comte de Vogüé (mise Maison Joseph Drouhin)

These bottles surfaced in Europe several years ago and there was some speculation as to whether or not they were in fact genuine. I do not know if the jury is still out on these wines or not, but I have had the good fortune to taste them on a few occasions and they seem completely consistent to my palate with the domaine-bottled version I have tasted from these vintages from the Comte de Vogüé. The nose on this Drouhin-bottled version of the '47 offers up an excellent and very complex nose of backed cherries, red currants, ginger, heather, stony soil tones, a touch of rosemary and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively pure and focused, with a lovely core of fruit, tertiary complexity and still a bit of old school tannins perking up the very long and complex finish. This is utterly consistent with the couple of bottles of the '47 I have tasted that were domaine-bottled and is a superb example of the '47 vintage. 2008-2035. **94.**

1947 Richebourg- Maison Camille Giroud

The 1947 Richebourg from Camille Giroud is another older wine from the cellars here that in my opinion was topped up with a bit of younger juice somewhere along the way of its cellaring life. The nose is quite nice, offering up a mature and complex mélange of dried black cherries, venison, *sous bois*, herb tones, a deep base of soil and malty and nutty tones that suggest that the wine is getting towards the end of its plateau. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with again, a touch of backend bitterness on the long finish. This is an perfectly respectable bottle of old Burgundy, but it seems a bit generic in profile on both the nose and palate and does not possess the breed one expects in a venerable bottle of Richebourg. 2011-2030. **88.**

1947 Pommard "Premier Cru"- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 1947 Pommard "Premier Cru" from Joseph Drouhin is a lovely example of the vintage that shows less of the overtly "roasted" character that is so prevalent with this vintage in Burgundy and more purity and transparency than is customary. The very lovely nose wafts from the glass in a mélange of cherries, heather, *sous bois*, coffee, lovely spice tones and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and tangy, with lovely transparency, fine focus and balance and a long, classy and *à point* finish. This is a lovely bottle of old Pommard that still has plenty of life in it. 2008-2025+. **91.**

The 1945 Vintage

The 1945 is a great classic vintage for red Burgundy. The yields were low, and bottling was a real issue with the glass shortages in the immediate wake of World War II, but the wines that remain are still lovely wines. The low yields have given an almost "candied" quality to the fruit of many '45s which I have tasted in the past, which is a very fine characteristic and which I expect one day will be replicated in the 2010s at a similar age. The last few '45s I have tasted have been absolutely lovely wines, with the best offering up the depth, complexity that only the greatest of red Burgundy vintages can deliver.

1945 Chambolle-Musigny “les Charmes”- Maison Bouchard Père et Fils

The 1945 Chambolle “Charmes” from Bouchard Père et Fils is holding on very nicely and is still a lovely drink. The very pretty and tertiary nose offers up a complex mélange of dried black cherries, charred earth, damp soil tones, gamebirds and just a whisper of the maltiness of Burgundian old age. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and still has plenty of sweet fruit at the core (a touch from chapitalization no doubt in these days), with fine focus, lovely complexity and very good length and grip on the finish. This is not a profound old wine, but a very good one that has stood the test of time and is still very tasty. 2011-2020+. **87.**

1945 Musigny- Domaine des Comte de Vogüé (mise Maison Joseph Drouhin)

It embarrasses me a bit to say that I have drunk a fair bit of the 1945 Comte de Vogüé Musigny, but I have been fortunate to come across this wine with some regularity over the course of my wine-drinking days. This was the second time I had tasted this wine with the “*mise a Joseph Drouhin*” label on it and the wine has shown beautifully both times that I had the chance to sample it. Stylistically, it reminds me more of the 1945 straight Musigny bottled by Comte de Vogüé in this vintage, rather than the Cuvée Vieilles Vignes, as the domaine produced two distinct bottlings of Musigny in 1945. This most recent bottle offers up a deep and old-fashioned nose of black cherries, dark berries, leather, a touch of burnt candle, woodsmoke, persimmons, singed heather and autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and old fashioned in style, with a plush core of old fruit, lovely soil inflection, beautifully-integrated acids and just a whisper of tannin on the long and complex finish. This wine has the faintest touch of maltiness showing up on the backend, suggesting that perhaps the wine is just beginning to slide down the further side of its plateau. A beautiful wine. 2008-2030+. **95.**

1945 Musigny Cuvée Vieilles Vignes- Domaine des Comte de Vogüé (served from magnum)

I assume that back in the 1940s, Comte de Vogüé would sell off barrels of the production of their younger vines in Musigny, and this is where the bottling from Joseph Drouhin came from that is commented on above. I have also on one occasion tasted a non-old vine bottling of Musigny from Comte de Vogüé in this vintage, so there was a small window when the domaine produced two distinct Musigny cuvées. I have had a few bottles of the '45 Musigny Vieilles Vignes from Comte de Vogüé that were even more profound than this magnum, which was still very good indeed, but not quite as sublime as the absolutely perfect versions of this wine I have tried. This particular magnum was very, very good, offering up scents of red and black cherries, heather, gamebirds, coffee, fresh herb tones, woodsmoke, *sous bois* and a bit of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very pure, with a fine core of fruit, lovely focus and balance and a very, very long, deep and vigorous finish that structurally is perfectly resolved, but remains charged with plenty of future longevity. Fine juice. 2008-2030+. **95.**

1945 Beaune “Premier Cru Cuvée Rouge”- Maison Voillemand

I do not know anything about the history of this producer, as this was a bottle I crossed paths with at a Paulée in Beaune several years ago. The wine was old-fashioned and hanging on to life tenaciously, offering up a tertiary nose of roasted game, rather anonymous black fruit, herb tones and scorched earth. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, four-square and quite sturdy in style, with respectable mid-palate depth, and good length and grip in a rather straightforward interpretation of Beaune. This is okay, but no better. However, it showed no signs of collapsing any time soon. 2006-2020+? **83.**

1945 Volnay “Clos des Chênes”- Domaine Henri Lafarge

The 1945 Clos des Chênes was still labeled under the name of Michel Lafarge’s father, Henri Lafarge, and was the oldest example I have ever had the pleasure to taste of this superb

bottling. The bouquet is deep, pure and beautifully tertiary, soaring from the glass in an almost meaty mélange of black cherries, charred wood, forest floor, black truffles, game, a beautifully complex base of soil and a touch of fresh walnut. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and magically complex, with great vigor and purity, stunning focus and detail and surprisingly, still a touch of tannin adding grip on the very, very long and velvety finish. I have not had a lot of 1945 red Burgundies, but the best I have had the good fortune to taste rank amongst the greatest mature wines I have ever had the pleasure to taste. The 1945 Lafarge Clos des Chênes still has decades of life in it. 2011-2030+. **95.**

The 1938 Vintage

According to Michael Broadbent, 1938 was a late harvested vintage, with grapes brought in mid-to-later October. By the time the vintage was ready for bottling in 1940, there were already issues with glass shortages and some wines stayed in cask for an extended period of time. I have only had one 1938 in recent times, but it was lovely.

1938 Clos des Lambrays

The 1938 Clos des Lambrays is a beautiful old example of this great *terroir* and continues to drink well, albeit in a more delicate style that is perfectly understandable in a seventy year-old wine. The deep, tertiary and gorgeous nose offers up scents of desiccated cherries and red berries, a nice touch of nuttiness, *sous bois*, woodsmoke, grilled venison and a lovely base of minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and still tangy, with lovely intensity of flavor, superb complexity and fine focus on the very long and ethereal finish. The ripeness here seems to have been more moderate, rather than very ripe, but the wine must have possessed superb balance right from the start, as it is still a truly delicious bottle of mature Burgundy for current consumption. Lovely wine. 2008-2025+? **93.**

The 1937 Vintage

1937 is one of the greatest vintages of the entire century, but I have not tasted many in the last half dozen years. It was a short crop of small berries, and according to old timers, the '37s possessed great depth and purity from the outset. The great bottles of '37 Burgundy that I have been lucky enough to taste over the years have to rank up with the very greatest wines I have ever had the pleasure to taste.

1937 Volnay “Cuvée Blondeau”- Hospices de Beaune (Camille Giroud)

The 1937 Cuvée Blondeau is a nice old bottle of Burgundy that is still drinking quite well. The mature bouquet offers up scents of dried berries, *sous bois*, coffee, smoke, herb tones and soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite autumnal in tone, with a good core of fruit, melted tannins and just a touch of backend bitterness keeping the score down a touch on the backend. This was certainly recorked periodically in the cellars of Camille Giroud over the years, and in my opinion it was probably freshened up a bit each time, as this was quite customary at many houses in this era in Burgundy. But, that said, it is still a tasty bottle of old Burgundy that should continue to drink quite well into the foreseeable future. 2011-2030. **88.**

The 1934 Vintage

1934 is one of the top Burgundy vintages of this decade of the twentieth century and I have had some absolutely stellar examples of the vintage over the years. The '34s may not be

quite up to the quality of the '37s- one of the reference point vintages for the entire century- but they are lovely wines that have aged very well indeed. However, my luck was not so good with the few '34s that have crossed my path in the last few years, as none of these bottles was up to expectations. That said, good bottles of 1934 red Burgundies should still be drinking beautifully well and in no imminent threat of decline.

1934 Romanée-St.-Vivant- Maison Gaston Boisseaux

The 1934 Romanée-St.-Vivant from Gaston Boisseaux is an old, blended wine of some kind that is not particularly good. The complex and meaty nose offers up scents of anonymous black fruit, bonfires, grilled meats, forest floor and a touch of inkiness. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, vigorous and certainly not entirely pinot noir, let alone RSV. The finish is reasonably long, but the wine is a chunky, old-fashioned, dishonest wine. It is not physically dead, but it was spiritually dead at bottling. 2007-2020+? **78.**

1934 Volnay “Champans”- Domaine de Marquis d’Angerville

This particular bottle of the 1934 Champans from the Marquis d’Angerville was on the cusp of decline, offering up a nose of strawberries, citrus, toffee, *sous bois*, fresh nutmeg and a bit of maltiness from imminent oxidation. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, round, long and sweet, with no remaining tannin, sound acids and again, just a touch of oxidation poking through on the backend. I am sure this was a beautiful wine in its day, but (if this bottle is representative), then this wine has been gently sliding down the far side of the plateau into decline for several decades already. But, maybe there are better bottles out there. Drink up? **86.**

1934 Volnay “Clos des Ducs”- Domaine de Marquis d’Angerville

This bottle of the 1934 Clos des Ducs was in about the same condition as the Champans, thought it also showed a bit of acetone when first opened that had to blow off before the wine could be enjoyed. Again, full-blown oxidation here is just around the corner, but there remains some intriguing elements on both the nose and palate that make the wine actually not too bad to drink (even in this fragile stage). The bouquet is a blend of red berries, tea leaves, orange rind, toffee and bonfires. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and complex on the attack, but structurally quite fragile. The finish is longer than the Champans, but again, with a bit of maltiness from oxidation now starting to creep in. I would love to see both these '34s from the Marquis d’Angerville today in magnums, as they might just be stunning wines! ??? **85.**

The 1926 Vintage

Michael Broadbent indicates that 1926 was a drought vintage, but this affected the yields as much as the quality. I have not had any 1926s that I can recall from Burgundy, other than the lovely Pommard commented on below.

1926 Pommard “les Charmots”- Domaine Louis Voilland

The 1926 les Charmots from Louis Voilland is drinking beautifully well and still has lots of life still in it, which is pretty amazing, considering that this great old wine is now eighty-six years of age and does not hail from one of the Pommard premier crus renowned for their longevity. The deep, complex and impressively vibrant nose wafts from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, game, singed heather, beautiful herb tones, *sous bois*, a touch of leather and just a whisper of maltiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and shows great vigor for its age, with a good core, melted tannins, sound acids and superb length and grip on the complex and autumnal finish. A beautiful example of the 1926 vintage, which was

produced from a short crop due to difficult flowering and drought conditions during the summer. Obviously, those bottles still around have stood the test of time very well indeed. 2012-2025. **93.**

The 1924 Vintage

1924 is not purported to be a good vintage, as it was a relatively cool summer and the weather was far from ideal at harvest. That said, the only previous 1924 that I had tried, the Romanée-St.-Vivant from Louis Latour, had been absolutely magnificent. This bottle of Clos des Mouches was not in the same league, but that may have been as much the fault of an old cork as anything else.

1924 Beaune “Clos des Mouches”- Maison Joseph Drouhin

This particular bottle of '24 Clos des Mouches was getting a touch cuspy and showing a bit of oxidative tones on both the nose and palate, but there was also some flavor interest here as well and the wine was far from completely gone. The slightly malty nose offers up scents of dried black cherries, dark berries, chocolate, *sous bois*, coffee, tea leaves and dried citrus peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and striving to hang on, with a nice core, lovely, autumnal complexity and good length and grip on the soft and bouncy finish. This faded in the glass after about fifteen minutes, but it was really not a bad drink during that time and there may well be fresher bottles or magnums out there. ??? **86.**

The 1921 Vintage

According to Michael Broadbent, 1921 was “an exceptionally hot summer” which produced an early harvest in Burgundy. I have not had a lot of experience with '21s, but this bottle of Clos des Lambrays was stunning and still had decades of life ahead of it.

1921 Clos des Lambrays

The 1921 Clos des Lambrays is one of the oldest pristine bottle I have tasted from this great estate and the wine was absolutely stunning when served in November of 2011. The brilliant and magically understated nose wafts from the glass in an ethereal mélange of cherries, a touch of dark berry, candle wax, coffee, heather, woodsmoke and a beautifully complex base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, tertiary and very intensely flavored, with magical complexity, great purity and harmony, no remaining tannins, sound acids and stunning focus on the very, very long, refined and smoky finish. This is a great old vintage of Clos des Lambrays! 2011-2030+. **94.**

The 1919 Vintage

The 1919 vintage was a great, classic vintage for red Burgundy, with a short crop producing wines of great terroir and potential for longevity. Prior to this superb bottle, I had only tasted one previous example of the 1919 vintage that was in good shape, a Chambertin from Domaine Armand Rousseau. Apparently, 1919 was particularly strong in the vineyard of Chambertin! Perfectly stored bottles from this vintage still have plenty of life in them.

1919 Chambertin- Domaine Thomas-Bassot

Readers may recall way back in Issue One the feature on the Ruchottes-Chambertin bottlings from Domaines Mugneret-Gibourg, Rousseau and Roumier. All of their parcels in Ruchottes hail back to Domaine Thomas-Bassot, who was one of the most important vineyard

owners in the Côte de Nuits in the first half of the twentieth century. This 1919 Chambertin is a beautiful old bottle, offering up a very refined and stunningly complex bouquet of dried strawberries, raspberries, *sous bois*, tea leaves, coffee, game, fallen leaves and a gentle topnote of vinesmoke. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, deep and intensely flavored, with flawless balance and focus, lovely complexity and a very long, ethereal finish. This is a brilliant old bottle of Chambertin that shows no signs of imminent decline. 2007-2022+. **95.**

The 1911 Vintage

The 1911 vintage, according to Michael Broadbent, was another absolutely superb year, and one of the best until the great decade of the 1920s here. Warm, perfect summer and ideal ripening conditions leading up to an early harvest of concentrated grapes. This was the first 1911 red Burgundy I had ever had the pleasure to taste.

1911 Richebourg- Maison Montay

I have no idea who Maison Montay was back in the very early years of the twentieth century, but I assume this was a small *négociant* who is no longer around. This 1911 Richebourg is an old and venerable bottle that shows a very small amount of oxidation on both the nose and palate, which will probably be part of its profile for the remainder of its years, but beyond this oxidative touch, the wine is remarkably vigorous and complex. The deep nose shows just a touch of maltiness in its mélange of plums, coffee, woodsmoke, venison, tea leaves and *sous bois*. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced still, with impressive mid-palate depth for its age, a broad spectrum of fine, mature old Richebourg flavors and most impressive length and grip on the velvety finish. Other than the very faint touch of maderization here, this wine is remarkably fine for its age and a really fine glass of Richebourg. 2007-2020+? **91.**

The 1908 Vintage

I can find no information on the 1908 Burgundy vintage, but I assume that it was not a great year. However, this particular bottle of 1908 was quite fine and still had plenty of life in it.

1908 Romanée-St.-Vivant- Domaine Thomas-Moillard

This is by a wide margin the oldest bottle of wine I have ever had the pleasure to taste from Domaine Thomas-Moillard and it was lovely. The deep and complex nose offers up a black fruity mélange of dried dark berries, heather, cola, forest floor, charred wood, espresso and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, long and beautifully complex, with sound acids, superb focus and outstanding length and grip on the silky and dancing finish. This is a beautiful bottle of old RSV that will continue to drink well for several more years. It is nice to see this kind of longevity from the piece of Romanée-St.-Vivant now owned by Domaine Dujac, as it augurs very well for the cellaring potential of their bottling as well. 2007-2020+? **92.**

The 1907 Vintage

1907 was not a great vintage, and following on the heels of the legendary 1906s, it is not hard to imagine that the '07s were probably a bit overlooked at the time, even if they were better than expected. This bottle was absolutely brilliant one a sheer joy to drink.

1907 Clos des Lambrays

The 1907 Clos des Lambrays is clearly one of the greatest very old Burgundies that I have ever had the pleasure to taste, as the wine remains deep and vigorous at age one hundred. The stunningly brilliant nose wafts from the glass in a glorious mélange of dried berries, forest floor, venison, coffee, orange rind, vinesmoke, *sous bois*, tea leaves, porcini and a slightly cheesy quality that I could quite not put my fingers on, but which was totally appealing. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and magically transparent, with stunning intensity of flavor, superb vibrancy and great soil drive on the very, very long, exceptionally complex and tangy finish. This brilliant old vintage of Clos des Lambrays shows absolutely no signs of slowing down any time soon and amazingly, still has several decades of life in it. An utterly brilliant wine! 2007-2040? **96.**

**THE TUMBRILS ROLL FOR CHÂTEAU MAGDELAINE
ONE OF THE LAST CLASSIC ST. ÉMILIONS IS NO LONGER**



It was with great sadness that I received the news last weekend that the Libourne-based firm of Ets. J. P. Moueix, owner of the great St. Émilion property of Château Magdelaine, had petitioned the INAO and won the right to dissolve this historic property into that of its neighbor on the Côtes in St. Émilion, Château Bélair-Monange. While I can certainly understand the mercantile reasons for such a move, as Bélair-Monange sells for a premium over Magdelaine, I must say that the dissolution of Château Magdelaine caught me completely by surprise, as Christian Moueix, the Director of Ets. J. P. Moueix, has been one of the staunchest defenders in the last twenty years of traditionally-styled claret in an era of über excess on the Right Bank. Whether or not the decapitation of Magdelaine signals a dramatic shift in philosophical position for the Moueix firm remains to be seen, but no matter what the future may hold in this regard, there is little doubt that lovers of classic Bordeaux lost one of the greatest Right Bank treasures with the absorption of this jewel of a Premier Grande Cru Classé into its tonier-priced neighbor. While there is little doubt that the vineyards of Magdelaine will seamlessly augment the production of Château Bélair-Monange, as the two properties lie adjacent on the chalky slopes that descend from the ancient village center of St. Émilion, the tragic disappearance of the

Magdelaine estate into the bowels of Château Bélair-Monange heartily calls into question whether or not *terroir* in Bordeaux is a real or a mythical proposition.

The shift of Magdelaine's vineyards to Bélair-Monange will probably allow the Moueix firm to now start to systematically replace the old and not particularly hearty vines at the domaine that were in place when the Moueix team purchased the former Château Bélair a few years ago, and one imagines that this step is envisioned by the firm as necessary to push Bélair-Monange one day up into the top official "A" division of St. Émilion Premier Grand Cru Classés, which was heretofore solely the fiefdom of Châteaux Ausone and Cheval Blanc. For the other piece of disheartening news out of St. Émilion to arrive at the same time is that once serious club of Premier Grand Cru Classés "A" division had been doubled by the inclusion (beginning in 2012) of Châteaux Pavie and Angélu- certainly not the two properties I personally would have entertained promoting with worthy châteaux possessing great track records such as Figeac and Canon at the top of their games and continuing to be snubbed by the power brokers in St. Émilion. But, inclusion in the "A" group in St. Émilion is primarily only important in allowing these two new additions to further raise their prices, and in my opinion, the two wines were already ludicrously over-priced and those foolish enough to buy either wine in the first place deserve to be bilked for a bit more for their fetish in following fashion. But, losing Magdelaine, that is really going to hurt lovers of traditionally-styled Right Bank wines.

Jean-Pierre Moueix, father of Christian, purchased Château Magdelaine in 1952. This was the first of several Right Bank properties that the family firm would buy over the ensuing years, which was originally founded in 1937 and which has prospered along with the fortunes of many of the superb Right Bank estates that it has promoted over the ensuing years. The eleven hectare property of Magdelaine had seemingly always had a warm spot in the family heart, as it was the first piece of wine-producing real estate that the Moueix firm owned outright, but the wine itself had never been as important in the marketplace as several other of the Moueix-owned properties, such as Château Trotanoy or Château Pétrus (now owned by Christian's older brother, Jean-François Moueix). In fact, when I spoke with Christian Moueix during this year's *En Primeur* tasting at the firm's offices in Libourne, he wryly commented that "despite the attachment of Magdelaine fans" such as myself, "the wine had never really captured the imagination of the market." Now, it is pretty easy to see the significance behind that seemingly innocuous comment in the spring. While Bélair-Monange has already shown itself to be a superb property under the direction of the Moueix firm, and will no doubt be even better with the outstanding *terroir* of Magdelaine now at its disposal, the Bordeaux firmament has clearly lost one of the most interesting, soil-driven and uniquely distinctive wines on either side of the Gironde with the death of Magdelaine. While the very essence of the world of wine is to discover and to lose, as wine estates and the people who stand behind them are caught in the temporal vicissitudes of human existence, I have to admit that hearing the news of Magdelaine being hauled off to the guillotine is one of the saddest moments in my career in the world of wine. The 2011 Château Magdelaine will be the last wine from this estate, and the last great classic wine produced here is the stunningly understated, elegant and soil-driven 2008. For fans of this now dead great domaine, it is time to start gobbling up the vintages still in the pipeline, as the already rapidly-thinning ranks of refined St. Émilions have just lost another star producer.