

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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WEINGUT JOHANN JOSEPH PRÜM
ONE OF THE WINE WORLD'S GREATEST ESTATES



Weingut Johann Joseph Prüm, as seen from across the Mosel in the upper reaches of the Wehlener Sonnenuhr.

Weingut Johann Joseph Prüm is one of Germany's greatest estates, and yet this Wehlen-based winery is not particularly old by Mosel standards, having only been founded in 1911. The estate was originally started by Johann Joseph Prüm in this year, as he was the oldest of seven children of Mathias Prüm, with each of Mathias' children inheriting one-seventh of the family vineyard patrimony upon their father's passing and starting out on their own. The plethora of different estates in the middle Mosel with Prüm in their name today is ample evidence of how Mathias Prüm's children's estates have blossomed since the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. While the estate of Johann Joseph Prüm was founded in 1911, it was co-managed from the early 1920s onwards by his son, Sebastian Alois Prüm, who worked alongside of his father and under whose inspired guidance it quickly rose to the very pinnacle of German wine. Sebastian Prüm took over much of the responsibility for the management of the estate at a fairly young age, as his father's health had been seriously ill-affected by the First World War and Johann Joseph Prüm never made a recovery to full health after the war. During his era at the estate, Sebastian Prüm carved out a place for the winery in the middle Mosel that would lay the foundation for today's undisputed excellence, adding important vineyard parcels as they became available in some of the finest *terroirs* in the region and the estate was soon one of the most important of the VDP estates in all of Germany. During his long career, Sebastian Prüm was aided by a small handful of cellar masters at the estate, but after his sudden passing in 1969, his

third oldest son, Dr. Manfred Prüm, assumed the reins of this iconic estate and took over the winemaking responsibilities as well.



Sebastian Prüm had four sons, with his oldest two boys pursuing careers outside of the wine business (one became a lawyer and another a business consultant), and it was left to his third son, Manfred (with later help from his younger brother, Wolfgang Prüm), to carry on the property in the wake of their father's death. As the elder of the two boys working at the family winery, Manfred Prüm, became the director of the estate, and for the first few months, he had the assistance of the last of his father's cellar masters, Horst Frank, who had been hired here in 1963. However, as Sebastian Prüm had passed away in the spring of 1969 and Horst Frank resigned in mid-summer of that same year, Dr. Manfred Prüm was left with the responsibilities for the winemaking at the property at the time of the 1969 harvest. His oldest daughter, Katharina Prüm, who now works alongside of her father at the domaine, reflects that "when my grandfather suddenly passed away in 1969, and then the cellar master left very soon thereafter, I think my father felt that 'fine, everyone is leaving me and I will

just have to do everything here myself in the cellars', and that single-minded determination just continued on year after year." Today, more than forty-five years after his first vintage, Dr. Prüm continues to still have a very active role in the winemaking decisions at the estate, which he has shared with his daughter Katharina since 2003. Ostensibly, Dr. Manfred Prüm is now semi-retired, however, as Katharina quips, "while my father is supposed to be semi-retired, he will never really retire and we still work together on a daily basis and take our winemaking decisions together, after considerable discussion about each and every wine and vintage."

During the course of much of his career, Dr. Manfred Prüm's younger brother, Wolfgang Prüm, has also worked at the estate, with the younger of the two Prüm brothers assisting with some of the commercial side of the family winery, while Manfred Prüm oversaw the vineyards and winemaking in the cellars, as well as being the public persona in the international wine market for Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm. I had heard at times from other wine lovers that the younger Prüm brother had actually been quite involved in the winemaking at the estate, but this turned

out to be inaccurate, as this has always the responsibility of Manfred Prüm from his first vintage at the head of the estate. In 2007, the formal transfer of the direction of the winery was handed over full-time to Dr. Katharina Prüm, after her having been full-time at the estate since 2003, and 2007 was the first vintage where she held the primary responsibility for the winemaking at the property and all of its day to day operations. As she observed, responding to my questions about the winemaking here during her father's years at the helm, "there have often been stories that my uncle, Wolfgang, was the winemaker here, but in fact, since 1969, it has always been my father who made the wines and my uncle was far more involved in assisting with things in the office." Today, Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm (as the estate's name is abbreviated on their tasteful labels) is synonymous with the great Wehlener Sonnenuhr vineyard in the heart of the middle Mosel, where fully forty percent of their twenty hectares of vines are located, but the Prüm family is also very important vineyard owners in other great vineyards such as the Himmelreich in Graach, as well as the beautiful Zeltinger Sonnenuhr and excellent Bernkasteler Badstube. Given the estate's role as the preeminent owner of vines in the Wehlener Sonnenuhr, some of the other great wines produced here from their other vineyards are often a bit overlooked, but there is no doubt that the outstanding quality for which this estate has always been known extends far beyond their Wehlener Sonnenuhr bottlings and includes each and every wine that they produce. It is actually quite refreshing to see, at a time when several other frontline estates in the middle Mosel have sought to focus primarily on their bottlings from a single village where they are best known, that Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm has never considered relinquishing any of their great vineyard holdings beyond the village limits of Wehlen.

Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm is one of the greatest traditionalists to be found in all the German wine world, with the estate long famous for its great, classic Prädikat wines and this is one estate that has done nothing more than dabble on very rare occasions with the trend to produce more drier styled bottlings of Riesling. In much the same way as their colleague Egon Müller has shown no interest in dry Riesling bottlings, this is a property that is very rightly famous for the brilliant quality of their off-dry and sweet wines, and there is really no reason for expect the family to start producing dry wines any time in the future. However, during my visit here this past March to taste and chat with Katharina in preparation for this article, I was quite surprised to hear that there had actually been some very real consideration behind the scenes at the winery to start making a few dry Riesling bottlings here, and that the impetus for perhaps starting to make some dry Rieslings had actually come from Dr. Manfred Prüm! As Katharina recounted, "we have had quite some discussions about whether to produce a bit of dry wine, and my father has been in favor of doing so, as he felt it would serve as a good introduction to the wines of the estate for newer clients who might be more inclined to drinking dry German wines, rather than the classic Prädikat wines, but I have been opposed to our doing so." She continued, "while we could make some very good dry Rieslings from our vineyards, as many of our colleagues do in the Mosel these days, there are so many places in the world of wine where one can make very fine dry white wines- for instance, when I am in Austria or Alsace, I will always order a dry Riesling- but, in this section of the Mosel, we have the possibility to make our traditional sweeter wines that really cannot be made in the same style or with the same quality as here, other than in some of the other very top wine regions in Germany, and I think that it makes more sense to focus on the wines that are so unique to our *terroirs* and region and which we have made very well for so long."

To my mind, this is a very logical and intelligent decision on the part of Katharina Prüm, as the winery has produced such brilliantly complex and ageworthy classic Prädikat wines for more than a century and there is really no reason to change that today. Of course, this great track record for the wines of Joh. Jos. Prüm is also the reason that the estate can continue to produce wines exclusively in the noble sweeter styles, as the winery has long had a very good visibility in all the top international wine markets and had already been synonymous with excellent German wines for many decades prior to my first entering the wine business, which now is more than thirty-five years ago. This is a luxury that not all top estates in the Mosel can afford these days, as if an estate's clients are asking consistently for more dry Riesling, one often needs to shift some priorities in the cellars to make a bit more dry wine and keep those clients content, but happily this is not the case at Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm. In fact, the only dry Rieslings ever produced here have been a few bottlings over the years that Dr. Manfred Prüm agreed to make for good, longtime clients of the estate who had specifically requested them in advance of a specific vintage. So, a couple of "special order" dry wines have been crafted here from time to time in the past, but this has been a very, very infrequent occurrence and really must be seen as Dr. Manfred Prüm doing a favor for an old friend, rather than an inclination of the winery to dip its toe in the water of dry Riesling production. In fact, along with Weingut Egon Müller, Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm is one of the pillars of great sweet German Riesling production and the two estates occupy a position of great classical excellence that is not a whole lot dissimilar from the important historical distinction enjoyed by a small handful of other iconic estates around the wine globe who are synonymous with their own respective regions.

As one of the greatest estates in the middle Mosel, Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm has long been one of the staunch supporters for the classic balance and style of the wines from this beautiful corner of the wine world, and Dr. Manfred Prüm has often been a very outspoken advocate for recognizing some of the key elements in the production of these "lighter than air" Rieslings that have long made the Middle Mosel so famous. This is particularly true of classically styled Kabinette wines, which are so light on their feet, yet possess such wonderful intensity of flavor in their medium-bodied formats, and which seem to be increasingly difficult to find in this day and age of climate change and different viticultural tendencies in recent times in Germany. One of the most important elements in many of the finest Kabinette that have been produced here since the early 1970s revolves around the issue of yields, which Dr. Manfred Prüm has always advocated should not be too low if one wants to continue to produce these beautifully ethereal bottlings, and it is often attributed to him that "one hundred hectoliters per hectare is what we need if we are going to be able to make classically excellent Kabinette." When I mentioned this to Julian Haart in Piesport on my most recent trip to the Mosel in the spring of 2015, he laughed and said "yes, Dr. Prüm has often said this, but what he really means is that one has to have old vines and higher yields to get this great intensity that he gets in his Kabinette, and in reality, though he claims he gets one hundred hectoliters per hectare, with his old vines and the tiny bunches that one always gets from old vines, he is really not getting yields quite that high in his vineyards from which he is producing his Kabinette." But, Herr Haart concurs that the combination of old vines and higher yields are the necessary building blocks to make the classically delicate and ethereal style of Kabinette.

It is still unclear how the new VDP regulations on lower yields in the greatest vineyard sites will ultimately affect the production of old school Kabinette from the top estates, as making

lower yields mandatory in the grand cru vineyards seems antithetical to making classically styled, delicate and filigreed examples of Kabinett. I took the opportunity while preparing this article to pose this question to Katharina Prüm and her father, as their estate has long been synonymous with brilliantly made Kabinette and I was very curious to hear their thoughts on this subject. Katharina responded to my questions about this issue by observing that “this is a very complex subject,” but, “in general, we feel it is impossible to name a certain number on yields determining the quality of wines” and which, in effect, is what the new VDP regulations are attempting to do. As she continued, expressing the philosophy of both her father and herself, “it is not possible because you have to consider the shape of the vineyards (flat – steep), the density of the planting, the sort and structure of soil, the climate conditions etc. and the question is also what you want to reach” with the grapes from each parcel. “If your aim is only to produce super-concentrated wines, you voluntarily will aim for lower yields” Katharina explains, “but sometimes you need certain yields to still reach some lightness /elegance in the wines, or to extend the ripening period.” It would also seem important to have ungrafted vines as well, as these seem to be able to better translate complexity into the finished wines at higher yields, or at least that was the impression that Julian Haart left me with after we had discussed this question at his domaine during my March trip.



Dr. Katharina Prüm, the fourth generation to head the iconic Weingut Johann Joseph Prüm.

Katharina Prüm continued on the subject of yields and traditionally-styled Prädikat wines in the middle Mosel, “a famous Geisenheim Professor once gave the statement that Riesling is the most yield-resistant grape varietal, by which he meant that there is no such rule that you cannot produce a good Riesling if you exceed a certain yield number.” She is quick to add that “of course, you should not exaggerate, but Riesling is much more flexible than Burgundy varietals for example” and “consequently, we experiment with different yields in our vineyards.” I asked her what the family’s philosophy is when it comes to Kabinett wines, as I was curious to hear how parcels were selected (or not) when considering producing a Kabinett in a specific vineyard or vintage. Much of this curiosity had originated in a conversation I had with Egon Müller earlier this year on this subject, as he had noted that “in our family, we have never selected for Kabinett, as this was always the *wine of the vintage*, after we had selected for higher Prädikat wines during the harvest.” The Prüm family has taken a different approach when it comes to producing top flight Kabinett, as Katharina observes that “for us, Kabinette, Spätlesen and Auslesen are all of the same importance” and Kabinett style wines have always been important at the domaine since its earliest vintages. She notes that decisions about what wines will be produced from which parcels are all very much dependent on the style of the vintage, and that this varies dramatically from year to year, and “we always try to produce the best wines possible in each year, and do not have a certain aim of how much of this or that Prädikat we want to produce.” She noted that, for example, that “there are years like 2013 when we nearly only produce Auslesen (and upper Prädikate), and there are other years when the focus is on Kabinette and Spätlesen.”

As we continued our discussion, Katharina Prüm mentioned that the family typically prefers not to make multiple passes through the same sections of vineyards during harvest time, unlike some of their colleagues, but instead, they will often make their selection right as they pick the grapes, and “depending on the conditions, harvest with two buckets for different ripeness and/or concentration levels.” By this technique, certain bunches can be placed in the basket that may produce a Spätlese or an Auslese, and another basket used for grapes that will be targeted for a different Prädikat level. Of course, all of this is prepared in advance, as Katharina and her father are out in the vineyards tasting grapes with great frequency leading up to starting the picking, as she notes that “the key decision as to when to pick a parcel is always made sensory, i.e. by tasting the grapes.” She continues, “of course there are some parcels in which it is more likely than others that we will harvest Kabinette than in others, but we do not have determined ‘Kabinett-parcels’, or Spätlese- or Auslese-parcels since the conditions vary too much from year to year and simply depend on too many differing factors.” The estate has long made beautiful Kabinett level wines, which prior to the adoption of the German Wine Laws in 1971, were simply labeled by the estate with the name of the village and vineyard on the front label (i.e. Wehlener Sonnenuhr) and were called either “Naturwein” or “Original Kellerabzug” on the side labels, as Kabinett was the term that was adopted to replace these two terms for this level of wines in 1971. Given the reverence with which the Joh. Jos. Prüm Kabinette bottlings are often spoken about by other top winegrowers in Germany, this is clearly one of their house specialties. Certainly the Prüm family has long produced some of the most cellar-worthy and long-lived examples of Kabinett that one can find in all of Germany, with these bottlings made to the same exacting standards of great structural integrity as higher Prädikat wines here and the possibility to age a Joh. Jos. Prüm Kabinett for half a century or more is clearly prevalent in these wines.

The original vineyard parcels that the winery started with in 1911 totaled up to about five hectares of vines, as Johann Joseph Prüm inherited approximately 2.5 hectares from his father Mathias as his share of the family's seventeen hectares of vines (that were divided evenly amongst his seven children) and his wife, Franziska Prüm, also came from a winegrowing family and brought about the same number of hectares of vineyard holdings when the winery was officially founded in 1911. As Katharina Prüm recounts, "later, Johann Josef, his son Sebastian, my father and myself have all bought additional vineyards when there was an opportunity, both from relatives (i.e. vineyards from the previous family domaine) as well as other, non-related owners." One of the original plots that the winery was founded upon is in the Zeltinger Sonnenuhr, which was actually a *Monopole* of Weingut Mathias Prüm in the first decade of the twentieth century and Johann Joseph Prüm actually received half of this vineyard as part of his original 2.5 hectares of vines after his father's passing. A handful of years after founding his winery in 1911, Johann Joseph was also able to buy the parcel of one of his brothers who had inherited the other half of the Zeltinger Sonnenuhr from their father, so the vineyard was a *Monopole* of Weingut J. J. Prüm as well for a period of time in the first half of the twentieth century. Keep in mind that with the adoption of the German Wine Laws in 1971, many of the top vineyard sites were greatly expanded from their original delimitations, and this was certainly the case with the vineyard of the Zeltinger Sonnenuhr, so the Prüm *Monopole* here in 1930, for instance, was not the same size vineyard as the Sonnenuhr today. While the Prüm family has always focused on purchasing more of the Wehlener Sonnenuhr when prime plots have become available over the years, their nearly two hectares in the Badstube vineyard were not bought, but arrived at the estate through marriage, as Katharina's grandmother's family owned these vines in Bernkastel. When Sebastian Prüm married his wife, Katharina Erz in 1928, she brought along some of her family's holdings in the Badstube and the first vintage produced from this parcel of vines at Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm would have been in 1928 (though back in this era, the wines would have been labeled as either Bernkasteler "Lay" or Bernkasteler "Bräthenhofchen"). The family's original five hectares of vines in 1911 also included a very small slice in the Himmelreich vineyard in Graach, as Mathias Prüm's wife's family came from this village and owned a wine estate here.

Today, Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm has an enviable lineup of great vineyard holdings in the heart of the middle Mosel, for as I mentioned above, the estate now has fully twenty hectares of vines, with eight hectares in the Wehlener Sonnenuhr, for which they are most famous, as well as nearly nine hectares in the superb Himmelreich vineyard in Graach, nearly two hectares in the Badstube vineyard in Bernkastel and just under a hectare of vines in the lovely Sonnenuhr vineyard in Zeltingen (which lies between Wehlen and Ürzig). Over the years, the family has always been keen to add a bit more Himmelreich as it became available (if the quality of the parcel was exemplary), and their holdings here have grown quite a bit in the past decades, with the last parcel that Katharina Prüm was able to purchase here arriving in 2013. As she observes about the Himmelreich, "when there were opportunities to acquire land neighboring ours, or fitting in with our quality profile" the estate has not hesitated to expand their holdings in this great *terroir*, and this philosophy was already prevalent as far back as the 1920s, when her grandfather bought significantly more land in the Himmelreich. For most of the last century, the estate's vineyards have been planted primarily to very old vines- eighty to a hundred years of age is far from uncommon for the Prüm vineyards, and almost all of these are planted on indigenous root stocks, as the need to graft onto American rootstocks to prevent phylloxera has heretofore

never been needed on the steep, grey slate slopes found in the middle Mosel. In recent times, the German wine authorities have prohibited planting on indigenous root systems, as climate change has perhaps opened the door for phylloxera to one day possibly take root on the Mosel, but the Prüm family undertook most of their replanting needs prior to this and Katharina Prüm notes that today “approximately ninety-eight percent of our vines are ungrafted”. There is quite unanimous agreement amongst German winegrowers that it is vastly preferable to have one’s vines on these indigenous rootstocks, for added complexity and refinement in the resulting wines, and I imagine that an estate so beautifully steeped in traditions as Weingut Johann Joseph Prüm was happy to complete much of their replanting needs on indigenous rootstocks prior to the prohibition against ungrafted vines.

While the winery has long been known for its support for higher yields, older vines and classically refined and filigreed Prädikat wines, there has been a steady change over in the cellars over the course of Dr. Manfred Prüm’s time as the director of the estate, away from old wooden fuders for fermentation and towards the use of stainless steel tanks. As Katharina Prüm recounted, “the change was never systematic or wholesale in the cellars away from old casks and towards stainless steel tanks, as my father would simply need to replace an old wooden cask at some point in time, and stainless steel would be the preferable replacement- once they were developed and available in the market- and as he was quite content with the results that he was achieving with the wines fermented and raised in stainless steel- once he had a few in the cellars, it was logical to continue on in this direction and eventually, over the course of several decades, all of the old casks had been replaced with stainless steel.” However, one thing that has never changed here is the use of indigenous yeasts for spontaneous fermentations, as cultured yeasts are not seen in the eyes of the Prüm family as delivering comparably fine results. The wines have always been made also in a quite reductive style, as each generation of the family in charge of the winemaking direction of the estate has sought to craft wines that aged as long and gracefully as only Riesling can do (which, along with Chenin Blanc, is certainly the longest-lived white wine grape variety), and the Prüms have never seen the reason to not make every decision in the cellar with an eye towards the ultimate quality and longevity of each and every wine that they have fashioned down through the decades.

Consequently, the wines invariably start out life tightly-knit, fairly inexpressive aromatically (at least in comparison to what lies in wait twenty or thirty years down the road!) and destined for a long life in bottle, with fine structures, lovely acidity and great transparency down to their underlying *terroir*. The early reductive aromatics and flavors of a young J. J. Prüm wine are often confused with sulfur when young (which the wines also have in sufficient, but not excessive quantity), but these are far more a result of the very reductive winemaking style the house has always followed and which have paid such rich rewards since 1911. As Katharina says, “if you are looking to make very long-lived white wines, oxygen early on is definitely not desirable, and so we have always sought to craft our wines with a reductive winemaking style to give them the potential for very long lives in bottle.” She is quick to add, “of course, we really do very little in the cellars during the winemaking, as our work is really all done either in the vineyards during the course of the growing season, or when it is time to do the blending at the end of the winemaking process- in between, we have very little to really do and nothing that we can add to the equation during this time.”

Though all of the *terroirs* that the Prüm family has worked with for so long are slate-based, they are all a bit different and the resulting wines from each vineyard are quite distinct in character. The Badstube in Bernkastel always seems to produce the most forward of all the bottlings from Joh. Jos. Prüm (this is of course relative, as all the wines here have very long lives), with its lively structure and zesty spine of acidity accented by lime and green apple tones, a fine signature of slate and often a bit of citrus zest and floral topnotes. The Zeltinger Sonnenuhr, which lies alongside the Sonnenuhr vineyard in Wehlen and is really a continuation of that majestic hillside, is perhaps the most inherently elegant site of all the Prüm family holdings, and I have long had a love affair with the great example of Zeltinger Sonnenuhr. It is a pity that the estate has such small holdings in this great *terroir*, for as a result one seldom sees this bottling in the market and I have to imagine that a significant percentage of each vintage's production from the Zeltinger Sonnenuhr here goes to long-time private clients of the estate. To my palate, the wines from this vineyard tend to be a bit more complex than the Badstube, with simply gorgeous fruit tones redolent of pear, apple and white cherries (at higher Prädikat levels), to go along with a very floral signature, refined slate and just a whiff of the vanilla bean tones that so often define the wines from its next door neighbor of Wehlener Sonnenuhr. In the hands of the Prüm family, the Zeltinger Sonnenuhr is clearly one of the great *terroirs* in all of Germany and this is one of the gems in their amazing lineup of wines and probably their best-kept secret.

Despite my very real passion for the Zeltinger Sonnenuhr wines at the estate, there is little debate that their two greatest vineyard holdings are the Graacher Himmelreich and the Wehlener Sonnenuhr. It is noteworthy that, in recent times, when so many of the great VDP estates in Germany have been encouraged to consolidate their holdings primarily in one village (often at the behest of German wine officials looking to more fully rationalize the small, scattered holdings in so many of the top vineyards in German wine country), the Prüm family has actively sought to purchase more vines in the Himmelreich in Graach in the last couple of decades, rather than to simply focus on the Wehlener Sonnenuhr. As Katharina Prüm recalls, "Johann Josef also inherited a smaller portion of vineyards in Graach" than in the other villages in which he had parcels of vines to start out in 1911, with "these coming from Johann Josef's mother's – or Mathias Prüm's wife's – family, who came from Graach." She continues, "we do not know details about the original size" of the vineyard parcel in the Himmelreich, but by "the 1920s our family already had bought a good portion of additional vineyards in Graach, probably around one hectare." Today, the Himmelreich is the Prüm family's largest vineyard holding, at approximately nine hectares of vines, and it is clearly one of the great bottlings to be found in the middle Mosel. All of the Himmelreich bottlings that I have had the pleasure to taste from Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm have always been quintessential expressions of this vineyard, with their tightly-knit youthful structures eventually blossoming to offer up lovely fruit tones of apple, tangerine and lime, as well as great, often crystalline expressions of the underlying slate here, citrus zest, floral tones and a bit of petrol in their youth. In the tradition of the estate, the Prüm wines from the Himmelreich are always very long-lived wines, and though perhaps not quite as age-worthy as those from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr, they too start out life youthfully reticent and really do not start to come truly into their own until they have had at least a decade of bottle age. In my tastings for this article, it was really interesting to see just how exotic the aromatics on the Himmelreich bottlings can become once the wines are more than twenty years of age, with several showing a distinctive botanical shading that was quite reminiscent of mature wines from the superb Herrenberg vineyard of Maximin Grünhäuser.



Looking down at the Mosel from the midst of the Wehlener Sonnenuhr vineyard.

However, despite the parcels in the Himmelreich now being the largest of the vineyard holdings of the Prüm family, there is no denying that the estate is absolutely synonymous with the Wehlener Sonnenuhr. With eight hectares of vines in the heart and soul of this great, grey slate hillside, this is the wine that one most often thinks about when Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm is mentioned. The wines here start out life very much defined by their structural elements, as the Sonnenuhr produces some of the deepest and longest-lived wines to be found in all of Germany. Given the combination of the vineyard site and the preference of the Prüm family to always produce very age-worthy wines, young Wehlener Sonnenuhr here is often quite an inexpressive wine out of the blocks, with all of its inherent complexity and grandiosity quite nicely hidden behind the fine structural elements of snappy acids, almost monolithic slate tones, petrol and pure, but quite primary fruit notes of pear, apple and white cherries. The Wehlener Sonnenuhr also seems to produce a youthful note of vanilla bean in most wines, and which is utterly unique to this *terroir* (other than on the rare occasions when one can find a bit of this character in the neighboring Zeltinger Sonnenuhr), and which often can evolve with bottle age into notes of pastry cream and almonds. Like almost all top German Prädikat wines, the Prüm family's bottlings of Wehlener Sonnenuhr can be quite accessible and tasty in their earlier years, but the true depth, complexity and breed of this *terroir* really only arrives within the fullness of time, and twenty years of bottle age is really a good place to start drinking the wines from this vineyard site. I should add that I learned this the hard way, as back in my early days in the wine

trade, I used to buy and drink on the young side a lot of the Prüm family's wines from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr. It is only in more recent times that I have learned the lesson to eschew early pleasure in favor of allowing these wines to fully reach their magical peaks of maturity from ages twenty to fifty and beyond, for there is little doubt that a top vintage of Wehlener Sonnenuhr from Weingut Prüm is one of the longest-lived bottlings to be found in all of Germany.

This article has been long overdue in View From the Cellar, as the wines from Weingut Johann Joseph Prüm were some of the first truly world class wines that I ever had the pleasure to drink when I began to work in the wine trade all those years ago. Back in those days, in the early 1980s, German wines were generally sold very differently here in the United States than is the custom today, as brokers in Germany would often float the wines of the most famous VDP estates to importers around the globe (whose specialty most of the time back in the day would have been Bordeaux), who would add their margins and reprint the listing to offer to their own clients. It was very rare for most importers to actually taste the wines prior to offering them, and it would not be uncommon for the distributors here to simply add more cases onto the order of the wines that they had received the largest orders for from their initial offering, so as to have some stocks on this side of the Atlantic. Of course, with no one having actually tasted the wines along the way, it was sometimes hard for the sales staff to sell the additional stocks in the warehouses, and periodically, retail buyers such as myself would see discounted offerings pop up of some of the finest German estates' wines from top vintages, as the accounting department at the importer might start to complain about the slow pace of sales of certain wines in inventory. I had the great benefit, while still working in Massachusetts at the start of my career, to have this happen with the beautiful 1983ers from Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm, amongst others. A couple of years later, the same opportunity popped up in the New York market, where I had relocated, and I was once again simply awash in the estate's beautiful 1983ers! I cannot tell you (for embarrassment's sake, as I do not have a single bottle of '83 left in the cellar today!) just how much 1983 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Goldkapsel Auslese I bought and drank in those early years.

In any case, given that I virtually "cut my teeth" on the wines from Weingut Prüm in my early career, it seemed only fitting that I get this historical feature on this iconic estate finally completed during this tenth year of the newsletter. I apologize to folks for it taking so long, but given how quickly I used to consume my J. J. Prüm wines in my cellar, once I had brought home the case, I simply did not have a goodly supply of their wines still remaining in my cellar today and was not in a good position to put together the sufficiently deep range of tasting notes that are necessary for reports of this kind. So, I have been dutifully organizing tastings and trying to find more time to visit the tasting room at the winery in the last couple of years, so that I could finally "right the wrong" of waiting until the tenth year of this publication to put together a comprehensive piece on this great family estate. I am owe indebted to all of the friends with whom I have shared bottles of Weingut Prüm's wines over the years, as many of their bottles appear as notes in the sections that follow, not to mention all of those accounting departments that made it possible back in the day for a very junior member of the wine trade (with his attendant junior level salary) to have been able to cellar and drink such a great array of Joh. Jos. Prüm wines in my formative years in the wine business! Most of all, I owe a great debt of gratitude to Katharina and Dr. Manfred Prüm, who so patiently found time to field round after round of questions about the history of their great estate, and their philosophies in the vineyards

and in the cellars. This article would be nowhere near as thorough without their extraordinary generosity with their time and with their cellar!

The following notes are organized by vineyard source and Prädikat, with all the wines listed within each subsection by vintage date, from youngest to oldest tasted in recent times. As the estate makes such a wide array of wines, the range here probably does not do justice to all the beautiful wines made here. I have supplied AP numbers where I have them in my notes.

Graacher Himmelreich Kabinette

2011 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett AP #21- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2011 Himmelreich Kabinett AP #21 is beginning to drink very well, though I would still be inclined to give it a handful more years in the cellar to allow further secondary layers of complexity to emerge before I would start drinking it in earnest. The bouquet is really a lovely, youthful mix of green apple, lemon, a lovely base of slate, a touch of petrol, white flowers and still a touch of reductive notes from its adolescence. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, focused and vibrant, with a lovely core and filigree, excellent balance and a very long, pure and nascently complex finish. This will be a really lovely bottle of Kabinett in only a few more years and should age very gracefully indeed. 2018-2040+. **93.**

2011 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett AP #9- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

I have really loved the Himmelreich examples I have tasted from Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm that I have tasted over the years and this 2011 Kabinett AP #9 is going to be excellent. The pure and youthful nose jumps from the glass in a mix of green apple, lime, a complex base of slate, petrol and a vibrant topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and very primary, with a superb core of fruit, excellent focus and balance, great cut and a very long, filigreed and zesty finish. This will need a fair bit of bottle age to really blossom, but it will be exceptional. 2018-2035+. **93+.**

2008 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett AP #18- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2008 Graacher Himmelreich Kabinett AP #18 from the Prüm family is still a fairly young wine and in need of at least four or five more years of bottle age to really blossom and start to drink with more generosity. Today, the wine is tightly-knit and very promising, but still a puppy, as it wafts from the glass in a mix of apple, white cherries, slate, petrol, wild yeasts and a topnote of lime blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, clean and racy, with a fine focus, blossoming filigree and a very long, still very primary, but classy finish. All this lovely Kabinett needs is more time in the cellar. 2018-2040. **91.**

Wehlener Sonnenuhr Kabinette

2011 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett AP #8- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2011 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett AP #8 from Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm is a gorgeous and very expressive example of the vintage. The deep, pure and utterly refined nose wafts from the glass in a blend of delicious apple, pear, a beautifully complex signature of slate, petrol and a potpourri of white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and rock solid at the core, with zesty acids, laser-like focus and simply stunning length and grip on the complex and dancing finish. A stunning Kabinett in the making! 2021-2050. **95.**

2002 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett AP #35- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

While I have loved the Spätlesen and Auslesen that I have tasted from the estate in 2002, this bottle of Kabinett was not up to their same caliber. The wine is quite broad-shouldered and

surprisingly sweet for its Prädikat level, with almost a light Auslese feel to the wine on the palate. The bouquet offers up notes of pear, peach, petrol, a touch of vanilla bean, slate and gentle notes of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is medium-full and big-boned, with nascent complexity, crisp acids and good length and grip on the easy-going and not particularly filigreed finish. There was some speculation around the table that this wine will tighten up structurally a bit with further bottle age, but my gut instinct is that it is probably now into its apogee and will retain this easy-going, sweeter style for its plateau of maturity. It certainly has the balance to age gracefully for several decades to come, but it does not today show the cut and grip on the backend that I associate with this wine in most vintages. 2015-2040. **88.**

1998 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett AP #4- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 1998 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett AP #4 from Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm is still a few years away from primetime drinking, but it is beginning to stir and show outstanding potential. The very pure and lovely nose offers up scents of delicious apples, pears, petrol, complex slate tones, wild yeasts and apple blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, delicately styled and gentle at the core, with lovely filigree, fine focus and really impressive backend persistence on the snappy finish. I might have expected just a bit more mid-plate intensity, but this is a very pretty wine that should age well and may yet improve with further bottle age. 2015-2040+. **90+.**

Bernkasteler Badstube Spätlese

2008 Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Spätlese AP #8- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2008 Badstube Spätlese AP #8 is a really lovely wine that is beginning to drink very well indeed and is now quite wide open and approachable. The suave and refined nose wafts from the glass in a mix of apple, white peach, tangerine, bee pollen, a gentle base of slate and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and filigreed, with a creamy core of fruit, ripe, crisp acids and very fine length and grip on the poised and nicely focused finish. Lovely juice. 2013-2035+. **92.**

Zeltinger Schlossberg Spätlese

This is the only bottling from the Schlossberg vineyard in Zeltingen that I have ever crossed paths with from Weingut Prüm, and I was curious what had happened to these vines at the estate. I posed the question to the domaine and Dr. Manfred Prüm noted that “the prime sections of the Schlossberg were incorporated into the Sonnenuhr in the early 1970s” as part of the adoption of the current German wine laws, but “we continued to own a small parcel of vines in the Schlossberg until 2005, until we lost them in the land consolidation of 2005.” As readers may recall, the German wine authorities set about “rationalizing” some of the smallest holdings in German vineyards in this year, so that the Prüm family would have been requested to give up their small parcel in the Schlossberg, probably in exchange for a bit more Wehlener Sonnenuhr or the like, where they already had substantial holdings.

1959 Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 1959 Zeltinger Schlossberg Spätlese from Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm is getting to the end of its long ride, but is still a very interesting glass of Riesling. The gently mahogany colored wine offers up a mature and very complex blend of star anise, pickled pear, leather, a delicate touch of tea leaves, orange peel and a lovely touch of salty soil. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, complex and gossamer-strung, with fine balance still hanging by a thread. The

finish is long, quite dry at this point in its evolution and still beautifully focused. There is little doubt that this was a stunning bottle of Spätlese thirty years ago, but even at age fifty it remains a very tasty glass of wine. I would drink it up in the next few years, as there is just the first touch of fraying starting to threaten the backend. A lovely, old, fragile bottle. 2009-2015+? **88.**



Graacher Himmelreich Spätlesen

2012 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese AP #3- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2012 harvest was a classic late harvest in the middle Mosel, with the Prüm estate starting picking on October 22nd and everything finishing up in the middle of November. The 2012 Himmelreich Spätlese is really a stunning young wine, jumping from the glass in a superb blend of apple, pear, slate-driven minerality, lime peel, gentle smokiness and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and tensile, with a fine core of fruit, impeccable balance and a long, complex and beautifully filigreed finish. I had not difficulties drinking this wine today, but another five years of bottle age will just allow the wine to truly reach its plateau of maturity. 2020-2050+. **94+.**

2011 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese AP #12- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2011 Himmelreich Spätlese AP #12 is another excellent expression of this magical *terroir*. The bouquet is a very refined and youthful blend of pear, tangerine, slate, a touch of petrol, orange blossoms and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and nascently complex, with lovely focus and core, a suave attack and absolutely

superb backend cut and vibrancy on the perfectly balanced and very, very long and snappy finish. A wonderful young wine. 2020-2060. **93+**.

2010 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese AP #9- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2010 vintage presented some absolutely stunning possibilities in terms of ripeness and acidity combinations, and the 2010 Himmelreich Spätlese AP #9 from Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm is one of those magical combinations. The deep, young and brilliant delivers a vibrant constellation of apple, white peach, petrol, a great signature of slate, orange zest, wild yeasts and a gentle topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and extremely racy, with a rock solid core of fruit, startling precision and detail, impeccable balance and amazing length and grip on the electric finish. One of the best young examples of Spätlese I have had the pleasure to taste in many a year! 2025-2075. **96.**

2009 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese AP #27- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2009 Graacher Himmelreich Spätlese AP #27 from Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm is a stunning wine in the making, soaring from the glass in a very classy aromatic mélange of tangerine, lime, wild yeasts, very complex minerality, bee pollen and incipient notes of petrol. On the palate the wine is medium-full, young and very pure, with laser-like focus, racy acids and simply brilliant length and grip on the dancing and still very youthful finish. A glorious expression of the Himmelreich! 2025-2075. **94.**

2008 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese AP #2- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2008 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese AP #2 from Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm is a bit less evolved than the very pretty Badstube from this vintage, but it too is a fine bottle in the making. The deep and still fairly youthful bouquet delivers scents of apple, tangerine, a touch of rather Domprobst-like slate, lime zest, petrol and a nice touch of top-end smokiness from wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and nicely reserved, with a fine core, excellent focus and balance and a very long, classy finish that closes with fine cut and grip. A lovely wine that still needs five or six years to really start to hit on all cylinders. 2019-2050. **92+.**

2002 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese AP #30- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

Like many Prädikat wines from the 2002 vintage, the Himmelreich Spätlese from the Prüm family is now fully into its apogee of peak drinkability and showing very well at the present time. The bright and wide open nose offers up scents of apple, peach, salty soil tones, bee pollen, orange peel and a discreet topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and filigreed, with fine acids, lovely focus and grip and a long, gently salty and complex finish. A lovely drink for the present time, but with the balance to age gracefully still for a couple of decades. 2015-2035. **92.**

1993 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese AP #9- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 1993 Himmelreich Spätlese from Dr. Prüm is outstanding and really offers up a classical interpretation of this lovely, pure and slightly exotic vintage. The bouquet is deep, pure and utterly stunning, as it jumps from the glass in a mature blend of apple, lime, a beautiful touch of mossiness, slate, wild yeasts and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and beautifully filigreed, with a lovely core, great complexity, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long and very classy finish. I love this style of Spätlesen in 1993, where the vibrant fruit tones are interwoven with some savory elements of mossiness that really add a sheen of exotica to the aromatics and flavors of the wines. This is not particularly sweet at age twenty-two and is really a delight at the table. A superb wine. 2015-2040. **94.**

Wehlener Sonnenuhr Spätlesen

2012 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #23- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2012 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Spätlese is another simply outstanding example of this vintage at Joh. Jos. Prüm, with the wine a bit behind the Himmelreich Spätlese in its evolution. The pure and youthful nose offers up a blossoming blend of delicious apple, pear, a beautiful base of slate, a touch of vanilla bean and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and primary, with a great core, crisp acids and outstanding focus and grip on the long and perfectly balanced finish. All this beautiful bottle of Spätlese needs is a bit more bottle age. 2022-2055+. **94+**.

2011 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #28- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2011 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #28 from Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm is a great, great wine in the making. The very youthful and primary nose offers up a sophisticated mélange of pear, white peach, a deep and very complex base of slate, a touch of vanilla custard, bee pollen and apple blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very youthful, with a great core of fruit, beautiful balance and delineation, crisp acids and stunning grip on the very, very long and classy finish. Just a gorgeous bottle of Spätlese in the making- but, give it time! 2025-2075. **95**.

2009 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2009 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Spätlese from the Prüm family was showing just brilliantly at the time of my visit to the estate in mid-March of this year, soaring from the glass in a glorious constellation of pear, golden delicious apple, petrol, a lovely base of slate, wild yeasts, vanilla bean and a potpourri of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and filigreed, with a lovely core, very good acids and fine length and grip on the focused and beautifully complex finish. This is very approachable today, but I would still want to tuck it away in the cellar for several more years and let its secondary layers of complexity emerge. 2022-2050+. **94**.

2008 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #4- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

Not surprisingly, it is still very early days for the glorious 2008 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Spätlese AP #4, but this is going to be one stunning bottle of Spätlese at its apogee! The very youthful nose jumps from the glass in a superb blend of pear, lemon blossoms, slate, vanilla bean, hints of petrol, bee pollen and delicious apples. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very intensely flavored, with a rock solid core, snappy acids and outstanding length and grip on the poised, youthful and very, very classy finish. A great wine, but still many years away from really drinking at its apogee. 2023-2060. **95**.

2007 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #24- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2007 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Spätlese AP #24 from Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm is a beautiful wine that is blossoming very nicely at age six and is only a few years away from really starting to drink at its apogee. The complex and very classy nose offers up scents of apple, white cherries, a gentle dollop of wild yeasts, spring flowers and a bit of vanilla bean in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and very elegant, with a good core, lovely filigree, bright acids and very good length and grip on the suave and refined finish. A lovely wine. 2017-2045. **92**.

2004 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #25- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2004 Spätlese AP #25 from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr is a superb wine that is beginning to stir and start to stretch its wings for a long and refined life of primetime drinking. The superb bouquet offers up a complex blend of delicious apples, wild yeasts, lime blossoms, a

fine base of slate, gentle notes of petrol, a bit of mossiness and a nice topnote of ripe peach. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, complex and zesty, with excellent mid-palate depth, ripe, snappy acids and superb focus and grip on the well-balanced and classy finish. A beautiful wine. 2013-2035+. **94+**.

2002 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #8- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2002 Spätlese from the Sonnenuhr vineyard in Wehlen, AP #8, is a very stylish example of the vintage that is just starting to blossom at age eleven and offers up a complex nose of white cherries, pears, petrol, a beautiful base of slate, white flowers and vanilla bean. On the palate the wine is medium-full, fresh and pure, with lovely filigree, the first stirrings of complexity, crisp acids and a very long, still quite primary and dancing finish. I really like this wine, but I would still give it another four or five years' worth of bottle age before seriously considering opening it. 2017-2045+. **93+**.

2001 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #25- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2001 Spätlese AP #25 from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr is a bit young by my rule of thumb of twenty years for this vineyard site, but the wine is starting to drink awfully well at age fourteen. The beautiful and vibrant nose jumps from the glass in a blaze of pear, vanilla bean, bee pollen, a lovely base of slate, blossoming notes of tangerine, fresh almond, white lilies and a nice touch of currant leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and intensely flavored, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent acidity, superb filigree and a very long, complex and dancing finish. This wine is just on the cusp of its plateau of peak maturity, but will be here for another quarter of a century, so there is no reason to hurry to drink this wine any time soon! 2015-2040. **94**.

1998 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #6- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 1998 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Spätlese is really a superb and precise example of the vintage, with great purity and raciness on the filigreed finish. The superb bouquet offers up a complex and very classy nose of apple, pear, petrol, a touch of vanilla bean, slate, gentle smokiness and an exotic topnote of currant leaf. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and very vibrant, with a lovely core, great interwoven elements of minerality, fruit and acidity and a very long, complex and low fat finish. This is marvelous juice. 2015-2035+. **93+**.

1997 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #22- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The Prüm family's 1997 Spätlese from the Sonnenuhr is quite different in profile than the fairly exotic 1998 version, as this is utterly classic and could be a poster child for the aromatic and flavor profiles of this great vineyard. The superb bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, pear, vanilla bean, slate, fresh apricot, bee pollen, wild yeasts and a touch of petrol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and ethereal, with a lovely core, laser-like focus and great backend energy and grip on the long, vibrant and dancing finish. A classic vintage for this iconic bottling of Spätlese. 2015-2040. **94**.

1996 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #8- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 1996 vintage produced such high acid wines that it is not surprising in the least that the Spätlese from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr is decidedly more backwards structurally than the 1998 or 1997 versions that preceded it at our tasting this June. This bottling has excellent promise, but it is still a puppy and at least five years away from fully blossoming. The bouquet offers up a youthful and classy nose of pear, apple, petrol, a hint of the vanilla bean to come and still quite a bit of primary, reductive tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and very, very racy, with a rock solid core, quite a bit of concentration for its

Prädikat, excellent focus and grip and a very, very long, youthful and promising finish. This will be a very, very long-lived bottle of Spätlese. 2020-2060. **93.**

1990 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #1- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 1990 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #1 from Dr. Manfred Prüm is a beautiful wine that is now fully into its plateau of maturity and drinking beautifully. The deep and absolutely lovely nose offers up scents of apple, dried peach, sea salts, a touch of moss, bee pollen and a beautiful base of slate soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and beautifully filigreed, with a round attack, lovely freshness and bounce and a very long, perfectly balanced and complex finish. This wine is not the snappiest bottle of mature Spätlese one is likely to come across, but the balance is so fine that I cannot believe that this wine will not last for many decades to come. Lovely juice and then some. 2011-2030+. **94.**

1988 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #5- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 1988 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Spätlese from Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm is a gorgeous wine at its absolute apogee of peak drinkability, soaring from the glass in a complex and very pure bouquet of pear, apple, petrol, a touch of walnuts, gentle notes of vanilla custard, a profound base of slate and a topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and dancing, with a fine core of fruit, superb focus and balance, bright acids and a very long, complex and filigreed finish. A classic vintage of Spätlese from the Sonnenuhr, the 1988 will continue to drink with great style and refinement for a couple more decades. 2013-2035+. **94.**

1987 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The Prüm family's 1987 Spätlese from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr is a beautiful bottle from a difficult vintage and is drinking at its apogee today. The lovely nose offers up a fine, mature constellation of pear, yellow plum, salty soil tones, a touch of beeswax and a gently nutty topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, complex and still quite pure, with lovely, tertiary complexity, sound acids and plenty of length and grip on the classy finish. This is fully mature today, but clearly still has a couple of decades of life ahead of it. 2015-2035. **90.**

Bernkasteler Badstube Auslesen

2013 Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Auslese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2013 Badstube Auslese from the Prüm family is a lovely wine in the making, wafting from the glass in a youthfully vibrant blend of apple, lime, slate, citrus zest, bee pollen and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and tangy, with a fine core of fruit, lovely underlying minerality, outstanding acids and very fine length and grip on the nascently complex and very promising finish. This is still very early days for the 2013 Badstube Auslese, but this wine will be excellent when it has had sufficient bottle age. Expect it to be quite drinkable in another five years, but its real apogee is probably fifteen years out from this day. 2020-2050. **93+.**

Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Auslesen

2013 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2013 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Auslese from Weingut J. J. Prüm is an absolutely brilliant example of the vintage and destined to be one of the very top wines produced at this great estate in the lovely 2013 vintage. The deep and stunning nose offers up a vibrant constellation of pear, apple, lime blossoms, a touch of vanilla bean, crystalline slate tones, bee pollen and a youthful topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and filigreed, with a lovely core of fruit, superb transparency, laser-like focus, great balance and acids and a perfectly

balanced, elegant and electric finish. This is a great, great young bottle of Auslese. 2023-2060+. **95+.**

2001 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese AP #5- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2001 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Auslese from Weingut Prüm is still a very young wine and this was one bottle in our June tasting where the sulfur level seemed quite high and still needed to back away a bit to allow the wine to fully blossom on the nose and palate. The underlying promise here is excellent, but this wine is still probably a decade away from really starting to drink well, as the SO₂ is currently blocking quite a bit of the nuance here. The bouquet has lovely promise in its constellation of white cherry, pear, lovely slate minerality, a touch of petrol, wild yeasts and a lovely topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very refined in profile, with a fine core, lovely filigree and a long, pure and nascently complex finish of lovely lift on the finish. When this wine finally blossoms, it will be lovely and I would not be surprised in the least to see my score seem unduly conservative ten years down the road. 2025-2075. **92+.**



Graacher Himmelreich Auslesen and Goldkapsel Auslesen

2013 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #14

The 2013 Himmelreich Auslese AP #14 is a really lovely wine that shimmers on both the nose and palate with a lovely coating of very clean botrytis. The really lovely nose wafts from the glass in a blaze of pineapple, apple, a lovely base of slate minerality, a touch of honeycomb and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, primary and rock solid at the core, with superb balance and grip, zesty acids and a very long, still quite youthful finish.

This will need a good eight to ten years to blossom and show some of its secondary layers of complexity, but it should prove to be very long-lived and I would not be surprised to see my score climb upwards as the years unfold. Lovely juice. 20123-2065. **93+**.

1997 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese AP #3- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 1997 Himmelreich Auslese from Dr. Manfred Prüm is a beautiful wine, with only modest glazing of botrytis, which really allows the underlying minerality of this great *terroir* to shine. The gorgeous nose offers up scents of apple, apricot, slate, a touch of honeycomb, gentle notes of mossiness and the first signs of the nuttiness of maturity in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and beautifully filigreed, with a great core, laser-like focus, bright acids and a very, very long, classically balanced finish that is starting to show the first vestiges of salty soil tones on the backend. This is a really, really lovely bottle of Himmelreich Auslese that is eminently drinkable today, but is still not quite into its true apogee of peak drinkability and probably should still be held for another five years or so. I love Auslesen done in this style, with quite moderate levels of botrytis and probably far more “golden berries” used in its making back in the fall of 1997. 2020-2050. **94**.

1996 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese AP #14- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 1996 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese AP #14 from J. J. Prüm is a lovely wine that offers up a pure and very pretty bouquet of apple, a touch of pineapple, pear, a very stylish underpinning of slate and gentle notes of petrol and wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is medium-full, delicate and filigreed, with fairly modest must weight for an Auslesen, crisp acids and very good length and grip on the pure and discreet finish. I like the style of this wine very much, but as it is a pretty light weight Auslesen, its most interesting moments are still in the future, as it will need more secondary layers of complexity to emerge to provide the drama that a younger Auslesen with greater must weight would deliver at an earlier age. 2017-2040. **91+**.

1996 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

I did not have a chance to see this bottle, so I do not have an AP number for the wine, but based on how it showed, I have to believe that it is a different bottling than the AP #14 listed above (though, of course, their different showings could have been simply different shipping and storage histories). In any event, I had the pleasure to taste this '96 Himmelreich Auslese and the Himmelreich Goldkapsel side by side, and I had a very slight preference for the regular Auslese, as it was just a touch more precise at its lower level of botrytis. The Himmelreich Auslese 1996 offers up a very refined and cleanly glazed bouquet of apple, pear, petrol, slate, gentle notes of sea salts, hints of the honey to come and a lovely topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and nascently complex, with a fine core of pure fruit, excellent focus, bouncy acids and impressive length and grip on the dancing and very refined finish. A beautiful example of the Domprobst. 2011-2035+. **93+**.

1996 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 1996 Gold Kap Auslese from the Himmelreich shows off decidedly more botrytis than the regular bottling, and perhaps it does not possess quite the same precision and filigree as a result. The nicely glazed nose wafts from the glass in a mix of pineapple, tangerine, honeycomb, gently smoky overtones, a touch of slate down low and a vibrant topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and heavily coated with botrytis, with good framing acids, a succulent personality and a very long, classy finish that closes with fine grip and lingering notes of tropical fruit. A very pretty, nobly rotten wine, but perhaps the lighter touch of botrytis in the above gives it a slight nod in terms of elegance. 2011-2035. **93**.

Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslesen

2013 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2013 Wehlener Sonnenuhr “regular” Auslese from Katharina Prüm is a great, great young bottle in the making. The wine seems very faintly affected by noble rot in this vintage, as it offers up a very pure and utterly refined nose of pear, delicious apple, complex slate tones, white flowers, bee pollen and vanilla bean. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and filigreed, with a lovely core, great refinement and nascent complexity, bright acids and great focus and grip on the very long and very racy finish. A great classic Auslese in the making! 2023-2075+. **95+.**

2007 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

I did not get a chance to see the AP number on this bottling of Auslese from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr, but the wine is a very young and very lovely example of the vintage. The pure and utterly refined bouquet offers up a mélange of apple, fresh pear, a touch of the honeycomb to come with further bottle age, a nice touch of salty slate soil, apple blossoms and bee pollen in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and zesty, with a lovely core, fine filigree and a very, very long and classy finish. This is not an overly big vintage for this bottling, but rather an utterly classic example of purity and dancing elegance. 2023-2060+. **94+.**

2004 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

We only tasted two Auslesen on this vintage, but both were excellent. The 2004 version from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr offers up a classy, very pure and beautifully clean bouquet of pineapple, white peach, vanilla custard, slate, a touch of wild yeasts and a fine topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and still quite youthfully reserved, with an excellent core, bright acids and a very long, still primary and racy finish. Whereas the 2004 Spätlese AP #25 is really starting to drink well at age nine, it is still very early days for this excellent Auslese. 2020-2060+. **94.**

2003 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

I had some very fine examples of the 2003 German vintage on this trip (in the spring of 2013) and the '03 Prüm Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese was one of the best. The deep, ripe and complex nose offers up a very stylish bouquet of pineapple, pear, orange zest, honeycomb, slate and a nice touch of Chartreuse-like botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and just starting to blossom with secondary elements, with a fine core, lovely focus and balance and a long, quite crisp (particularly for a 2003er) finish. A lovely, lovely wine that is drinking very well already, but has decades of life still ahead of it! 2013-2035+. **94.**

2003 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #3

As I tasted a different version of Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese back in the spring of 2013 (where I did not get the AP number), I was very happy to at least jot down the AP number on this fine wine, so that I could differentiate the two bottlings in this article. The AP #3 Auslese is a gorgeous young wine, jumping from the glass in a vibrant mix of pear, delicious apple, vanilla bean, slate, still a hint of youthful petrol and wild yeasts and a field-full of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and absolutely rock solid at the core, with fine acids, great focus and grip and a very, very long, pure and still very youthful finish. This was served after the very, very fine 2007 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese, and it was quite clear that the 2003 AP #3 is not quite as far along its evolutionary curve as the 2007! A great wine in the making. 2025-2075+. **95+.**

2002 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese AP #13- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2002 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese AP #13 remains quite a youthful wine at age eleven, but it shares the structural promiscuity of the vintage and is really quite approachable already. The bouquet is a youthful and very pretty blend of pears, apples, orange zest, petrol, a lovely base of slate and blossoming notes of honeycomb in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and very pure, with beautiful balance and nascent complexity, a fine core, bright, zesty acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long and dancing finish. It is still very early days for this lovely wine, but it is blossoming in a most promising manner and should be superb for decades to come. 2013-2040+. **93+**.

2002 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese AP #29- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The Prüm family's 2002 Auslese from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr is stellar and a marvelous synthesis of this great *terroir* and this lovely vintage. The pure and youthful nose wafts from the glass in a mélange of apple, pear, vanilla bean, a lovely base of slate, bee pollen and a potpourri of white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very gently glazed with botrytis, with a lovely core, crisp acids and outstanding focus and grip on the filigreed and still fairly primary finish. This is still very early days for this lovely Auslese and I would not be tempted to open another bottle for at least another five years. Its true apogee is probably more like fifteen years down the road! 2020-2075. **94+**.

1996 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese AP #9- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 1996 vintage's electric acidity works beautifully in the realm of Auslesen, and the Wehlener Sonnenuhr bottling from Dr. Manfred Prüm is a stellar wine in the making. The young and vibrant nose offers up a superb blend of peach, orange, a lovely hint of mossiness, a superb base of slate, almond, incipient notes of honeycomb, vanilla bean and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and complex, with plenty of zesty acidity, impeccable balance, great grip and a very long, focused and racy finish. This is beginning to drink very well indeed at age nineteen, but it has a long life ahead of it and there is no rush to be opening it now. 2015-2055+. **94**.

1990 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese AP #21- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm (Auction)

The 1990 auction bottling of Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese from Dr. Manfred Prüm is a beautiful wine that is just entering its plateau of peak maturity. The deep, complex and really lovely nose wafts from the glass in a blend of pear, honeycomb, gentle notes of laurel, a nascent touch of sea salts, a dollop of petrol and a woody touch of heather. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long, complex and perfectly balanced, with excellent focus and grip. The structure here is a tad on the gentle side, which probably indicates that this wine will be best over the next decade or so, but with a wine this cunningly balanced, it may cruise along far past that point, despite its relatively gentle girdle of acidity. A beautifully filigreed Auslese. 2009-2030+? **93**.

1975 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese AP #4- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 1975 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese from J. J. Prüm is one of the most brilliant wines I have ever had the pleasure to taste from this great estate. The deep and utterly ethereal nose soars from the glass in a blaze of peach, orange, a touch of custard, beautiful, salty soil tones, a gentle dollop of honey, orange zest and an exotic, mossy topnote that reminds me a bit of the Herrenberg vineyard from Maximin Grünhäuser. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and very, very complex, with the lightness of step of a ballerina, beautiful focus and grip, bright acids and stunning length and grip on the absolutely *à point* finish. This is the epitome of elegance and transparent purity. 2011-2040. **98**.



Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslesen Goldkapsel and Lange Goldkapsel

2002 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel AP #31- Joh. Jos. Prüm (375 ml.)

There is a style of botrytis to the Goldkapsel Auslese AP #31 from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr that I am not particularly wild about, for though the noble rot seems quite clean, it has added a deeper pitch to the aromatics and flavors here that are interesting, but not classical in style and seem to have masked much of the slate foundation of the wine, without bringing along the tropical fruit elements by way of compensation. The glazed nose offers up scents of white cherry, pear, vanilla bean, bee pollen and a topnote of irises. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a lovely core, good bounce and grip and a long, quite fruit-driven finish. This is a perfectly pleasant bottle of Gold Kap Auslese, but it is not one of the great 2002ers from the Prüm family. 2020-2060. **91.**

2001 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel AP #24 – Joh. Jos. Prüm (375 ml.)

The AP #24 Goldkapsel Auslese from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr was an auction bottling sold at Trier in the autumn of 2003. I had bought a few halves on general principal, as I did not attend the auctions that year and did not taste the wine prior to purchasing it. It is quite a heavily botrytized example and at age fourteen, the botrytis currently has a bit of an upper hand in the wine and some of the inherent complexity of this great vineyard is masked behind the lovely glazing of noble rot. The bouquet is a lovely glazed blend of peach, apricot, orange, salty soil tones, citrus peel and peach-stone. On the palate the wine is fullish, suave and very light on its feet, with fine depth, sound acids and good length and grip on the long finish, which shows just a

touch of backend bitterness today from the botrytis. Perhaps I am just drinking this wine too soon, but today, it seems that a bit of complexity has been lost to the noble rot, though maybe further bottle age will allow more *terroir* to emerge. 2015-2040. **91+?**

1996 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel AP #15- Joh. Jos. Prüm (375 ml.)

The 1996 Goldkapsel Auslese from the Sonnenuhr vineyard in Wehlen is a lovely example of the vintage, with a fine glazing of noble rot that creates a bouquet of peach, apricot, honey, a touch of new leather, salty soil tones and a lovely floral topnote redolent of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, vibrant acidity and excellent length and grip on the zesty and very classy finish. A lovely bottle. 2015-2060. **94.**

1985 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel AP #1- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 1985 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese AP #1 is a very pretty bottle of mature Auslese, but if this particular bottle was representative, then it is a wine that misses just a touch of mid-palate concentration- at least in comparison to so many of the older Auslesen Gold Kaps I have had the pleasure to taste from the Prüm family. The bouquet is bright and very pretty, offering up scents of apple, pear, petrol, honeycomb, slate and dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and juicy, with a respectable, but not exceptional core, sound acids and very good balance on the long, but moderately simple finish. This is a very tasty and still quite youthful bottle of '85 Auslese, but by the very high standards of this estate, this is a bit of a disappointment. Not bad. 2013-2030+. **89.**

1983 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

I did not take down the AP number on the last bottle of the 1983 Goldkapsel from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr that I drank, but the wine was delicious. I should note that it is my distinct impression that there are at least two different versions of Goldkapsel from this vineyard in 1983, as I have drunk an awful lot of this wine over the years, and one batch that I owned was not as heavily glazed with picture perfect botrytis as most bottles and was clearly another selection. This most recent bottle was far more typical of my experience with this wine, soaring from the glass in a nobly rotten mélange of honey, apricots, oranges, lovely memory of vanilla bean, hints of the yellow plums to come, the first vestiges of nuttiness and distinctly salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and utterly electric, with a marvelous core, great focus and filigree, vibrant acids and a very, very long, complex and vibrant finish. A beautiful wine. 2012-2040. **95.**

1976 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese Lange Goldkapsel AP# 21- Weingut J. J. Prüm

The 1976 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Long Gold Kap Auslese is an utterly brilliant expression of this vintage, with a lightness of step that one associates more with the 1975 vintage in the middle Mosel than 1976. The magical bouquet soars from the glass in a blend of honeycomb, apple, salty soil tones, yellow fruit, a touch of petrol, fresh apricot, iris blossom, a dollop of beeswax and the first hints of the leather that will come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and tangy, with stunning complexity, perfect focus and balance, great cut and grip and a very long, ethereal and superb finish. A magical wine at its apogee. 2012-250. **97.**

1971 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 1971 Auslese Goldkapsel from the Sonnenuhr is one of the most beautiful bottles of wine I have ever had the pleasure to taste from Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm, as the wine soars from the glass in a brilliant bouquet of peach, white cherry, almond paste, slate, honeycomb, a touch of orange zest and a lovely base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, filigreed and stunningly pure, with a fine core of fruit, a very elegant glazing of botrytis, crisp

acids and brilliant length and grip on the very complex, filigreed and utterly refined finish. A simply stunning bottle of Gold Kap at its absolute apogee! 2013-2030+. **97.**

1971 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel AP #23- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

I do not drink as many mature J. J. Prüm wines as I would like and it is a superb bout of good luck to have fairly recent notes on two distinct bottles of the 1971 Goldkapsel from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr vineyard. As these two wines were tasted two years apart and I did not have a chance to note the AP number on the above wine, I do not know if these were the same wine or two different examples of 1971 Gold Kap Auslese, but both bottles were utterly magical. The 1971 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Gold Kap Auslese AP #23 is an absolutely profound bottle of Riesling at its pinnacle of peak drinkability, soaring from the glass in a glorious mélange of peach, apple, salty soil tones, orange zest, gentle notes of petrol, custard and a floral topnote redolent of almond blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and dancing, with great focus and filigree, bright, zesty acids, impeccable balance and stunning length and grip on the complex and dancing finish. The sweetness level here after forty years or bottle age has dropped down to an Auslese level. This is a brilliant, brilliant wine. 2011-2040. **96.**

Beerenauslesen and Trockenbeerenauslesen

While the Prüm family does not make a large number of dessert wines above Goldkapsel and Lange Goldkapsel Auslesen, they have been making dessert wines at this level since the 1930s. However, going back through my notes of the last couple years, I see that I have not tasted any, so I guess these can be added to my wine bucket list for the coming years! Needless to say, the ones that I have had in the past are stunning wines.

THE 2014 BEAUJOLAIS VINTAGE AND OTHER RECENTLY TASTED BOTTLES FROM THE REGION



The 2014 vintage in Beaujolais is absolutely terrific and probably, along with 2011, the best vintage in the region since 2005. The region has had a bit of a rollercoaster ride in the last few years, with an absolutely phenomenal vintage in 2011 (particularly for those of us who like to age our Beaujolais for several years prior to serving), one of the most difficult growing seasons in recent memory in 2012, a good, solid classic vintage in 2013, and now, again, another truly outstanding vintage in 2014. As has been the case for the last several years, I am indebted to Xavier Barbet of Domaine des Billards (and several other excellent estates in Beaujolais) for his fine weather summation of the growing season of 2014, from which much of this background information on the weather for this vintage is taken. The growing season got off to an early and hot start in the spring, with temperatures decidedly higher than normal and vines starting out of their winter dormancy with plenty of vigor. Budbreak in 2014 was on April 7th, which happened to be the exact same date as in the fine years of 2005 and 2009! The sunny weather held well throughout the spring, though the temperatures were lower in the month of May and the flowering took place in early June under ideal conditions. As seems to be the case almost every year these days in the southern half of Burgundy, hail was again a problem in 2014, as a series of hailstorms hit hard on June 28th. They were centered in the Beaujolais region around the village

of Beaujeu west of the Crus (where *vignerons* in the surrounding vineyards, which are Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages AOC, lost thirty to fifty percent of their crop) and in Pierres Dorées in the southern end of Beaujolais (near Domaine du Vissoux), where the damage was a bit less intense, ranging from ten to thirty percent of the crop. There were also two scorching days in the middle of the month of July (the 17th and 18th) where temperatures soared and the grapes suffered from heavy sunburn, further causing a significant loss of crop. However, these two blistering days in mid-month were definitely the exception to the rule in July of 2014, as the month was very, very wet, with rainfall measuring 130 mm and setting a record in the region! August was also rainy, but less so in the southern half of the region (40 mm) and the northern half near the Crus (85 mm), so the pressures of rot and mildew were less in August in the southern half of the appellation. All the optimism felt by *vignerons* by the warm spring and beautiful period of flowering disappeared under the rain and clouds of July and August!

However, September arrived with gorgeous Indian Summer conditions and grapes ripened up beautifully in the final three weeks of the growing season, with rot pressures disappearing in the sun and low humidity. A key indicator of quality in 2014 will be when producers decided to harvest, as the superb weather in September gave a very wide window for picking and some of the less intrepid estates probably got started picking too early in this vintage and have missed the chance to make truly exceptional wines in 2014. The grapes gained very nicely in maturity over the first half of September and those who waited to pick in the second half of the month have really benefitted from the Indian Summer conditions in Beaujolais in 2014. In the end, the superb flowering allowed for sufficient crop loads that after the depredations of hail at the end of June, sunburned bunches and rot pressures, the overall yields in 2014 ended up quite similar to the previous year, or what the *vignerons* would call “quite correct”. But, the sugar levels in the grapes of 2014 is certainly superior to the 2013sw and this can really be felt in the extra depth and crunchy density found in so many wines from this latter vintage. Acidity levels are about average for the region (and again, quite similar to 2013), but the better phenolic maturity that arrived with the Indian Summer conditions giving the wines more floral and less fresh herbal notes in comparison to last year’s crop.

The 2014 wines have ended up really beautifully- at least where producers decided to delay harvesting until the latter half of September and be strict with selection- with great purity and density of fruit tones, excellent soil signatures, a bit more tannin than their 2013 counterparts and really lovely mid-palate stuffing. Many of the wines have a fine sense of reserve out of the blocks that augurs very well for their ability to age long and gracefully. The vintage in general strikes me as very ageworthy, with not only the longest-lived crus such as Moulin-à-Vent, Morgon and St. Amour producing wines that will repay aging, but wines further down the appellation hierarchy also possessing uncharacteristically fine structural elements and potential for at least a decade’s worth of very positive evolution in the cellar. The vintage is not as surprisingly tannic as the 2011s were out of the blocks, nor quite as deep as the 2005s at a similar age, but this is a vintage where the wines show a bit of nicely ripe tannin and really fine density in the mid-palates, and there is going to be absolutely to drink up even the Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages bottlings from the most serious producers, as these too are going to age just fine. Beaujolais, as a region, is getting better and better with each passing year, as the generation of early pioneers has been joined by a younger generation that is in complete accord that good farming and careful, natural winemaking here can produce wines of exemplary complexity and

charm, and the bad old days when half the region's annual production was slurped up in drunken bacchanals at the end of November in the Nouveau craze are now long, long gone. Certainly the Nouveau days were fun in their way, but think of just how much good wine could have been made from those grapes in the 1980s and early 1990s, if today's generation of serious *vignerons* had been in place back then! This is not to say that the Beaujolais Nouveau craze did not do some good in the region, as it managed to sell wine and ignite interest where there was so very little previously, but the wines coming out of Beaujolais today are so superior to what was being produced back in the day and it is hard to really recognize the region as the same today as the impoverished backwater of the wine world that it was once upon a time.

This report is actually pretty short on notes on the 2014 Beaujolais Crus, as a great many importers here in New York are still working their way through the very good 2013s, and I anticipate doing a follow-up report on the 2014s in another four or five months, when more of the Crus have shipped into this market. All the praise for the 2014s should not obscure the fact that the 2013 vintage in Beaujolais is also very good- probably very similar in style and quality to the 2010 vintage- and there remains a goodly supply of the top wines from this vintage still available. It was a cool and atypically late harvested year in Beaujolais, but the wines have turned out well and will offer up very good drinking over the coming decade. I also had a chance to revisit several 2012s for this report, and I continue to be convinced that Mother Nature has conspired against the *vignerons* in the region to hand out one of the most difficult years in quite a long time, and it is really hard to warm up to the wines from this vintage, given how much good Beaujolais is currently in the pipeline from 2014, 2013 and even still 2011. The latter vintage remains one of my favorites of the last couple of decades in Beaujolais, with the rather strapping tannins found in many of the Crus early on now nicely integrated and the wines showing gorgeous mid-palate depth and soil signatures. Further back, the 2010s are a very nice vintage that is really starting to drink with lovely secondary layers of complexity at the Cru level; 2009 is ripe, plush and very tasty today (though I feel I may have overrated some of the wines out of the blocks, as some I revisit today are fully mature and a bit more easy-going than I initially anticipated); 2008 was a difficult year (but nowhere near as hard as 2012) where the successes are now usually fully mature and often quite tasty. I only have a few examples left in my cellar from the 2007 and 2006 vintages, so I have not opened any of these for this report from my own collection and do not have a real frame of reference for where those two vintages stand today, though I have always liked the 2006s very well. The great 2005 vintage continues to cruise along with all of the stately depth and complexity one expects from a classic year and there is absolutely no hurry to drink the top wines from the longer-lived communes.

The following notes are listed by category, with Beaujolais Blanc first, followed by Rosé and then red wines. The red wines are organized by appellation, with the Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages bottlings first, followed by a list of the Crus from north to south. Within each subsection, the wines are grouped first by vintage and then alphabetically by producer.

Beaujolais Blanc

2014 Beaujolais Blanc- Domaine les Terres d'Orées (Jean-Paul Brun)

I have routinely enjoyed Jean-Paul Brun's Beaujolais Blanc, which I find one of the great bargains in serious white Burgundy, so I do not really understand Monsieur Brun's decision to bottle this wine with a plastic cork, as I have always felt it would age quite well for at least four

or five years out from the vintage. In any event, the 2014 offers up a ripe and musky bouquet of peach, apple, fine soil tones, a bit of Mâconnais-like toasty elements and a bit of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and extroverted in personality, with a fine core, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the long finish. The powerful style of the 2014 vintage is on display here, and this broad-shouldered chardonnay has plenty of depth and nice complexity, even if it is not the most subtle of Beaujolais Blanc bottlings. 2015-2017+? **89**.

2011 Beaujolais Blanc- Bruno Debrize

Bruno Debrize is a very interesting character in Beaujolais and I am sorry to learn about his wines only as he is undertaking a “sabbatical” in protest to the all-caring French highway officials putting an autoroute through some of his finest old vine parcels. Whether he will ever make wine again is an open question today, but I was very happy to have a chance to taste a few of his more recent releases. His 2011 Beaujolais Blanc, which includes some pinot gris in with the chardonnay is a lovely middleweight, offering up a complex nose of green apple, lemon zest, beeswax, chalky soil tones and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, long and complex, with tangy acids and fine focus, length and grip on the backend. Good juice in a lean and racier style. 2015-2020. **89**.

Beaujolais Rosé

2014 Beaujolais Rosé “Le Rosé d’Folie”- Jean-Paul Brun

The 2014 Le Rosé d’Folie from Jean-Paul Brun is a bit darker in color than these other Beaujolais Rosés, and is clearly made to be drunk in its first year, as Monsieur Brun has chosen to bottle it with a plastic cork. The wine is deep and impressively complex on the nose, wafting from the glass in a blend of cherries, pomegranate, rose petals, a nice base of soil and a hint of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, fairly complex and quite vinous in style, with a good core, solid acids and a long, vibrant finish. This is quite a broad-shouldered style of Beaujolais Rosé and really is more for the table, rather than serving as an aperitif. Not bad at all- wish it had a normal cork! 2015-2016. **87+**.

2014 Beaujolais Rosé “Les Griottes”- Pierre-Marie Chermette

The 2014 Les Griottes Beaujolais Rosé from Monsieur Chermette is a pale salmon color and quite a bit lighter than its counterpart from Jean-Paul Brun. The wine is the ripest of the three Beaujolais Rosés that I tasted for this report, coming in at 12.5 percent (in comparison to 12 percent for the other two). The nose is lovely, wafting from the glass in a blend of tangerine, white cherries, lovely soil tones, spring flowers and a bit of fruit skin. On the palate the wine is full, bright and juicy, with a good core, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the still fairly youthful finish. This shows every signs of being able to age gracefully at least for the next three or four years, and as it is sealed with a natural cork, I see no reason it will not keep and improve over at least the next couple of years. 2015-2019. **88+**.

2014 Beaujolais-Villages Rosé- Domaine Laurent Gauthier

The 2014 Beaujolais-Villages Rosé from Laurent Gauthier comes packaged in a stylized, clear bottle with an attractive, *Belle Époque*- inspired label that just screams out “summer” in all its glory. The wine is quite a pale melon color and offers up a very pretty nose of white cherries, bubble gum, discreet soil tones and a basketful of flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and quite intensely flavored, with a fine core, bright acids and just a whisper of backend tannin that adds grip on the impressively long finish. This has some stuffing and pretty serious structure on the palate, which comes as a bit of a surprise, given the easy-going bouquet, and is really quite good at the table. 2015-2016. **87**.



Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages

2014 Beaujolais- Pierre Chermette

I have consistently loved Pierre Chermette's straight Beaujolais bottling, so I was dismayed to see it sealed up this year with a plastic cork. I know that most bottles of this are drunk up within a year of release, but it always has the depth and balance to age a decade, so why not give it a proper closure? The 2014 is utterly classic, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of cherries, sweet cranberry, woodsmoke, fresh herbs soil tones, a touch of nuttiness and a pungent topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full-bodied and really has lovely mid-palate stuffing this year, with tangy acids, excellent focus and balance and a long, primary and very serious finish. Lovely juice, but I would not age this more than a couple of years with its plastic cork. 2015-2017+? 90.

2014 Beaujolais "Cuvée Kéké"- Kevin Descombes

Kevin Descombes is the twenty-three year-old son of Georges Descombes and 2013 was his first vintage flying solo. He has inherited three hectares of vines from his father and his Beaujolais bottling he calls "Cuvée Kéké" after his nickname of Kéké. The wine is barrel-fermented and the 2014 is really a superb example of its appellation, jumping from the glass in a vibrant mélange of red and black cherries, lovely spice tones, a nice base of soil, a bit of oak and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and sappy at the core, with lovely focus and balance, a bit of tannin and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is terrific to drink

right now, but I have the feeling that a couple of years in the cellar will add even more complexity, without sacrificing any of the wine's vivacious personality. A superb bottle. 2015-2030. **91.**

2014 Beaujolais- Michel Guignier

The "straight" Beaujolais bottling from Michel Guignier is always well-made in my experience and the 2014 is excellent. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a lovely, youthful mélange of red and black cherries, a touch of currant leaf, lovely soil tones, woodsmoke, fresh herbs and a touch of sweet cranberry. On the palate the wine is fullish, succulent and tangy, with a lovely core, impressive complexity, with a solid core, just a touch of tannin and a long, youthful finish. This is very tasty and will be even better with a year or two in the bottle. I have to give it a very slight nod over the equally well-made 2013 version. 2015-2025. **90.**

2014 Beaujolais "Vieilles Vignes" Cuvée Traditionnelle- Domaine du Vissoux (P. Chermette)

The 2014 Cuvée Traditionnelle from Domaine du Vissoux is outstanding, offering up superb intensity of flavor and youthful structure, a great core of pure fruit and stellar transparency. The bouquet is still a bit primary, but deep and very, very promising, as it delivers scents of cherries, pomegranate, violets, woodsmoke, fresh thyme a beautifully complex signature of soil, violets and even a touch of incipient gamebird. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and intensely flavored, with a sappy core, great soil tones, tangy acids and outstanding length and grip on the youthful and superb finish. Non-Cru Beaujolais simply does not get any better than this! 2015-2030+. **92.**

2014 Beaujolais-Villages "Biologique-Naturel"- Domaine Victor Sornin

The Beaujolais-Villages "Biologique-Naturel" from Frédéric Sornin is made from parcels of vines that are fifty to sixty years of age and have been farmed organically since 2006. The wine is made without sulfur dioxide, unchaptalized and fermented with indigenous yeasts in cement tanks. The 2014 comes in at a nicely ripe twelve percent alcohol and offers up a nose of sweet dark berries, bonfires, a fine base of soil tones, a bit of coffee and a gentle topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and juicy, with a nice core, good complexity and just a bit of backend tannin on the round and wide open finish. This is sealed with a plastic cork, so I would drink in over the first year (why would Monsieur Sornin want to use a plastic cork for a natural wine?) and not risk its oxidative demise, but over the coming year, there is plenty to enjoy here in this very honest and tasty middleweight. 2015-2016+? **87.**

2013 Beaujolais "Cuvée Ancienne"- Domaine des Terres d'Orées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The Cuvée Ancienne bottling from Jean-Paul Brun is most serious straight Beaujolais bottlings to be found in the region. Monsieur Brun makes this wine from parcels of old vines, with the wine bottled in the June following the vintage and the cuvée built to age long and gracefully. The 2013 is excellent, as it offers up a very pure and classic bouquet of cherries, strawberries, fresh herb tones, a superb base of soil, a bit of pepper and a topnote of vinesmoke. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and nascently complex, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature, bright acids, just a bit of tannin and excellent length and grip on the long and youthful finish. This is a quintessential 2013 Beaujolais, with a bit of *herbacité*, lovely transparency and the balance to age very well indeed. The wine is certainly tasty today, but it will be even better with a bit of bottle age. 2015-2030+. **90.**

2013 Beaujolais "Beau"- A la Chapelle de Guinchay (screwcap)

As I noted last year, the 2013 Beaujolais "Beau" from A la Chapelle de Guinchay comes in a very stylish, modern package, with an artsy label that is very attractive, but last year's

sample was quite reduced. This year, the sample bottle was a touch less reductive, without any of the vegetal overtones of reduction and just a bit of metallic edginess from its closure. Not surprisingly, I liked this bottle a bit better, but this is a good wine that really deserves a natural cork of some kind! The nose on this particular example is more black fruity than a year ago and offers up scents of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, a touch of violet and a nice base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and just a touch metallic, with a good core, modest tannins and some backend pinching on the finish from the screwcap. This is better than last year's version, but why, why, why this closure, as the wine is better than it shows under the screw? 2015-2016. **86.**

2013 “Bâtard Beaujolais” Vin de France- Bruno Debrize

The INAO official denied the Beaujolais AOC to this wine from Monsieur Debrize, as he chose not to chapitalize and the wine came in at only 11.3 percent octane. It is (or was, as these may well be the vines that are now buried under an autoroute) made from pre-phylloxera vines that range from one hundred and twenty to one hundred and fifty years of age. The wine is excellent, offering up a vibrant and tangy nose of red and black cherries, nutskin, a beautiful base of soil tones, a touch of woodsmoke and a bit of botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, complex and tangy, with lovely transparency, fine focus and very good grip on the long finish. This is on the lean side, but intensely flavored and packing plenty of complexity. 2015-2025. **90.**

2013 Beaujolais-Villages- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2013 Beaujolais-Villages from Joseph Drouhin is really a very classic example of this consistently excellent bottling, as it offers up a bright and complex nose of cherries, cranberries, a touch of smokiness, fresh herbs, lovely soil tones and violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is quite full, bright and succulent, with a sappy core, fine soil signature, just a touch of tannin and a long, tangy finish that closes with a youthful touch of pepperiness. Fine juice that should age very well. 2015-2025+. **90.**

2013 Beaujolais- Maison Louis Jadot

The Beaujolais wines from Louis Jadot are overseen by the Barbet family of Domaine des Billards in St. Amour, and have been for decades, and one could probably not ask for a better family to act as one's agent in the region. The 2013 straight Beaujolais from Louis Jadot is a pretty example of the vintage, with lovely fruit from some carbonic maceration and a bit of youthful weediness to add complexity. The bouquet is a blend of cherries, cranberries, herb tones and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and still fairly youthful, with a touch of tannin, good focus and grip and an overt backend note of *herbacité* on the fairly long finish. This will be even better with another year's worth of bottle age, but is not bad today. 2015-2022. **86.**

2013 Beaujolais-Villages- Maison Louis Jadot

The 2013 Beaujolais-Villages bottling from Louis Jadot is a notable step up from the straight Beaujolais cuvée, as it offers up significantly more depth and complexity on both the nose and palate. The fine bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of cherries, pomegranate, fresh herb tones, a lovely signature of soil, woodsmoke and a hint of gamebird. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and complex, with a fine core, excellent transparency, a bit of tannin and impressive length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is quite the serious bottle of Beaujolais-Villages and will age quite well. 2015-2025+. **89.**

2011 Beaujolais-Villages- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2011 Beaujolais-Villages from Joseph Drouhin is still available in the New York market and the wine is drinking beautifully, with the depth and muscle that defines this excellent vintage beautifully displayed in a classic Beaujolais-Villages framework. The deep and complex nose shows some lovely roasted tones in its fruit blend of dark berries and black cherries, with notes of gamebird, coffee, dark soil tones, a touch of nuttiness and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, quite full for its appellation and seriously structured, with a great core, superb complexity and just a bit of backend tannin on the long, focused and very serious finish. This is a steal in the market and folks in the New York vicinity should really seek this out! 2015-2025. **91.**

St. Amour

2014 St. Amour- Domaine des Billards

Domaine des Billards is one of my absolute favorite wines in all of Beaujolais, as it ages impeccably well and is always as good as the growing conditions of the particular season will allow. The 2014 is not yet released here in the states, but a sample was air-freighted in right before this article was completed, so that it could be included in this feature. The bouquet is still very primary in profile, but very deep and pure at the same time, and it is quite clear that the 2014 will vie with the 2011 for the greatest wine produced at Domaine des Billards since the surreal 2005. The youthful nose is a fine blend of red and black cherries, pomegranate, nutskin, dark soil tones, a bit of bitter chocolate, fresh thyme and violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and adolescent, with a potentially sappy core nicely wrapped in structural elements, modest tannins, fine acidity and great length and grip on the still very primary finish. This wine routinely gets more red fruity as it ages, and when it starts out this black fruity I always take that as a very, very good sign for its ultimate evolution in the bottle. This is a beautiful wine in the making. 2017-2035+. **93+.**

2013 St. Amour- Domaine des Billards

Domaine des Billards is the flagship property of the Barbet family and their 2013 is flat out superb, delivering a deep and very pure bouquet of cherries, pomegranate, violets, a touch of gamebird, a superb base of chalky soil tones and incipient nutskin. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and very intensely flavored, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature, lovely complexity and a long, tangy and modestly tannic finish. As is often the case with good vintages of Domaine des Billards, this wine is very drinkable today, but is also built to age and will be even better with a bit of bottle age, to allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. There is almost a hint of sappiness here that is extremely rare in 2013 and which promises great things down the road. 2015-2035+. **92+.**

2013 St. Amour- Maison Joseph Drouhin

As readers already know, I find St. Amour to be the most underrated of the Crus of Beaujolais and Maison Drouhin makes one of the finest to be found in the region. Their 2013 version is youthfully excellent, offering up a complex and still fairly tight nose of cherries, cranberries, pepper, woodsmoke, fresh thyme, dark soil tones and a hint of roses in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and still pretty primary, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature and a bit of backend tannin that will need to resolve before the wine starts to drink with true generosity- though it is eminently drinkable today with food. St. Amour is the least well-known of the longer-lived Crus in the region and the 2013 version from Joseph Drouhin will clearly age very well indeed. 2016-2035. **91+.**

2011 St. Amour “Clos des Billards”- Famille Barbet

The 2011 Clos des Billards from the Barbet family is a very good wine, but its cellar regimen of extended maceration and aging in Burgundy barrels produces a very different interpretation of this special *terroir*, and I am not sure if I do not like the regular bottling better! Certainly the family’s holdings in Moulin-à-Vent are better-suited to this style of vinification, but it is still very early days for the 2011 Clos des Billards and perhaps in a decade’s time, I will change my tune. Today, this wine is deep, complex and a bit heavy-handed in its aromatic constellation of black cherries, cassis, coffee bean, woodsmoke, dark soil tones and a bit of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very black fruity for a St. Amour, with a fine core of fruit, plenty of dark soil tones and a very long, well-balanced and chewy finish. This is still a very young wine and needs time to blossom, but right now, it seems to have all of the depth and special soil signature of the regular bottling, but none of the vibrancy, purity and *élan* of the standard St. Amour here. This will be very good in the fullness of time, but my gut instinct is that it will always be just a bit heavy-handed in style and never catch up to the regular Domaine des Billards bottling from 2011, which is one of the wines of the vintage in Beaujolais. 2020-2040+. **90+**.

Chiroubles

2014 Chiroubles “Vieilles Vignes”- Fabien Collonge

The 2014 Chiroubles “Vieilles Vignes”- Fabien Collonge is produced from forty-five year-old vines and is fermented in cement tanks. The 2014 version offers up a deep and lovely nose of black cherries, a touch of dark berry, fresh herbs, a fine base of soil, woodsmoke and a nice touch of spiciness in the upper register vaguely reminiscent of curry. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and offers up superb intensity of flavor, with a sappy core, excellent soil signature, tangy acids, just a touch of tannin and lovely balance and grip on the long, classy and complex finish. This is really a lovely, old school example of Chiroubles that is drinking great out of the blocks, but will have no difficulty keeping up to ten years. 2015-2025. **90**.

2014 Chiroubles “Terroir”- Christine et Gilles Paris

The 2014 Chiroubles “Terroir” from Christine et Gilles Paris is a lovely wine that was not chapitalized and comes in at an even twelve percent alcohol. The very pretty and youthful nose wafts from the glass in a blend of cherries, blood orange, vinesmoke, a fine base of soil, woodsmoke and a touch of fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and tangy, with good intensity at the core (though not a lot of fat), fine focus and grip and a very long, transparent and very modestly tannic finish. I like the complexity and bounce here very much. 2015-2030. **90**.

2013 Chiroubles “Vieilles Vignes”- Christine et Gilles Paris

The 2013 old vine bottling of Chiroubles from the Christine and Gilles Paris is also unchapitalized and twelve percent alcohol, and this too is a good bottle, but more backwards than the 2014 “Terroir” bottling and will need a few years in the cellar to blossom. This was initially a bit reduced when opened and will benefit from a some time in decanter prior to serving, but eventually blossoms to offer up a “cool fruit” nose of dark berries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, a bit of pepper, fresh herb tones and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and shows more flesh at the core than the Terroir bottling, with fine focus and grip, tangy acids and a bit of ripe tannin on the long and promising finish. Good juice. 2017-2030+. **89**.

Moulin-à-Vent

2014 Moulin-à-Vent- Domaine Richard Rottiers

The 2014 Moulin-à-Vent from Richard Rottiers is produced from sixty-five year-old vines and is raised in a combination of *foudres* and older Burgundy barrels. The wine is excellent, offering up an utterly classic bouquet of cassis, black cherries, espresso, black pepper, a bit of charred wood, dark soil tones and a lovely topnote redolent of thyme and sage. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and intensely flavored, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent purity, good acids and a bit of tannin adding grip and *gras* on the long and soil-driven finish. This is an excellent example of Moulin-à-Vent from a producer I have not crossed paths with before, but will be keeping track of from here on out! A lovely example. 2015-2035. **91+**.

2013 Moulin-à-Vent “Champs de Cour” Réserve Caveau- Xavier et Nicolas Barbet

The 2013 Champs de Cour from Xavier et Nicolas Barbet is a beautiful example of the vintage, with exemplary depth and nascent complexity. I tasted the first iterations of these single *lieux à dits* bottlings from the Barbet family when they were still barrel samples and not on form, but I have been looking forward to trying future editions of them and this 2013 is very promising. The Champs de Cour is located right at the foot of the famous windmill here and is aged in Burgundy barrels; the 2013 offers up a superb, youthful bouquet of dark berries, black cherries, dark soil tones, a bit of bitter chocolate, a hint of cedar, woodsmoke and roasted gamebird in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a rock solid core, superb soil signature, nascent complexity and a very long, youthful and moderately tannic finish. This is a serious cuvée of Moulin-à-Vent and is built to age, but it should prove to be outstanding with sufficient bottle age. 2020-2050. **93+**.

2013 Moulin-à-Vent- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2013 Moulin-à-Vent from Maison Joseph Drouhin is another outstanding example of the vintage, as the wine offers up a complex and very pure nose of cassis, dark berries, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, gamebirds, espresso, a touch of graphite and a discreet topnote of chicory. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a good core of fruit, excellent soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish that closes with a youthful touch of pepperiness. Like all of the 2013s from Maison Drouhin, this is not a blockbuster example of Moulin-à-Vent, but it is intensely flavored, very refined and will age beautifully. Normally, when it comes to the domaine’s lineups of Cru Beaujolais, my heart is usually owned by their St. Amour and Morgon, but I am going to tuck a case of this wine in my cellar and see how it blossoms with bottle age, as my gut instinct is that this is going to be a terrific wine with extended bottle age. 2015-2040. **93**.

2013 Moulin-à-Vent “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Grand Moulin (Xavier et Nicolas Barbet)

The 2013 Moulin-à-Vent “Vieilles Vignes” from Domaine Grand Moulin was kindly shipped to me by Xavier Barbet from France shortly before I finished this article, as the wine has not yet been released here in the New York. This is continually one of my favorite unsung bottlings from this commune and the 2013 is another very strong wine, wafting from the glass in a complex and classic blend of cassis, dark soil tones, a bit of currant leaf, woodsmoke, espresso and a touch of youthful pepperiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly primary, with a good core, fine soil signature, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This will need a couple of years in the cellar to really blossom, but should prove to be a fine wine for a decade or two after that. 2017-2035. **90+**.

2013 Moulin-à-Vent “Roches Grès”- Patrick Tranchand

The 2013 Moulin-à-Vent “Roches Grès” from Patrick Tranchand hails from a parcel of seventy-five year-old vines and is raised in older *barriques* for a year prior to bottling. The 2013 is the first example I have tasted from Monsieur Tranchand and the wine is quite fine on the nose, offering up a classic and youthful nose of dark berries, cassis, a touch of grilled meat, woodsmoke, dark soil tones and some *herbacité*. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and a bit weedy in style, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, tangy acids, moderate tannins and good length and grip on the slightly pyrazine finish. For those who are a bit sensitive to pyrazines, this is not going to be a wine for you, but if you are fairly tolerant of this affliction, then a few years down the road, this will be a pretty tasty bottle. However, the tannins do need a bit of time in the cellar to more fully soften. 2018-2035. **87+**.

2013 Moulin-à-Vent “les Trois Roches”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

The 2013 Moulin-à-Vent “les Trois Roches” from Domaine du Vissoux is a beautiful example of the vintage and an utterly classic young bottle of Moulin-à-Vent. The nose offers up scents of cassis, black cherries, woodsmoke, granite soil tones, a bit of espresso, gentle notes of pepper and a deft framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, a bit of tannin and a long, tangy and complex finish. This will be better with a few years in the cellar, but it is so beautifully balanced out of the blocks that it is quite drinkable today. 2015-2040+. **92+**.

2012 Moulin-à-Vent- Château des Jacques

I will be tasting the various *lieux à dits* bottlings of Moulin-à-Vent from Château des Jacques this autumn, as they have not yet shipped into New York, but I was happy that the straight Moulin-à-Vent bottling from the 2012 vintage was currently in the market. As readers will recall, this is not my favorite recent vintage in Beaujolais, as the growing season was very difficult and it was extremely hard for *vignerons* to attain adequate ripeness, and this wine has not been able to completely escape the vagaries of the vintage. It seems pretty gently extracted in 2012, offering up a weedy nose of dark berries, charred wood, herb tones, vinesmoke and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, reasonably complex, but modestly ripe and fairly weedy in profile, with modest tannins, good soil signature and a long, slightly herbal finish. This is a pretty strong effort for the vintage, but not a great wine. 2015-2025? **85**.

2011 Moulin-à-Vent “Champs de Cour” Réserve Caveau- Xavier et Nicolas Barbet

The 2011 Moulin-à-Vent “Champs de Cour” from Xavier et Nicolas Barbet is a bit more marked on the nose by its oak component than the 2013, but carries it very well, due to better mid-palate density and broader shoulders than its younger sibling. The bouquet is deep and serious, as it offers up notes of cassis, espresso, a bit of charred wood, dark soil tones, a bit of venison and a fairly generous framing of toasty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully structured, with a fine core, superb soil signature and a firm chassis of tannin that will demand a bit of time in the cellar. The finish is long, nascently complex and well-balanced and all this wine needs is some extended bottle age to resolve its tannins. The open question is whether or not it will have sacrificed a bit of soil signature to its oak component, once the wine fully blossoms? If the soil takes center stage in the fullness of time, my score will seem very conservative. 2020-2045+. **91+**.



Vines huddled at the feet of the famous Moulin-à-Vent.

2010 Moulin-à-Vent- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2010 Moulin-à-Vent from Joseph Drouhin is really starting to drink beautifully at age five and is a superb example of the appellation and the vintage at the present time. The deep and complex nose offers up a black fruity mélange of cassis, sweet dark berries, singed wood, espresso, complex dark soil tones, the first signs of autumnal elements and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and silky, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, excellent secondary layers of complexity and still a bit of tannin on the long and classy finish. This is a lovely bottle of Moulin-à-Vent that is now entering its apogee of peak drinkability, but is so beautifully balanced, that it will have no troubles cruising along for at least another twenty years. 2015-2035+. **92.**

2008 Moulin-à-Vent “Cuvée Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Diochon

Thomas Patenotre, the winemaker here at Domaine Diochon for several years now, really did a nice job with his 2008, which was not an easy vintage in Beaujolais. The wine today is still showing a bit of chewy structural elements and in a perfect world, this could probably do with a few more years' worth of bottle age. However, this being a 2008, there is not the same plushness of fruit at the core of a riper year, and my gut instincts would be to drink this in the next several years, as it seems quite possible that the fruit may go before the tannins here fully soften over the longer haul. The nose is quite good, as it offers up scents of cassis, roasted meats, chicory, dark soil tones, charred wood and some fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is

only medium-full and still a bit tight, with moderate mid-palate depth, lovely complexity and focus and a long, moderately tannic finish. With food, this is really quite tasty today and the chewy tannins do not get in the way, and over the next three to five years it will be quite tasty. Further out than that, one could start to face the risk of the fruit drying out before the tannins budge, but it is possible that the fruit will stay strong and the wine will last far longer. 2018-2030? **87.**

2005 Moulin-à-Vent “les Deux Roches”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

The 2005 les Deux Roches Moulin-à-Vent from Pierre-Marie Chermette is drinking beautifully and is fully into its apogee of peak maturity at age ten. The pure and complex nose wafts from the glass in a complex blend of black cherries, cassis, woodsmoke, a touch of chicory, espresso and a lovely base of dark, complex soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, melting tannins, lovely focus and grip and a very long, complex and utterly suave finish. This has really aged with great style. 2015-2030+. **94.**

Fleurie

2014 Fleurie- Château de Fleurie

The 2014 Château de Fleurie is a lovely young wine that is approachable out of the blocks, but still pretty tangy and tightly-knit on the backend, and I would be inclined to let this lovely wine age for a year or two in the cellar and really allow it to come into full bloom. The bouquet is very, very promising, as it jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of red and black cherries, violets, a touch of nutskin, lovely soil tones, fresh thyme and a hint of chicory in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very intensely flavored, with a potentially sappy core, good structure and focus and a long, modestly tannic and still quite primary finish. A superb bottle of Fleurie in the making, which will drink well upon its release, but will not really start hitting on all cylinders until it has had a bit of bottle age. Lovely juice. 2015-2030. **92+.**

2014 Fleurie “Cuvée Christal”- Alain Coudert

The 2014 Fleurie “Cuvée Christal” from Alain Coudert is a lovely young bottle of Fleurie, with bright acids, a touch of tannin and the potential to age gracefully for up to a decade. The deep and serious nose wafts from the glass in a fine blend of black cherries, pomegranate, a touch of youthful pepper, lovely soil tones, fresh herbs and a bit of violet in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and nicely structured, with a sappy core of fruit, a fine sense of reserve (which augurs very well for its future evolution), fine soil signature and a long, tangy finish. This has a bit of youthful *herbacité* evident on the backend right now, but this should be nicely integrated into the fruit and soil elements with a few more months in the bottle. I love the backend energy here. 2015-2025+. **89+.**

2014 Fleurie- Clos de la Roilette (Alain Coudert)

Alain Coudert’s flagship bottling of the Clos de la Roilette is absolutely superb in 2014. The nose is deeper and more serious than the Cuvée Christal bottling from Monsieur Coudert, offering up a pure and nascently complex aromatic constellation of cherries, pomegranate, fresh thyme, a bit of bitter chocolate, a very complex base of dark soil nuances (dare I say Moulin-à-Vent-like soil tones), a touch of nutskin and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with moderate, ripe tannins, tangy acids, a superb core of fruit and outstanding focus and grip on the long and still quite youthful finish. I was seduced by the fleshy generosity of the 2009 Clos de la Roilette out of the blocks and found that it did not

age quite as well as I had anticipated, but here, the wine's depth and generosity are currently buried nicely behind its structural elements and this looks likely to truly age superbly well. It is quite tasty today, but still a puppy and I would buy a case and tuck it away for a couple of years before starting to drink it in earnest. A lovely wine. 2017-2035. **92+**.

2014 Fleurie “Clos de la Grand Cour”- Domaine de la Grand Cour (J-L. Dutraive)

As readers will recall, Monsieur Dutraive's “Clos de la Grand Cour” is produced from a monopole vineyard that is planted with thirty to seventy year-old vines and is aged in a combination of older *barriques* and *foudres*. The bouquet on the 2014 is red fruity and excellent, offering up scents of cherries, pomegranate, a bit of bonfire, fresh thyme, lovely soil tones and a hint of cedar. On the palate the wine is really lovely, with a full-bodied format, a succulent core, lovely soil inflection and a long, gently tannic and tangy finish. My sample bottle had just a touch of volatile acidity in it and really benefited from decanting to let it blow off. Really a lovely wine. 2015-2030+. **91+**.

2014 Fleurie “Terroir Champagne” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine de la Grand Cour

The 2014 “Terroir Champagne” bottling from Jean-Louis Dutraive, from one of his most important *lieux à dits* in Fleurie, and this wine is also produced from vineyards ranging from thirty to seventy years of age, with one-third of the wines raised in stainless steel tanks, one-third in old *foudres* and one-third in Burgundy casks. The bouquet on the 2014 is gorgeous, soaring from the glass in a red fruity and spicy mélange of cherries, blood orange, woodsmoke, turmeric, lovely soil tones and a bit of cedary wood spice. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and very transparent, with a silky core, just a whisper of tannin, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is already a very velvety and delicious bottle of Fleurie, but it has the stuffing to age well and could even be tastier with three or four years of bottle age. Fine juice. 2015-2030+. **92**.

2013 Fleurie “la Grande Rose”- Julie Balagny

The 2013 Fleurie “la Grande Rose” from Julie Balagny, who arrived in Fleurie in 2009, after a stint making wine in Provence, is extremely low octane, tipping the scales at only 10.7 percent alcohol, but packs plenty of flavor intensity in its feline profile. Not surprisingly, the nose is only moderately ripe, but pure and complex as well, as it offers up scents of musky cherries, cranberries, vinesmoke, a touch of mustard seed, green peppercorns and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, tangy and quite transparent, with energetic acids, a bit of tannin and fine length and grip on the nascently complex finish. I am always a partisan of lower octane wines, but here, I cannot really understand why this is not at least another half point riper, as I have a hard time imagining that this wine would lose any precision or soil expression with a touch more ripeness, and like a super model up close, this wine would be no less attractive with a touch more meat on the bones. At this octane level, it is really a wine only for purists, but there is serious promise here and I am very much looking forward to future iterations. Please add four points to my score if you are a purist at heart. 2015-2025+. **88**.

2013 Fleurie “en Rémont”- Julie Balagny

The 2013 en Rémont bottling from Julie Balagny is also extremely low in alcohol, also coming in at an uncapitalized 10.7 percent. The wine is pretty and high-toned aromatically, wafting from the glass in a mix of strawberries, woodsmoke, lovely soil tones, a bit of mustard seed and rose petals. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, pure and very transparent, with a whisper of volatility, modest depth, but again, good intensity of flavor and fine grip on the tangy

finish. This is quite a nice wine, though I would be willing to take a bit more mid-palate amplitude! 2014-2016. **87.**

2013 Fleurie- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2013 Fleurie from Domaine des Terres Dorées is a beautiful and utterly classic bottle in the making, jumping from the glass in a blaze of sweet cranberries, pomegranate, rose petals, woodsmoke, a superb base of soil, fresh herb tones, a touch of Morey St. Denis-like mustard seed and a nice topnote of rose petal. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and tangy, with a lovely core, great transparency, vibrant acids and outstanding focus and backend energy on the long, complex and intensely flavored finish. This is really a lovely, pure bottle of Fleurie that is quite approachable today, but will be even better with a couple of years' worth of bottle age. Impressive middleweight in the making! 2015-2030. **92.**

2013 Fleurie “Grillé Midi”- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

I tasted this single vineyard bottling of Fleurie from Monsieur Brun last year and really liked its promise, so I was very excited to see it arrive in my pile of samples again one year on. As readers may recall, Grillé Midi is one of the finest *lieux à dits* in Fleurie, as it is a granitic amphitheater that really excels in later harvested vintages like 2013. Today, the wine is deeper and potentially sappier than the regular bottling of Fleurie from the domaine, offering up a slightly more reserved nose of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, a bit of gamebird, stony soil tones and a lovely mix of gentle herbs and floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly structured still, with a fine core of fruit, moderate tannins and very good focus and grip on the nascently complex and very long finish. I would still give this a few more years in the cellar to really blossom, as it will be terrific wine at its apogee. 2018-2035+. **93.**

2013 Fleurie- Château de Fleurie

The Château de Fleurie is owned by the Barbet family, who also owns Domaine des Billards in St. Amour and a few other properties in the region. I have consistently liked this bottling and the 2013 is no exception, as it wafts from the glass in a youthful blend of black cherries, violets, a bit of dark chocolate, a discreet touch of fresh thyme, peonies and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and tangy, with a good core, a touch of tannin and a long, youthful and low fat finish. This is a leaner 2013 Fleurie, with solid, but not dramatic ripeness and it will be best with a year or two of bottle age. It offers fine intensity of flavor and very good length and grip on the finish, even if it is only moderately ripe. Good juice. 2017-2025+. **89+.**

2013 Fleurie- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2013 Fleurie from Maison Drouhin is really lovely and nicely youthful in profile today. The bouquet is a vibrant constellation of red and black cherries, fresh thyme, a touch of gamebird, dark soil tones and a touch of black peppercorn in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright and intensely flavored, with a sappy core, a fairly tight structure today and a long, tangy finish. This is very good, but I would be inclined to give it a year in the cellar to blossom on the backend of the palate and start to show a bit more of its inherent succulence. 2016-2030. **90+.**

2013 Fleurie “Poncié”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

The 2013 Fleurie “Poncié” from Domaine du Vissoux is an excellent young wine, with tangy acids and lovely depth and nascent complexity. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of cranberries, tart strawberries, fresh thyme, vinesmoke, lovely soil tones and a bit of youthful green peppercorn in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, tight

and youthful, with a lovely core, ripe tannins and a very long, very tangy and complex finish. This is a wine that is pretty tightly-knit out of the blocks and really could use a bit of bottle age to blossom. At this stage, it may be a touch too youthfully green for those overly sensitive to pyrazines, but this is just the style of the 2013 vintage and this wine will be just lovely with a couple of years in the cellar. 2017-2035. **91+**.

2013 Fleurie “Les Garants”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

Pierre Chermette’s 2013 Fleurie “Les Garants” is just a tad riper than the Poncié bottling, but this too is a nicely structured young bottle of Fleurie that will be even better with a bit of cellaring. The nose offers up a fine constellation of red and black cherries, a touch of meatiness, pepper, fresh thyme, a fine base of soil and a bit of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, tangy and complex, with an excellent core, moderate tannins and lovely focus and grip on the youthful and vibrant finish. Fine juice. 2016-2035. **92**.

2010 Fleurie- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2010 Fleurie from Joseph Drouhin has now developed a lovely patina of secondary layers of complexity, as it wafts from the glass in an absolutely superb blend of cassis, roasted coffee bean, forest floor, woodsmoke, gamebirds, a bit of acorn and a lovely, savory topnote of thyme and marjoram. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright and complex, with a good core, tangy acids, a hint of tannin and a long, vibrant and beautifully focused finish. This lovely Fleurie is very typical of the low fat 2010 vintage, with fine intensity of flavor, excellent complexity and bounce and a really fine backend. Just classic, middleweight Fleurie that is aging with great style and breed. 2015-2025+. **91**.

2009 Fleurie- Clos de la Roilette (Alain Coudert)

I had absolutely loved this wine out of the blocks, but like so many of the 2009 Cru Beaujolais that I have tasted in the last year or two, it does not seem quite so deep at the core as it did out of the blocks, having evolved into a wine more of breadth and true intensity at the core. It is still very tasty, wafting from the glass in a fine aromatic constellation of black cherries, cranberries, fresh herb tones, dark soil notes and a topnote of vinesmoke. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and quite plush on the attack, with just a bit of tannin, nice juiciness at the core and a long, gently peppery finish. I had even higher hopes for this wine when it was young, but I appear to have overrated it slightly. 2015-2030+. **91+**.

2009 Fleurie “Poncié”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

The 2009 Fleurie “Poncié” from Pierre-Marie Chermette is drinking beautifully at age six, offering up a ripe and juicy nose of black cherries, dark chocolate, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil, a bit of charred wood and touches of fresh thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly powerfully built for Fleurie, with a fine core, still a touch of tannin, good acids and a long, ripe and complex finish. This is listed at thirteen percent alcohol and seems like it might be just a touch riper than that, but is very well-balanced and should continue to age very nicely for at least another ten years, though it is into its apogee today. 2015-2025+. **92**.

2007 Fleurie “Poncié”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

The 2007 Fleurie “Poncié” from Domaine du Vissoux is very different stylistically from the more powerful 2009 version, as this is a classic middleweight Fleurie that is aging very well indeed and is showing quite a bit more secondary layers of complexity than its younger sibling. The excellent nose offers up gently autumnal scents of dark berries, fallen leaves, a bit of gamebird, lovely soil nuances, gentle herb tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is

medium-full, complex and beautifully knit together, with tangy acids, fine complexity, an impressive core and lovely length and grip on the focused and still quite vibrant finish. This is not as deep or plush as the 2009 version, but it is more complex today and I like its balance and backend energy even better. A superb 2007. 2015-2025+. **92+**.

2005 Fleurie “les Garants”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

I am not sure if this bottle was one hundred percent sound, as it had an odd combination of slight oxidation and a touch of reductive tones as well (I know that this does not make any sense to have both in evidence!) and I suspect that there are superior bottles out there. Certainly, this wine retains plenty of velvety fruit tones on the palate, a lovely signature of soil and secondary layers of complexity on both the nose and palate, but the touch of oxidation on the nose also carries through in the mid-palate. I did not score the wine, assuming it was not representative and would imagine pristine bottles would be outstanding.

1989 Fleurie- Jean Henry

Jean Henry was a *négociant* in Mercurey back in the 1980s, but I cannot find any record of the firm still existing today. I found this bottle tucked in a corner of a fine wine store in Beaune in March, and as 1989 was a fantastic vintage in Beaujolais, I thought I would give it a try, despite most Fleuries not likely to last fully twenty-six years out from the vintage. Opening the wine seemed to indicate that this had not really stood the test of time, as it was alive, but a bit monolithic and four-square in an anonymous, old red wine sort of way. Refusing to give up on the bottle at first pour, I tucked it in the cellar for half an hour to let it open up a bit and come down in temperature, and the wine responded by blossoming nicely and really offering up a fine glass of mature, vibrant Fleurie! The bouquet offers up a lovely blend of desiccated cherries and strawberries, autumn leaves, coffee, a touch of meatiness, new leather and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and tangy, with lovely complexity, still a good core of fruit, good acids and impressive length and grip on the focused and well-balanced finish. After this wine had a bit of time to blossom, it clearly showed how much vigor it still has and it will continue to cruise along for at least another decade. It was probably not a top division example of Fleurie in its youth, but it has aged quite well and is really very tasty today. 2015-2025. **89**.

Morgon

2014 Morgon- Kevin Descombes

The 2014 Morgon from Kevin Descombes is a lovely example of its appellation, with a fine synthesis of the spiciness so often found in his father's wines and a lovely underpinning of soil and structure that speaks warmly of the 2014 vintage. The nose is deep and first class, jumping from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, blood orange, discreet spice tones redolent of cardamom and cloves, stony Morgon soil nuances, a bit of gamebird and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and very intensely flavored, with a sappy core, superb soil inflection, modest tannins and a long, soil-driven and tangy finish. This is not the most powerful of Morgons, but it has depth and intensity that puts it in the top division in 2014. A very impressive wine, particularly when one considers that this is only the second vintage for Monsieur Descombes on his own! 2015-2035. **93**.



2014 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Michel Guignier

Michel Guignier’s 2014 old vine bottling of Morgon is a fine example of the vintage and a proper young Morgon, as the wine has a good spine of structure for long-term aging. The bouquet is quite black fruity out of the blocks, offering up an excellent bouquet of black cherries, pomegranate, vinesmoke, granite minerality, a touch of espresso and a touch of blood orange in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with lovely focus and complexity, a sappy core, excellent soil signature, moderate tannins, tangy acids and fine focus and grip on the very long and energetic finish. Fine, fine juice that is eminently approachable today and will be better with a few years in the cellar; the 2014 is a small step above the superb 2013 version. 2015-2040. **93.**

2014 Morgon “Bio-Vitis”- Domaine Michel Guignier

The 2014 Morgon “Bio-Vitis” from Michel Guignier is produced from sixty-one year-old vines in the fine *lieu à dit* of La Roche Pilée, and the wine is aged in old Burgundy casks. As I have noted in the past, Monsieur Guignier farms this parcel organically. The 2014 rendition is really stunning and a bit more extroverted in personality than the Vieilles Vignes bottling this year, as it jumps from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, stony soil tones, a bit of dark chocolate, violets, woodsmoke and a hint of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with great focus and structure, bright acids, modest, beautifully integrated tannins and outstanding length and grip on the superb finish. This is a young wine that will age

beautifully, but it is so good out of the blocks that it is going to be hard not to drink this wine in the first blush of youth! 2015-2040. **94.**

2013 Morgon- Domaine les Terres d'Orées (Jean-Paul Brun)

2013 is the thirty-fifth vintage for Jean-Paul Brun and he has made a superb range of wines in this year to commemorate this anniversary harvest. His 2013 Morgon delivers promising depth and complexity on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up a youthful and compelling blend of red and black cherries, just a touch of fresh herbs, vinesmoke, granitic soil tones, a hint of the blood orange to come, gamebirds and a topnote of crushed violets. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly classic in profile, with good mid-palate depth, moderate tannins, tangy acids and a very long, complex and soil-driven finish. This wine is accessible today, but it is a proper young Morgon and really deserves at least a few years in the cellar to truly blossom and start to drink with generosity and verve. 2017-2040+. **93.**

2013 Morgon- Georges Descombes

The 2013 Morgon from Georges Descombes is a lovely wine, with just a touch of spritz on the palate, but lovely aromatic and flavor complexity and really fine depth in the mid-palate. The bouquet is excellent, wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, pomegranate, bonfire, clove-like spice tones, a fine base of soil and a bit of gamebird. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with a bit of tannin, good acids and lovely length and grip on the complex and gently chewy finish. I decanted this wine for about fifteen minutes to let the touch of CO2 captured in solution blow off, and then the wine drank beautifully. 2015-2030+. **92.**

2013 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes”- Kevin Descombes

The 2013 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes” from Kevin Descombes is really a stunning example of the vintage, with the depth and sappy purity at the core that seems more typical of a 2014 or a 2011 than the more classically endowed 2013 vintage. The superb nose jumps from the glass in a blend of black cherries, plums, a touch of spice tones, granite soil, woodsmoke and a bit of gamebird. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite seriously structured, with a sappy core, great mineral drive, firm tannins and excellent length and grip on the chewy and still very young finish. This is a puppy and really needs two or three more years (minimum) in the cellar to blossom, but it is very well-balanced and is going to be a dynamite bottle of Morgon in the fullness of time. Great juice. 2018-2035+. **93.**

2013 Morgon “la Voute Saint Vincent”- Domaine Louis Claude Desvignes

The 2013 la Voute Saint Vincent from Domaine Louis Claude Desvignes is a really lovely example of the vintage, with a bit of the year's *herbacité* in evidence on both the nose and palate, but also excellent depth and purity. The fine bouquet offers up a complex constellation of red and black cherries, fresh thyme, a bit of pepper, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and a touch of red curry in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with excellent soil signature, modest tannins, good acids and lovely focus and grip on the balanced and slightly chewy finish. This is a lovely bottle of Morgon in the making, that is eminently drinkable today, but will be even better with a bit of bottle age. 2015-2035. **90+.**

2013 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Domaine Louis Claude Desvignes

The 2013 Morgon “Côte du Py” from Domaine Louis Claude Desvignes is an utterly classic young Morgon and destined to provide plenty of pleasure with a bit of bottle age. The deep, complex and youthful nose offers up scents of black cherries, pomegranate, a fine base of granite minerality, a touch of espresso, a discreet touch of fresh herb tones, a bit of spices meats

and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with ripe tannins, fine acids and just a touch of youthful pepperiness perking up the very long and very soil-driven finish. This is going to be stellar, but give it some time to blossom in the cellar. 2018-2040+. **92+**.

2013 Morgon “Javernières”- Domaine Louis Claude Desvignes

The Desvignes family’s 2013 Javernières another absolutely classic bottle of Morgon in the making, and like the 2013 Côte du Py, this will need some time in the cellar to come into its own. The bouquet is deep, complex and meaty, as it offers up scents of red and black cherries, herb tones, a bit of curry, superb minerality, a bit of peppercorn and incipient notes of bonfires in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and more tightly-knit than the Côte du Py, with fine depth and nascent complexity, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and promising finish that closes with lovely mineral drive. This will need a bit longer than the 2013 Côte du Py, but should also be excellent. 2020-2040. **92**.

2013 Morgon “Les Impénitents” Javernières- Domaine Louis Claude Desvignes

The Les Impénitents bottling from the Desvignes brothers is their oldest vine cuvée from their parcel of Javernières, with most of the vines over one hundred years of age. This is the first vintage where I have tasted the wine, but I believe they started producing this in 2009. The 2013 Les Impénitents offers up a really superb nose of black cherries, dark berries, woodsmoke, gamebirds, stony soil tones, a touch of fresh thyme and a touch of youthful pepper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a rock solid core, tangy acids and a fair bit of ripe tannin on the long, soil-driven and serious finish. This is a superb wine in the making, but it is going to be a long-distance runner and will need a few years in the cellar to start to stir and probably a good decade before it really reaches its apogee. A fine, fine bottle for the cellar. 2020-2050. **93**.

2013 Morgon- Maison Joseph Drouhin

I have to think that if you posed the question to Véronique Drouhin which Cru she felt the maison excelled with year in and year out, her selection would be their Morgon. They have bought fruit for this bottling from the same *vignerons* for generations and it is always a superbly crafted wine. The 2013 is outstanding, jumping from the glass in a pure and sappy blend of red and black cherries, pomegranate, stony soil tones, woodsmoke, incipient gamebirds and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and complex, with great sappiness at the core, a fine soil signature, outstanding focus and grip and a very long, youthful and slightly peppery finish. This is quite drinkable today, but I would be very inclined to not touch a bottle for a few years and let its secondary layers of complexity to fully emerge. 2018-2040. **93+**.

2013 Morgon “les Charmes”- Château Grange Cochard

The 2013 Morgon “les Charmes” from Château Grange Cochard is a beautiful bottle of Morgon that is already quite accessible, but with the underlying chassis of structure to also age long and gracefully. The pure and sappy nose offers up scents of black cherries, granite, woodsmoke, a bit of espresso, fresh thyme and a hint of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent soil inflection, a bit of firm tannin, tangy acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex and very classic finish. Fine, fine Morgon. 2015-2040+. **93**.

2013 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Château Grange Cochard

Sarah and James Wilding have done marvelous things at Château Grange Cochard since they purchased the estate in 2008, and their 2013s are clearly the finest wines I have yet tasted from this fine husband and wife team. The 2013 Côte du Py, which hails from old vines at the

very pinnacle of the vineyard, is flat out stunning, soaring from the glass in a blaze of black cherries, pomegranate, superb minerality, a touch of youthful pepper, bitter chocolate and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and nicely structured, with a rock solid core, great transparency, tangy acids, moderate tannins and great length and grip on the youthful and very, very promising finish. A classic bottle of Côte du Py in the making, all this wine needs is a bit of bottle age to really start hitting on all cylinders. 2017-2040+. **93.**

2013 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes”- Château Grange Cochard

The 2013 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes” from Château Grange Cochard is an excellent example of the vintage, but it is a wine that really deserves a bit of bottle age to fully blossom before starting to drink it with wild abandon. The pure and very classy nose offers up a nascently complex mélange of black cherries, cassis, espresso, dark soil tones, a bit of bonfire, fresh thyme and a very discreet touch of spicy wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and potentially quite sappy at the core, with a bit of ripe tannin, good acids and lovely soil signature on the long, complex and nicely structured finish. Like the 2013 Côte du Py, this will want a couple of years’ worth of bottle age to blossom, but it too will be excellent when it is ready to drink. 2017-2040+. **93.**

2012 Morgon- Domaine Georges Descombes

It has been a year since I last crossed paths with the 2012 Morgon from Domaine Georges Descombes and the wine is aging quite gracefully and drinking very well today. The vintage’s slightly green tones are evident here, but nicely subsumed in the other aromatic elements of cherries, cranberries, woodsmoke, orange peel, autumnal notes and soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and pretty low fat for this bottling, with moderate depth at the core, tangy acids, a bit of backend tannin and a touch more *herbacité* on the palate than is evident on the nose today. The finish is fairly short, but balanced, and the wine is not bad for near-term drinking, but this is not a strong vintage for this bottling. 2015-2020+? **86.**

2012 Morgon “la Voute Saint Vincent”- Domaine Louis Claude Desvignes

The 2012 la Voute Saint Vincent from Domaine Louis Claude Desvignes is aging in a very interesting way, as its touch of *herbacité* of a year ago is getting quite savory in tone and adding a nice element to the aromatics of the wine, but this remains a pretty moderately ripe wine that does not show the customary generosity that is so customary with this fine cuvée in most growing seasons. The nose offers up a maturing blend of dark berries, charred wood, a bit of cigar ash, dark soil tones and herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, a bit modestly endowed in the mid-palate and tangy on the backend, with a bit of tannin and good length and grip on the low fat finish. As I noted a year ago, this is a touch malnourished (due to the brutally difficult vintage conditions), but not bad for a 2012, but best drunk up in its relative youth. 2015-2019. **87.**

2012 Morgon “Javernières”- Domaine Louis Claude Desvignes

The 2012 Morgon “Javernières” from the Desvignes family was my favorite of their lineup last year from this vintage, and the wine is aging quite nicely and evolving as anticipated. This wine really has quite impressive ripeness for this difficult year, wafting from the glass in a mélange of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, granite soil tones, a very understated touch of *herbacité*, a bit of chicory, gentle autumnal tones and a nice dollop of red curry in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and beautifully balanced, with respectable depth at the core, tangy acids, a bit of nicely integrated tannin and a long, complex and intensely flavored finish. This was one of my favorite 2012 Cru Beaujolais bottlings a year

ago, and it is cruising along nicely and starting to drink very well. It is fairly lean by the very high standards of this bottling *chez* Desvignes, but really is a revelation for the 2012 vintage. 2015-2025. **89.**

2011 Morgon- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2011 vintage is simply outstanding and probably, along with 2005, the finest recent vintage for long-term cellaring of the top crus in the region, and the Drouhin family's 2011 Morgon is an absolute classic in the making. This is still a young wine and will benefit from further cellaring to allow its tannins to more fully fall away, but there is depth and complexity here and this is going to be a superb wine at its zenith. Today, the fairly adolescent nose wafts from the glass in a pure blend of red and black cherries, a bit of roasted gamebird, complex soil tones, a touch of orange peel, fresh herb tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully structured, with a rock solid core, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the still fairly primary finish. I would tuck this wine away in the cellar for another two or three years to really let it blossom; it should easily last another twenty years or more. 2017-2035+. **92+.**



2009 Morgon- Maison Joseph Drouhin

I have drunk plenty of the 2009 Drouhin Morgon over the last few years, as I bought a couple of cases of this wine and have been enjoying them immensely. Today the wine is really drinking beautifully, wafting from the glass in a complex and *à point* mélange of red and black

cherries, a bit of gamebird, nutskin, a fine base of stony soil tones, woodsmoke and fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, with melting tannins, a lovely core, tangy acids and impressive length and grip on the complex and absolutely wide open finish. This wine is so beautifully balanced that I see no reason that it will not be drinking equally well twenty years from now, but it is so ready to go right now that I suspect that most remaining bottles in peoples' cellars will not be around that far down the road. I certainly do not like the odds for my remaining bottles! 2015-2030+. **92.**

2008 Morgon “N”- Marcel Lapierre

The Morgon “N” cuvée from Marcel Lapierre is the non-sulfured bottling which only comes to the US to be sold through the Kermit Lynch retail outlet in Berkeley, California. The rest of the American market gets a lightly sulfured version of this wine. The wine is fairly light in color today and showing some marked evolution from its no-sulfur regimen, offering up a bit of volatility and showing some cracks in the façade on both the nose and palate. The bouquet delivers a mix of cranberries, woodsmoke, black peppercorns, soil and a bit of bell pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and fairly volatile, with still nicely fresh fruit tones, melted tannins and pretty good length and grip on the crumbling finish. I would guess that the lightly sulfured versions show better structural integrity today and would be the superior bottles. Drink up the non-sulfur bottles pronto. 2015-2016. **85.**

2008 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes”- Jean-Paul Thévenet

The 2008 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes” from Jean-Paul Thévenet is fully mature at age seven and drinking very nicely at the present time. The fine nose wafts from the glass in a blend of desiccated cherries, underbrush, lovely soil tones, a touch of allspice and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and nicely transparent, with really pretty good depth for an '08, melted tannins and good complexity and grip on the wide open and tangy finish. This should continue to drink well for another eight to ten years, and though it is not as sappy and broad-shouldered as most top vintages of this bottling from Monsieur Thévenet, this really is a very well-made example of the vintage and a wine that offers up plenty of pleasure in its more middleweight persona. 2015-2025. **88.**

2005 Morgon “Delys”- Daniel Bouland

The 2005 Morgon “Delys” from Daniel Bouland is a superb example of this great vintage, with its secondary layers of complexity starting to emerge nicely on both the nose and palate at age ten, but still with plenty of sound structural elements and a long, long future still ahead of it. The outstanding nose jumps from the glass in a complex blend of red and black cherries, lovely spice tones, stony soil, woodsmoke, gamebird and the very first vestiges of the forest floor to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and still a bit tannic, with tangy acids, a rock solid core, great soil signature and a very long, very complex and still ascending finish. This is delicious today (witness how quickly I drained this bottle!), but the wine will be even better with further bottle age and has decades of life still ahead of it. A great bottle of Morgon! 2015-2040. **94+.**

2005 Morgon “Javernières”- Domaine Louis & Claude Desvignes (Upper Section)

This was the first bottle I opened out of my cellar of the 2005 Javernières from the Desvignes family and I was really surprised just how tannic and shut down this lovely wine remains today. The bouquet is outstanding, offering up a deep and very pure blend of black cherries, stony soil tones, espresso, woodsmoke and still a touch of youthful black pepper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with plenty of ripe, firm

tannins, lovely focus and grip and a very long, very primary and chewy finish. I will not open the next bottle for at least another five years! I would have had the chance to compare this to the '05 bottling from the lower section of the vineyard, but at the tasting where we were to have it, I became ill with some sort of stomach ailment and had to retire from tasting about an hour before we were to get to the bottle, so I sadly missed that opportunity. Reports from my fellow tasters were that it was drinking beautifully and far more accessible than the upper section bottling. 2020-2050. **93+**.

Brouilly

2013 Brouilly- Georges Descombes

The 2012 Brouilly from Georges Descombes was a pretty good effort for that tough vintage, but the 2013 is utterly classic and really a lovely wine that will drink well right from the outset and also age quite well. The pure and vibrant nose wafts from the glass in a blend of red cherries, sweet cranberry, a lovely base of soil, gentle notes of bonfire, fresh thyme and a touch of coffee. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, a touch of tannin, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and slightly peppery finish. This is really a lovely bottle of Brouilly that will be even better with another year in the cellar. 2015-2025+. **91+**.

2013 Brouilly- Maison Joseph Drouhin

Joseph Drouhin has historically done very good things with their Brouilly and the 2013 version is very strong, bouncing from the glass in a very red fruity blend of cherries, quince, cranberries, woodsmoke, a touch of nutskin, gamebirds and a dollop of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and tangy, with a lovely core, fine soil signature and a long, gently tannic finish. Fine juice. 2015-2025+. **92**.

2013 Brouilly “Pierreux”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

The 2013 Brouilly “Pierreux” from Pierre Chermette is a gorgeous wine, with a tightly-knit personality that could use another year or two in the cellar to really peak, but which is quite tasty already with a bit of aeration. The bouquet is classic, offering up a very pure nose of cherries, cranberries, pepper, fresh herb tones, lovely minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and still quite primary, with a fine core, a bit of tannin and very good length and grip on the youthful finish. This is a low fat and serious bottle of Brouilly that is still in need of a bit of bottle age to fully blossom, but which will be excellent with a few years in the cellar. 2017-2035. **91+**.

2011 Brouilly- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2011 Brouilly from Joseph Drouhin, which is also still here in the New York market, is flat out stunning Brouilly, with atypical depth and stuffing in this outstanding vintage. The deep and still vibrant nose jumps from the glass in a superb blend of black cherries, cassis, a bit of bonfire, lovely soil tones, just a touch of autumn leaf and a fine topnote of spice tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with great focus and structure, impressive complexity and still a bit of tannin on the long and tangy finish. This is really a superb bottle of Brouilly with a level of mid-palate stuffing that is quite atypical of this appellation, but emblematic of this outstanding vintage! 2015-2030+. **92+**.



Côte de Brouilly

2014 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée des Ambassades”- Domaine du Pavillon de Chavannes

The 2014 Cuvée des Ambassades from Domaine du Pavillon de Chavannes is a fine young bottle of Côte de Brouilly, with its carbonic maceration personality giving the wine really a lovely succulence out of the blocks, coupled to the fine underlying structure and depth of this excellent vintage. The vibrant nose jumps from the glass in a mix of black cherries, pomegranate, violets, a touch of nutskin, a fine base of soil tones, woodsmoke and a gentle topnote of sweet herb tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with lovely sappiness in reserve at the core, modest tannins, tangy acids and outstanding length and grip on the beautifully balanced and very serious finish. This wine is often quite forward and red fruity in personality, but the stuffing and structural integrity of the 2014 vintage have given this wine more depth and potential for longevity than I am accustomed to from this consistently well-made wine and it should age beautifully in 2014. Fine, fine juice. 2015-2030+. 92+.

2013 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

I always think of the Côte de Brouilly as one of the great sleepers in the lineup of Jean-Paul Brun and the 2013 is really a beautifully transparent and pure example of the vintage. The bouquet is strikingly beautiful in its constellation of griotte cherries, *fraises du bois*, complex minerality, a touch of dusty rose, fresh thyme, gentle nutskin and just a touch of youthful Gamay pepperiness. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and tangy, with a lovely core of

fruit, great mineral drive, modest tannins and a very long, still fairly primary finish. This is going to be a beautiful wine- pure, soil-driven and intensely flavored, and while it is eminently drinkable today, it will be even better down the road. High class juice. 2017-2035. **92+**.

2013 Côte de Brouilly- France Gonzalvez (served from magnum)

France Gonzalvez is a relatively new producer in Beaujolais, as her first vintage was the 2004. She likes to produce natural wines, with no chapitalization, and her 2013 Côte de Brouilly surprised me as coming in at only 11.5 percent alcohol in this pretty classic vintage. While I am most often a proponent of lower octane wines, here, a bit more ripeness would have been most welcome, as this wine comes in a bit malnourished and green on the backend. The nose is quite pretty, offering up notes of cranberries, cherries, vinesmoke, fresh herbs and a nice base of Côte de Brouilly soil tones. However, on the palate, the wine could really use a bit more stuffing, as it is medium-bodied and a bit emaciated, with a thin mid-palate, tangy acids and a short, green finish. Better to pick the grapes when they are ripe... 2015-2020. **84**.

2005 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine de la Voute des Crozes (Nicole Chanrion)

I bought a case of this wine and have been dipping into it regularly with great pleasure. This most recent bottle was drinking beautifully and fully mature on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up a suave blend of cherries, sweet cranberries, woodsmoke, a superb base of gently autumnal soil tones, a bit of fresh thyme and a nice Burgundian dollop of gamebird. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and quite velvety on the attack, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, melted tannins and a long, focused and tangy finish. A lovely vintage for this wine that is at its apogee, but so keenly balanced that it may continue drinking at this very high level for quite a long time to come. 2015-2025+. **92**.

**JOËL AND ÉMILE CHAMPET'S
SUPERB OLD SCHOOL CÔTE-RÔTIE**



Émile Champet hails back to an older and simpler time in the world of Côte-Rôtie, when very few *vignerons* bottled their own wines and most had to make a living in a myriad of other ways, while still tending their vines in their spare time. Monsieur Champet belongs to that older generation in Ampuis, having been born in 1925, and like some of his contemporaries such as Marius Gentaz or Noël Verset, winemaking was a very part-time job for him during the majority of his career, and for much of his adult life he made his principal living as a farmer growing vegetables and flowers for the local market in Ampuis and only tending his vines in his spare time. By the decade of the 1960s, as he closed in on his fortieth birthday, he was finally able to make winegrowing his principal vocation. For much of his early career, Monsieur Champet was content to sell his small production of Côte-Rôtie off to the *négociant* house of Chapoutier, but in the mid-1960s, he began to bottle a significant percentage of his production himself and his first commercially available, domaine-bottled vintage was the 1967. Of course, there were never a large number of bottles by today's standards, as Monsieur Champet never farmed more than a couple of hectares of vines during the height of his career, and throughout, he continued to sell at least some of his production off to *négociants*. He was joined by his son, Joël Champet full-time at the domaine in the 1985 vintage, and by the 1990 vintage, most of the family wines were

labeled under Joël Champet's name, as father Émile had reached the mandatory retirement age of sixty-five years of age that year. However, some wines still appeared under father Émile's name after his "official" retirement- which mostly went to local clients in and around Ampuis- as he was able to retain about a half hectare of vines to farm while *en retrait* and not jeopardize his pension. Émile Champet was able to produce wines up until the 2005 vintage, when he finally decided to call it quits after thirty-nine harvests of estate-bottled wines, and dozens of vintages sold off previously to *négociants*, with his final retirement taking place on April 17th of 2006. Monsieur Champet passed away the following year, at the ripe age of eighty-two.

Today, Joël Champet, who was born in 1955, has been joined in turn by his own two sons, Romain and Maxime Champet, so another generation of the family is now firmly established in the crafting of first class, very traditionally-styled Côte-Rôtie. Romain's first vintage with his father was the 2003, and Maxime's was 2009. Over the years, the labels of the Domaine Champet wines have reflected these generational changes, with the wines from 1967 through 1989 all appearing under the name of Émile Champet, and then from 1990 to 2003 as Joël Champet. From 2003 through 2008, the label appeared as Joël et Romain Champet, and from 2009 forwards, with Maxime's joining the family estate full-time, they are labeled simply as Domaine Champet. As noted above, Émile Champet continued to make a small amount of wine up until two years before his passing away, and this wine was always sold under his own label, but I have never actually had the good fortune to see a bottle from his first "retirement" phase of his long and very successful career. Ironically, given that Monsieur Champet was such an influential member of the generation that first put Côte-Rôtie on the international wine map in the 1970s, his wines always tended to fly a bit under the radar- probably due to their uncompromisingly classical styling- and the wines have remained very much "insider wines" that have been well-known to astute connoisseurs of the wines from this region, but often overlooked by much of the general wine-drinking public and they were never really "discovered" the way the wines of Marius Gentaz or Noël Verset have been in the last decade or two. But, they are certainly cut from the same stylistic cloth as the Gentaz and Verset wines and are amongst the top traditionalist wines one can find in Côte-Rôtie in the present day.

All three generations of Champet *vignerons* have been died in the wool traditionalists, making wines in a style that was very much the way Côte-Rôtie was produced when it first came to prominence in the 1970s and 1980s, but which was largely left by the wayside in the aftermath of the success of Marcel Guigal and his more new oaky style of wines. The Champet family ferments their grapes in whole clusters (one hundred percent of the stems are included *chez* Champet, year in and year out), with the alcoholic and malolactic fermentations taking place in cement tanks, prior to the wines being racked into well-seasoned oak *foudres*, *demi-muids* and the occasional old Burgundy cask for aging prior to bottling. Prior to Joël Champet arriving full-time at the estate in the 1980s, his father would take a very traditional approach to the bottling of the wines as well, as it was customary in this era in the Rhône to bottle as one had sufficient orders for the wines, and it was not uncommon for a given vintage to be bottled over a significantly long period of time, with some wines bottled after eighteen or twenty months in *foudre* or cask and others remaining there for up to another two or three years. This was very much prevalent throughout the Rhône valley when I first began visiting the region back in the latter half of the 1980s, so for instance, on my first visit to Clos du Mont Olivet in Châteauneuf du Pape back in 1989, the estate retained a significant quantity of their beautiful 1981 vintage

still sitting in *foudre* awaiting orders, so that it could be bottled. So Émile Champet's practice of doing the same with his Côte-Rôtie prior to his son joining him full-time at the winery was hardly exceptional back in the day, but once Joël arrived, the wines here tended to all be bottled between eighteen and twenty-four months after the vintage, though still in multiple passes, rather than all in one bottling session.

According to John Livingstone-Learmonth, Émile Champet started out with a couple of very small slices of vineyard land in Côte-Rôtie that his father had purchased, in the *lieux à dits* of Le Mollard and La Taquière. These were purchased in 1935, with the Le Mollard holding comprising forty *ares* and the La Taquière parcel even smaller, at only ten *ares*. Neither of these vineyards are household names, but they are both very, very fine *terroirs*, as both of these vineyards flank the extremely well-known *lieu à dit* of Côte Blonde to their immediate east, with La Taquière lying just below Le Mollard (and the westerly portion of Côte Blonde) on the slope. After Émile Champet "officially" retired, he continued to farm these two small parcels in Le Mollard and La Taquière and bottle this wine on its own under his own label, as the production level here of 2,400 bottles per year was sufficiently small to be allowed by the French government and not interrupt Monsieur Champet's pension, with his other vineyard holdings passing to his son Joël upon his "official" retirement in 1990. From this very small base of half a hectare of vines in the *Côte de Blonde* with which Émile Champet began his career as a part-time *vigneron* back in the 1950s, he expanded rather dramatically by the purchase and clearing of a very significant section of one of the most important vineyards today in Côte-Rôtie, the famous La Viallière in the more northern half of the appellation. Today, La Viallière is considered one of the greatest *terroirs* in Côte-Rôtie, with such legendary producers as Marius Gentaz, Albert Dervieux and René Rostaing all having produced wines from this excellent vineyard, but when Émile Champet purchased his three hectares here, the vineyard had been mostly lost over the preceding century and was almost all scrub land and forest, and Monsieur Champet systematically began clearing and planting the vineyard during the decade of the 1960s. Again, according to Mr. Livingstone-Learmonth, only Albert Dervieux cultivated a tiny parcel of vines in La Viallière when Monsieur Champet began his clearing and planting work here, with almost all of the remainder of the vineyard overgrown with trees. Other producers eventually took note of his progress and followed his lead, and it was principally by the early efforts of Émile Champet that one of the great vineyards in Côte-Rôtie was rediscovered in post-war years in the region, though one should note that Albert Dervieux was the first to produce a single vineyard bottling from this site.

Émile Champet never labeled his wine as hailing from La Viallière during his career (as he continued to blend in his production from Le Mollard and La Taquière until quite late in his career- at least through the 1982 vintage) and it was not until Joël took over direction of the domaine that the vineyard name first began to appear on the label of the Champets' version in the 1990 vintage. The Champet family eventually cleared and planted the entirety of their three hectares, which comprises fully thirty percent of La Viallière, but it took all of thirty-five years to complete this project, so that the last vines were planted in their section of La Viallière only in 1999 by Joël Champet! The soil types of the three vineyard parcels that Émile Champet eventually worked with, once his vines became old enough in La Viallière, were fairly different, as his two smaller parcels in Le Mollard and La Taquière are in the more southerly half of the appellation (on the far side of the ravine of Reynard that Mr. Livingstone-Learmonth designates

as the point of demarcation between the northerly sector of the *Côte de Brune* and the southerly half of the appellation's *vignoble*, the *Côte de Blonde*), and La Viallière is located a few kilometers to the north of Ampuis in the village of Verenay, just downslope from the *lieu à dit* of Les Grands Places. In Le Mollard and La Taquière, there is more sand interspersed with the crumbling mica-schist and granite, as both of these vineyards lie in the *Côte de Blonde*, with the surface stones here taking on a decidedly white color. Émile Champet originally had a bit of viognier planted in these two parcels to augment his syrah, as the soils here favor this variety in comparison to vineyards further to the north, so that typically, five percent of the blend would be comprised of viognier in these parcels when he first began estate-bottling his wine in 1967.



Joël Champet, in his cellars in la Viallière in 2011 (courtesy of Jason Yapp).

La Viallière is quite different in soil type, as here, the fractured mica-schist of Côte-Rôtie is interlaced with far more iron and clay in the soil, so that the soils are decidedly darker in hue (often quite brown and hence the adoption of the name of the *Côte de Brune* for this sector) with grey-blue stones, rather than the white stones found strewn amongst the vineyards further south. Today, due in part to the pioneering work of Émile Champet, La Viallière is one of the largest of the very top vineyard sites in Côte-Rôtie, as it encompasses fully ten hectares of vines, with a demarcation in the vineyard between a northerly and southerly section created by a small ravine. The Champet section lies in the more southerly portion of the vineyard, where the soils are a bit finer and less rocky than in the more northerly portion of the vineyard, which one imagines was

cleared and planted a bit later by neighbors inspired by Émile Champet's and Albert Dervieux's success with the portion that they had cleared back in the '60s. In this southerly portion of La Viallière the parcels that were farmed by Albert Dervieux and Marius Gentaz (and now owned by René Rostaing) are located, whereas the northerly portion of the vineyard is cultivated by producers such as Domaine Clusel-Roch, Jean-Michel Gérin and Pierre Gaillard. Interestingly, the Champet family decided to continue to utilize five percent of viognier in their wine, even when the principal vineyard source became La Viallière, so they planted viognier here in this *Côte de Brune* vineyard right from the outset, which probably makes them the only estate to grow a bit of viognier in La Viallière. Émile Champet decided not to plant his section here with *Petite Serine* in the 1960s, but rather a clone of syrah (number 3309, for those keeping score at home), and this practice was continued as Joël continued the labor of clearing and reclaiming parcels in the vineyard after Émile's first "retirement" in 1990.

Throughout his long career, Émile Champet produced his wine in a very small and simple cellar down by the river in Ampuis, but in the 1990s, his son, Joël moved to a house and cellars in the village confines of Verenay (that is actually located within the vineyard boundaries of La Viallière), and the domaine's wines have been produced there since that time. Both Émile and Joël Champet have been passionate builders in addition to winegrowers, with stone masonry their specialty, and Joël has found the time in between harvests to actually build by himself the two homes that his sons live in today. No doubt a skill with masonry is of great service in the steep and so often terraced vineyards of Côte-Rôtie. Both father and son Champet have always been described as men of boundless energy in all of the reports I have read of them, and one imagines that this is also a character trait shared by Romain and Maxime Champet and one that well-serves winegrowers in the steep hillside vineyards of Côte-Rôtie. All three generations of Champet *vignerons* share a great respect for the traditional style of the wines of this appellation, and the wines have never been filtered under Joël Champet's tenure, with fining also discontinued here with the 2001 vintage here. As a result, these are very classically structured examples of Côte-Rôtie, with the inclusion of one hundred percent of the stems and the use of absolutely no new oak producing wines that start out life tightly-knit, deep and well-built for long-term cellaring. However, they are not overly powerful or forbidding wines in their youth, but rather wines that are very much defined by their soil elements and very pure, unadulterated fruit, as well as marked by their youthful stemminess (which turns to lovely spice tones in the mature wines as the years roll by). Their whole cluster personalities certainly recall the wines of Marius Gentaz quite a bit when they are young. One really has to marvel at the willingness of the Champet family to use one hundred percent whole clusters year in and year out, as this requires a very serious approach to viticulture, for in more difficult years, it requires low yields and complete ripeness to ensure that the stems are sufficiently ripe to not impart any green elements in the wines, and yet I have never seen any evidence of this in the Champet wines even in the most difficult vintages, such as 1996 or 2002, and the wines have always been properly ripe and well-balanced. In fact, the great consistency of quality of the Champet wines really stood out in the vertical tasting that served as the basis for this report.

The style of the Champet family's Côte-Rôtie bottlings is very classic, as they start out life tightly-knit, black fruity, peppery and quite defined by their superb soil elements. As I noted above, with no destemming (neither Émile nor Joël Champet has ever even owned a crusher-destemmer!), the wines show a distinct stemminess in their youth that is very reminiscent of the

wines of Marius Gentaz back in his day, and this is a characteristic that needs to be allowed time in the bottle to settle in and begin to transform from the slightly herbaceous elements that this brings to the young wines to the lovely spice tones that arrive as the wines mature with bottle age. In my experience, the Champet wines are not as powerful in style as were those of Marius Gentaz, but are every bit as complex and loyal to their underlying *terroir* and are clearly some of the finest old school examples of Côte-Rôtie still produced in the region. They show a lovely touch of gaminess out of the blocks, with this element showing notes of roasted venison or gamebirds with time in the cellar. The fruit tones here tend to start out properly black fruity, often with a nice touch syrah's youthful medicinal overtones, but as is the case with several other traditionalists in Côte-Rôtie, the fruit becomes quite a bit more red as the wines evolve in bottle, and by the time they are fully mature, the fruit is decidedly more red fruity than black in profile, with notes of raspberries and cherries predominant. A good rule of thumb for reaching maturity is fifteen years out from the vintage in most years for the Champet wines, with deeper and more structured years like 1995 or 2005 probably wanting a solid couple of decades' worth of bottle age to really reach their apogees. While I have only tasted as far back as the 1979, it seems pretty clear to me from the range of wines I have tried that forty to fifty years out from the vintage does not seem unreasonable for the potential longevity of these lovely wines.

One of the great hallmarks of the wines from the domaine in the fifteen vintages that I tried in preparation for this report is the impressive consistency of both style and quality from year to year with the Champet family's wines. Having stayed utterly true to the traditional style of Côte-Rôtie, even when the winds of fashion were dictating the use of new oak barrels, late harvesting and complete destemming to emulate the success of Marcel Guigal back in the decades of the 1980s and 1990s, the Champet style has remained firmly rooted in tradition, with low octane, no new wood, full use of the stems and no filtration for the wines, so that they start out properly structured and age long and gracefully in the bottle. Reading back through the literature on the Rhône region, one sees reports that in Émile Champet's day, the wines could suffer a bit from bottle variation, but as the only two vintages that I have tasted in recent times from the years where he was singularly in charge at the domaine, the 1979 and the 1983, I cannot really comment on whether or not this an accurate charge leveled against the domaine's wines back in the day. I used to cross paths with the Champet wines infrequently back in the decades of the 1980s and 1990s, when more of Émile's wines would have been in the market, and I always had positive results with them back then, but hardly sufficient experience to be able to comment intelligently on whether bottle variation was indeed an issue with the wines in the first few decades of the domaine's era of estate-bottling their production. Intuitively, with bottling then taking place over an extended period of time, as was the case throughout most of the Rhône Valley in this era, it would certainly seem likely that there would be some variation between wines bottled within two years of the vintage and those that spent another couple of years in *foudre* prior to their *mise*. However, given that the *foudres* have always been old here, with very minimal oxygen exchange, one would not be sure whether the earlier or later bottled versions might have been the superior bottles! In any case, all commentators on the domaine concur that once Joël arrived full-time to work with his father in 1985, bottling became a bit more homogenous in terms of timing, so that even if there would be multiple bottlings (as time allowed), they would all occur over a much shorter time period and bottle variation has never been a problem here since the latter half of the 1980s.



Émile Champet, by the banks of the Rhône River, back in the mid-1970s (courtesy of Jason Yapp).

Émile Champet's wines were some of the first to come to prominence in the very early days of the wine world waking up to the beauty of Côte-Rôtie, as one of the earliest pioneers of importing Rhône wines, the United Kingdom's Robin Yapp, first began to import the Champet wines to England back in 1972, with the 1970 vintage from Émile Champet being one of the first wines to travel outside of the region. Prior to his retirement, Robin Yapp was a dentist by training, and he continued to work both jobs for sixteen years after forming his wine importing firm of Yapp Brothers in 1969, and one of the very earliest specialties of the company was the fledgling region of the Rhône, with the wines of Émile Champet joined on their list by other such luminaries as Domaines Chave and Clape in those very earliest years of their importing business. It is hard to imagine these days, but back in the early 1970s, wines such as these were largely undiscovered and really offered up stunning values in comparison to the prices fetched in this era for comparable wines from Bordeaux or Burgundy. Robin Yapp "officially" retired in 2004, with Robin's son Jason Yapp and his stepson, Tom Ashworth, now running the firm, and Jason Yapp was very helpful in providing quite a bit of historical information and photos from these early days of estate-bottled wines from Émile Champet, and Yapp Brothers continues to proudly offer the Domaine Champet wines more than forty years after the first bottle was shipped from Ampuis to the United Kingdom. As Jason Yapp commented, upon checking the records to see

which was the first vintage from Émile Champet that his father offered for sale, “the 1970 vintage was our first from Domaine Champet, which was shipped and sold in 1972 and was a pretty good value at £1.60 a bottle!” Those were the days.

Interestingly, all of the Champet labels at our vertical tasting were printed with alcohol levels of 12.5 percent, indicative of a real commitment to traditional style Côte-Rôtie. I am sure that the actual alcohol levels fluctuate a bit more with variations of growing season (the law in France allows a half a degree of alcohol swing from what is printed on the label, so that anything labeled at 12.5 percent has to be between twelve and thirteen percent), but there is little doubt that even the most ripe and buxom of vintages here, such as 2009 or 2005, the wines of the Champet family are amongst the lowest in alcohol to be found in the entire region, so that one is not going to find pronounced elements of *sur maturité* or backend heat in any vintage of Champet Côte-Rôtie. I am sure that this is one of the character traits that allows the family’s wines to age so beautifully, and in an age of global warming, where even traditionalists such as René Rostaing occasionally will produce a wine where the ripeness of the vintage defines its personality, the Champets ability to avoid this characteristic in their own wines is mightily impressive. One of the elements that I find so attractive to the wines of the Champet family is that they are not overly stylized and really harken back to a previous era in the history of Côte-Rôtie, as there is an element of “noble rusticity” here to the wines that I find immensely attractive, as this is a trait that one can equally apply to the wines of old-timers like Marius Gentaz, Albert Dervieux and Noël Verset, and which I find to be one of the great inherent strengths of the wines of classic, old school Côte-Rôtie. It is of great credit to Émile Champet that he was able to pass on a respect for this style of wine to his son Joël, and that Joël in turn, has shared this with his own sons, Romain and Maxime, so that today, the Champet wines are amongst the most classically styled in the entire appellation.

As touched upon above, the Champet wines have changed vineyard sources in the early years of their being estate bottled, as Émile Champet originally started back in the 1950s with vines in the two Côte de Blonde *lieux à dits* of Le Mollard and La Taquière. However, once Émile had purchased his land in La Viallière and began to clear and plant it, there would begin to be more Côte de Brune fruit included in the domaine’s bottling of Côte-Rôtie. Back in these days in the region, as was also much the case in Barolo for instance in this era, an emphasis was made on blending from different vineyard sources, so that by the time that Émile Champet began to get established with his estate-bottling, the wine would have been comprised of a blend from both the original parcels in Le Mollard and La Taquière and the newly planted La Viallière. According to Jason Yapp, who culled through the family’s wine library to check on the labels of older vintages, from at least the 1978 vintage forwards, the Champet wines showed this blend by a notation on their neck labels, which had the vintage in the center and notations of “Côte Blonde” on one side of the vintage date, and “Côte Brune” on the other side, and this was indeed the case with the bottle of 1979 that I tasted in preparation for this report. However, beginning in the 1983 vintage, the “Côte Blonde” was removed from the neck labels, which only included the “Côte Brune” designation from that vintage forward, which seems to have signified a shift over to using exclusively fruit from La Viallière in their standard bottling. While the information is not clear, with Émile Champet having passed away in 2007, it seems likely that the fruit from two original parcels of Le Mollard and La Taquière stopped being used for the main blend here, and was either sold off to *négociants* or bottled on its own for private clients who would have

bought directly at the cellar door. With Émile Champet's "official" retirement after the 1989 vintage, Joël Champet changed the labels slightly, printing the name of the vineyard, La Viallière on the label, and the fruit from the two small Côte de Blonde parcels of Le Mollard and La Taquière were vinified separately and bottled on their own by his father for his small coterie of long-time private clients, being produced in his old cellars by the river in Ampuis. The family continues to own the two small parcels in Le Mollard and La Taquière that formed the foundation of the estate back in 1935, but today, they lease them out to other *vignerons* in exchange for parcels that lie alongside of La Viallière.

I would be remiss in not mentioning the superb vertical tasting of the Champet family's classic Côte-Rôtie bottlings that served as the nexus for this report. It was organized by Mannie Berk of The Rare Wine Company, as part of his continuing series of tastings highlighting the great traditionalists in the northern Rhône. As I alluded to at the start of this article, back in my wine merchant days I would cross paths with the wines of Émile Champet quite seldom, as I am not sure who was importing the wines into the states back in the 1980s and early 1990s, but whomever had the pleasure to represent these wines in the US did not manage to find me as a customer. Consequently, it would typically be at vintage horizontal tastings where the odd bottle of Émile Champet's wines would turn up, and they always acquitted themselves very well at these events, but I was never able to cultivate a source for the wines and offer them to my retail clients. Of course, the landscape in the Rhône Valley was far different in those days than it is today, as there was a great abundance of classically-styled wines to be found from both the north and the south of the region back then, so that there were tons of well-priced options to be had in the Rhône and one did not have to be quite so assiduous in searching out the great traditionalist producers, as there were so many of them in this era that one could not possibly offer all of them at a single retail establishment! However, with the huge movement towards modern, higher alcohol, overripe styles of wines in both the north and the south over the last few decades, great family estates who have stayed the traditionalist course such as the Champets are far more rare today and stand out from the crowd rather dramatically for their continued excellence in the face of the profound changes in fashion in the region.

My sincere thanks goes out to Mannie Berk for inviting me to his excellent vertical tasting of the Champet wines and reacquainting me with the consistent excellence of this very, very worthy Côte-Rôtie producer. I was so happy to find that the flow at the domaine from one generation to the next here has occurred without any change in the traditional style of these beautiful bottlings of Côte-Rôtie, as this has not always been the case at all of the top estates in the northern Rhône over the last couple of decades! The following wines were all tasted at our vertical tasting in May of this year, with all of the bottles in pristine shape, with the possible exception of the oldest vintage represented, the 1979, which showed a bit of acetone when first opened, but eventually seemed to clean up in the glass and prove pretty tasty (even if there may well be even better examples out there). I should also reiterate my thanks to Jason Yapp of Yapp Brothers, who so kindly fielded my myriad of questions about their firm's history with the estate and contacted the Champet family directly when answers to certain of my questions could not be found in their files. After having tasted through a superb range of wines, my appetite for the wines from the Champet family has only just been whetted, and I hope to keep my eyes open at auction for possible older vintages that I have not yet had the pleasure to taste, and maybe one of these days, I may even have a chance to cross paths with some of the "retirement" vintage

bottlings that were produced from Émile Champet from the 1990 vintage forwards, as I would find it fascinating to compare his wines that were produced in this era from his two original *Côte de Blonde* parcels of Le Mollard and La Taquière with the bottlings produced from La Viallière by Joël Champet. It would be a fascinating comparison, as the old Émile Champet bottlings would have been produced from extremely old vines, as many of these were over one hundred years of age during his first “retirement” phase. Domaine Champet is one of the great classically-minded producers in Côte-Rôtie, and happily, with the arrival of Romain and Maxime at the estate in the last few years, it seems likely that this will continue on with great success for another generation. Certainly the stunning quality of the Champet wines from this past decade’s worth of vintages is an indication that Domaine Champet remains on course as one of the great, flagship traditionalist estates in Côte-Rôtie today, and their superbly crafted wines deserve a far wider audience!



Romain, Joël and Maxime Champet in their cellars in Verenay (photo courtesy of the Champet family).

2012 Côte-Rôtie “la Viallière”- Domaine Champet

The 2012 la Viallière from Joël and Romain Champet is a young and utterly classic bottle of Côte-Rôtie in the making. The excellent nose wafts from the glass in a blend of dark berries, pepper, a touch of shoe polish, dark soil tones, a bit of bitter chocolate and a nice topnote of meatiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully structured, with a fine core,

lovely soil inflection, impeccable balance and lovely length and grip on the ripely tannic finish. All this superb bottle needs is some bottle age. 2022-2055. **91+**.

2011 Côte-Rôtie “la Viallière”- Domaine Champet

The 2011 vintage of la Viallière from the Champet family is already fairly open on the nose, but shows great structural precision and intensity on the palate and clearly will age long and gracefully. The beautiful bouquet delivers a complex constellation of cassis, charred wood, venison, new leather, gentle medicinal syrah tones, chocolate and a bit of pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully textured on the attack, with a fine core, moderate tannins and great backend energy and grip on the focused, tangy and superb finish. 2011 is not reputed to be a top flight vintage in Côte-Rôtie, but I have loved the examples that I have tasted, as they strike me as utterly classic wines in the making. 2018-2045. **92+**.

2010 Côte-Rôtie “la Viallière”- Domaine Champet

The 2010 la Viallière is a beautiful example of how well the Champet family manages to keep their wines classically styled even in riper vintages, as this is only a touch riper than the 2011 version and every bit as old school in style. The quite classic, youthful nose offers up a deep and pure blend of cassis, black raspberries, medicinal syrah tones, pepper, dark chocolate, a lovely base of soil and a touch of violet in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and still very, very primary in personality, with a rock solid core of fruit, chewy tannins and excellent grip on the long and still very youthful finish. This is going to be a long-distance runner of a vintage for the domaine, and I would not touch a bottle of this for at least another eight to ten years. 2023-2060+. **93**.

2009 Côte-Rôtie “la Viallière”- Domaine Champet

The 2009 la Viallière from Joël and Romain Champet is another super bottle in the making and another very clear exhibit of how well the family managed to navigate the hotter, riper vintages and still keep their wines cool, classic and soil-driven in profile. I would be shocked if this any more than thirteen percent in alcohol, which is quite impressive in this very hot summer. The outstanding nose again shows nice, ripe fruit tones that remain fresh and pure in personality, wafting from the glass in a vibrant mélange of black raspberries, cassis, pepper, stony soil tones, woodsmoke and incipient notes of the meatiness to come. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with impeccable focus and balance, ripe, well-integrated tannins, superb transparency and a very, very long and classic finish. This is going to be one of the reference point vintages of Champet Côte-Rôtie and it should last for fifty years! 2023-2060+. **94**.

2006 Côte-Rôtie “la Viallière”- Joël et Romain Champet

The more I taste wines from the 2006 vintage in the northern Rhône, the more I am convinced that this is one of the great recent years for the wines of this region. The 2006 Champet la Viallière is starting to blossom a bit aromatically and is an absolute classic in the making, offering up a superbly complex bouquet of red berries, roasted gamebird, a touch of nutskin, incipient notes of summer truffle, woodsmoke, a bit of stem spice tones and a really great base of minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really soil-driven in personality, with a fine core of fruit, still some ripe tannin to resolve and excellent length and grip on the complex and utterly classic finish. This wine is beginning to drink quite well, but I would still want to give it another five years in the cellar to let it truly reach its apogee. Fine, fine juice. 2020-2045+. **92+**.

2005 Côte-Rôtie “la Viallière”- Joël et Romain Champet

The 2005 vintage in the northern Rhône was an absolute scorcher and the wines are generally defined by very ripe fruit, powerful personalities and plenty of alcohol and tannin. Even some of my very favorite producers, such as René Rostaing, have not been able to navigate the potential pitfalls of such a vintage with any great success, but Joël and Romain Champet have really made a brilliant example of Côte-Rôtie in 2005 and this is one of the great recent vintages for the estate. The wine shows no signs of excessive ripeness on either the nose and palate, as the bouquet is an utterly classic blend of sweet cassis, black raspberries, pepper, woodsmoke, stony soil tones, nutskin and roasted game. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very much defined by its underlying *terroir*, with a superb core, ripe, chewy tannins and excellent grip and focus on the very long and youthful finish. This is a fairly powerful vintage by the Champet family standards, but with all of the soil signature and balance that are the hallmarks of this consistently excellent domaine. 2022-2055+. **93+**.

2000 Côte-Rôtie “la Viallière”- Joël Champet

The 2000 la Viallière from the Champet family is another very fine bottle and at age fifteen, it is now drinking very well indeed. The nose wafts from the glass in an excellent blend of raspberries, nutskin, gamebirds, a superb base of soil tones, pepper, stem spices and a bit of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and transparent, with a fine core of fruit, lovely complexity and just a bit of backend tannin still perking up the long finish. A fine bottle that is just reaching its apogee of peak drinkability and should cruise along nicely here for a couple of decades. 2015-2035+. **91**.

1999 Côte-Rôtie “la Viallière”- Joël Champet

Ironically, given the very high reputation of the ripe 1999 vintage in the northern Rhône, this is one of my least favorite wines in our vertical tasting. It is not that the wine is overripe *per se*, but the ripeness and heat of the vintage have conspired to take away some of the soil signature that is such a defining element in most vintages of Champet Côte-Rôtie. This is not a bad wine, but not one of the top recent vintages here, as it offers up a ripe nose of black raspberries, chocolate, pepper, venison and a discreet touch of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and packed with ripe fruit at the core, with good balance and grip, ripe tannins and good length on the finish. Today, this seems a bit short on complexity compared to many recent vintages, but perhaps this is just in an extended adolescent phase and more complexity will emerge with further bottle age? It is still a very good wine, but I was hoping for a bit more from the Champets in this vintage, given how well they navigated other ripe vintages like 2005 and 2009. 2019-2040+. **90+?**

1998 Côte-Rôtie “la Viallière”- Joël Champet

The 1998 la Viallière from Monsieur Champet is an absolutely classic in the making and a terrific bottle that has just reached its apogee of maturity and is starting to drink with great class and style. The bouquet offers up a beautiful constellation of cherries, raspberries, pepper, nutskins, cocoa, stem spices and a superb base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and very soil-driven in personality, with a lovely core, still a bit of backend tannin and outstanding length and grip on the complex and compelling finish. This has just reached its plateau and should cruise along here for another twenty-five to thirty years! 2015-2045. **93**.



1996 Côte-Rôtie “la Viallière”- Joël Champet

The 1996 vintage is not a very strong one in the northern Rhône, but the Champet la Viallière is one of the best wines I have tasted from this vintage. The superb nose wafts from the glass in a blend of raspberries, a touch of red curry, gamebirds, stem spices, complex soil tones, woodsmoke and a touch of pepper. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and quite poised on the attack, with good mid-palate depth, modest tannins and a long, focused and tangy finish. Really a strong 1996, the Champet la Viallière clearly has a couple more decades of life in it! 2015-2035. **91.**

1995 Côte-Rôtie “la Viallière”- Joël Champet

The 1995 vintage is one of my favorites in the region in the decade of the 1990s and the Champet la Viallière is exceptional. This is just beginning to drink well, but there is no rush, as there remains plenty of structural integrity to carry this wine many, many years into the future. The gorgeous and utterly classic nose delivers a mélange of raspberries, cherries, pepper, stem spice tones, a great signature of soil, venison, the first touch of *sous bois* and a bit of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with great transparency and complexity, still a bit of beautifully integrated tannin and excellent length and grip on the perfectly balanced and utterly classic finish. 2015-2040+. **94.**

1992 Côte-Rôtie “la Viallière”- Joël Champet

The 1992 vintage is one of the most difficult in the decade of the 1990s, and the Champet version is a good solid effort in this very difficult vintage, but the wine was probably better to drink a decade ago and is now starting to gently slide down the far side of its plateau. That said, the wine is still not too bad for present day drinking, but a bit flat on the palate compared to most of the other wines in this range. The nose offers up a fully mature nose of desiccated cherries, coffee, *sous bois*, nutskins, spice and soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, very gentle structured and low in acid, but still with complexity and personality and not a bad drink for consuming over the next few years. 2015-2020. **87.**

1991 Côte-Rôtie “la Viallière”- Joël Champet

The 1991 vintage is such a great year- particularly for Côte-Rôtie, and given how superbly consistent the Joël Champet bottlings were prior to the 1991, I am guessing that this particular bottle was not one hundred percent on form. The wine was still quite good at our vertical tasting, but given the quality of the year, I was expecting a bit more, particularly in terms of precision and backend grip. The nose is fully mature and complex, offering up scents of baked red fruit, coffee, nutskin, roasted venison, spice tones and black pepper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven, with a good core, fine complexity and balance, melted tannins, but not quite the focus or backend intensity one would expect in this vintage from Joël Champet. I am betting that there are even better examples of this wine out there. 2015-2025. **90+?**

1983 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”- Émile Champet

In contrast to the slightly forward bottle of 1991 la Viallière from Joël Champet, the 1983 Côte Brune bottling from his father, Émile, is absolutely superb and still very much at its apogee of peak maturity. The utterly classic nose jumps from the glass in a mature and vibrant blend of raspberries, pepper, roasted gamebird, stem spices, beautiful minerality, a touch of orange peel and a bit of *sous bois* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, suave and *à point*, with a lovely core, impeccable focus and balance, just a whisper of remaining tannin and lovely grip on the complex and fully mature finish. A classic bottle of Côte-Rôtie still at its zenith. 2015-2030+. **93.**

1979 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune et Blonde”- Émile Champet

The 1979 “Côte Brune et Blonde” from Émile Champet showed a bit of acetone when it was first opened, but this element receded nearly one hundred percent with about fifteen minutes in the glass, and it was really quite a tasty old bottle of Côte-Rôtie once it had cleaned up a bit. With air, the wine offers up a mélange of red fruit, eucalyptus, nutskin, forest floor, a touch of porcini, pepper and a topnote of stem spices. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and still quite tangy, with no remaining tannin, but good focus and balance on the reasonably long finish. Given the reports of bottle variation from this era, when bottling was done over a more extended period of time than today, I would bet that there are even better bottles of this wine out there. But, this is still quite enjoyable to drink, once it clears up a bit on the nose, and is not going to fall apart anytime soon. 2015-2025. **88+?**

DIPPING A FIRST TOE IN THE DEEP WATERS OF SOUTH AFRICAN WINE



Late autumn quiet in the vineyards in Paarl, with the morning fogs burning off in the background.

I spent a bit more than a week in early May in Paarl, South Africa, primarily acting as one of the international judges for the Old Mutual Trophy Wine Show, which is the country's most prestigious wine competition. I had planned to finish off my trip with a few days visiting some of the highly regarded small producers in the Western Cape wine regions, but unfortunately, was waylaid with a nasty stomach ailment early on in my trip and was in no shape to continue tasting with winery visits at the end of my week working the show. I managed to soldier through the four very intensive days of tasting during the competition, which focused primarily on relatively younger wines, but with a few oldies sprinkled in as "Museum Class" wines, but the identities of those three hundred odd wines tasted during the show will remain incognito until a bit later this summer, as the organizers of the show serve everything blind and do not reveal the lineup of wines until after all the results are tabulated and the trophies and medals are presented to the winners of the show sometime in June. As this was my first trip to South Africa and I was woefully behind the times in what has been going on in the various wine regions in the country, serving as a judge at the Old Mutual show was a perfect "crash course" in getting caught up with current trends in the country's wine world and I will look forward to my

next visit to this beautiful country, so that I can fulfill my appointments I had to sadly cancel on this trip and become better acquainted with more of the finest producers in South Africa today.

While the organizers of the Old Mutual Trophy Wine Show keep the identities of all the wines in the competition secret until the final results are handed out, we did start off our week of heavy tasting with an open tasting of mature South African wines, which was conducted on the Sunday afternoon leading into the actual show judging, and which served as a beautiful window into the winemaking past in South Africa and served to underscore just how promising the future is in this country, given the far greater technological knowhow in both the vineyards and cellars these days in South Africa, particularly when compared to the levels that winemakers worked with back in the 1960s and 1970s in this country's wine regions. However, as was the case back in the 1980s and 1990s in California, or in more recent times in Australia for instance, the technological advances that have swept through the South African wine universe in the last ten or fifteen years have been a bit of a mixed blessing to my mind, as one could see an awful lot of reliance on techniques to make the wines squeaky clean on several fronts, and one might surmise that "natural winemaking" is hardly as popular these days in South Africa as it is in France. As readers already know, I am hardly a fan of "natural wines" if they are technically flawed, as so many can be these days, where the "natural" methodology seems to be viewed as the end result in so many of the inferior bottles that cross my path, but I am also staunchly opposed to wines that over-emphasize cellar techniques to "craft" the wine in the cellar, rather than wines that rely on good viticultural practices to produce the highest quality fruit possible and use this as their medium to attain high quality wines. And I certainly crossed paths with plenty of contemporary South African wines today that seemed to over-emphasize cellar winemaking "techniques" at the expense of the ultimate quality of the finished wine. In fact, I had a real sense of *déjà vu* during several of my conversations with South African wine professionals during my stay, as there were many tenets that could have come straight out of similar conversations ten or fifteen years ago with Australian winemakers, or twenty years ago in California, many of which time and bottle age have proven to have been poorly-considered strategies for producing world class wines.

To cite just one example, though perhaps one of the most important at the present time, the conversations regarding the use of screwcaps for a wide array of wines in South Africa was like going back in time to Australia fifteen years ago, when that country's passionate embrace with this closure was still in its infancy and there was often a near-religious fervor surrounding the adoption of this closure. I heard repeated quite frequently the same slogans that "South Africa wineries always got the lowest quality corks from manufacturers" and that reduction issues with screwcap-sealed wines "were winemaking errors, not closure problems" which were repeated *ad nauseum* by Aussies and Kiwis for many years, despite the growing body of evidence generated by the Australian Wine Research Institute (of all places) on how reduction is simply part and parcel with the use of screwcaps for wines and there does not presently seem to be any way around this technical flaw with the closure. Of course, an aggressive "copper fining" or two is seen as a way to hold off the onset of reduction with screwcap-sealed wines for another six or twelve months (pushing out the general onset of reduction problems from the twelve month to eighteen or twenty-four months post-bottling), but most winemakers do not seem to know or consider that copper fining (which targets the sulfur molecules in wine that are most prone to reduction) also strips out a substantial percentage of aromatic and flavor complexity in a wine, as these elements are also housed in sulfur-based molecules and which copper fining is

incapable of not adversely affecting. However, as most South African wine professionals do not seem to be *au courant* with the body of scientific literature on the closure and its applicability to high quality wines, it is not too surprising to see them quite enthusiastic about the use of screwcaps, which seems to only have made massive inroads in the market here in the last half dozen years. A perfect example of how new this closure is and how neophyte even some of the best professionals in the South African trade are when it comes to reduction issues brought about by screwcaps was seen when a well-known South African journalist commented about a Riesling closed up under screwcap that “this is simply a varietal that we should forget about in South Africa, as we simply cannot make good wines with this grape.” Of course, the wine was completely reduced from its screwcap, rather than inherently flawed, which was shown when I dumped it in a decanter for half an hour and we all retasted the vastly improved wine. This is just a sign of a lack of experience with the closure and one imagines that a bit more balanced judgment concerning screwcaps will arrive here with a bit more seasoning.

In any case, despite my misgivings about the country’s current red hot affair with the screwcap, there was an awful lot to like in the wide array of wines that I tasted during my stay in South Africa, and it is quite clear that this is a country that is capable of producing some startlingly fine wines from a wide array of different grape varieties, and when they can find a bit more balance between modern winemaking and viticultural practices and their very impressive historical legacy of wine, then this is going to be one of the most exciting regions in the vinous world. And, though I did not get a chance to taste as broadly as I would have liked on this trip, due to my stomach ailment, from what have I read, the producers with whom I had made appointments to visit later in the trip have already come to this same conclusion and are reportedly making some of the finest wines to ever to have been produced in South Africa. As the older wine tasting that kicked off my week of tasting in the country so aptly demonstrated, there are some great vineyards to be found in the many different regions where wine is produced, and there are still an awful lot of old vines scattered around in the vineyards. Many of South Africa’s best-known wine-producing regions are very hot in the summer months, and it is clear that regions where the daytime heat can be moderated by cooler evenings (either by altitude or proximity to the ocean) are going to be producing the finest wines in the country in the future. There is also the question of irrigation, which is crucial in some (most?) of the hot regions where vineyards are planted today, and wherever this is the case, one has to balance the need for irrigation to keep the vines maturing (rather than shutting down from hydric stress) with the temptation to crop at high yields, water all the time and bring in a bountiful crop load of grapes that lack character and the potential to make great wine.

Of the notes that follow, most of the wines tasted were during my first few days in the country, prior to my falling ill. A great many of these are from the old wine tasting that was organized for the Sunday afternoon prior to our starting our judging for the Old Mutual Trophy Wine Show, which ran the week of May 4th to May 7th. It was clear from this tasting of assorted older wines that South Africa certainly produces wines capable of long and very interesting evolution in the bottle. One should emphasize that the world of South African wines was far different back when many of these older wines were produced, when the market was carefully regulated by the giant, governmental cooperative, KWV (*Kooperative Wijnbouwers Vereniging*), which had been founded back in 1918 to oversee the grape-growing market in South Africa and ostensibly protect prices for farmers. Over time, KWV grew to have near monopoly powers over

the South African wine industry during the days of Apartheid, with all of the country's grape farmers required to be members of the cooperative and KWV setting grape prices and crop quotas each year, with roughly one-third of each harvest required to be delivered by growers to one of KWV's five large winemaking facilities, or to one of its sixty affiliated cooperatives around the country. During its era of hegemony, KWV did not sell still wine in the domestic market, though it did produce a fair bit of table wine for export during this era, when it was responsible for nearly all of the South African wines shipped to foreign markets. Domestically, KWV produced large quantities of fortified wines, sherries, ports and brandies, which were sold in the South African market, as well as abroad. Given its enormous size, KWV really produced some excellent wines, as can be seen by some of the older wines in our tasting that hailed from the cooperative, and most reports I have read on the quality of their fortified wines, sherries, and brandies were quite laudatory back in the 1980s. KWV also kept large stocks of fermented wines on hand in their cellars, which could also be sold back to wineries in the country if the need should arise from a short crop in a given vintage. At this time, there were not a large number of private wineries in South Africa, but that number has grown exponentially since the end of Apartheid. The foundation for today's more open wine market in South Africa was laid with the first quality-oriented wine laws in 1973, but the real renaissance in the various wine-producing regions did not begin until the end of Apartheid in 1994, as there was a rash of new investment in both vineyards and wineries that arrived in the wake of political change in the country.

The vineyard composition of South Africa was transformed dramatically with the arrival of political change here in 1994. Prior to the new openness in society and sense of experimentation that arrived with it in wine country, the workhorse grapes of South Africa had been Chenin Blanc for white wines, followed by Columbard, with Cabernet Sauvignon, Cinsaut and Pinotage (a cross of Pinot Noir and Cinsaut) the most prolific red varieties. The international success realized by California in the 1970s and 1980s vintners was not lost on the South African winegrowers, and in the early 1980s, plantations of Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Syrah (or Shiraz, as it is most often known here) began to be much more widely planted, and this only accelerated after 1994. Merlot, Malbec and Cabernet Franc also began to be planted in the 1980s and 1990s in South Africa, as producers here sought to emulate the classic red wine blend in Bordeaux to go along with their already well-established Cabernet Sauvignon vines, which previously had often been blended with Cinsaut. Sémillon also began to find its way into the vineyards here in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and this grape has also done quite well, particularly when blended with Sauvignon Blanc, which has really shown a fine aptitude in the country. There are also smatterings of Riesling, Gewurztraminer, Pinot Noir and old vine Grenache still to be found in smaller parcels, and gapes such as Touriga Nacional have also been planted with varying success since the late 1990s. All of this rash of new plantings or replantings has often come at the expense of Cinsaut, which may be too bad, as this was the most widely planted red grape in the second half of the twentieth century in South Africa and clearly was an important component in many of the old wines that we tasted at the start of the wine show, often with outstanding results.

An undesirable side effect of the spate of new plantings in the 1990s and first decade of the 2000s in South Africa has been the widespread arrival of leaf roll virus, which found its way into the vineyards from some of the new grape varieties and has been plaguing the wine industry here for much of the last decade. Leaf roll virus slows photosynthesis in the affected vines,

causing a halting march to maturity for the grapes and often leaving a green note of pyrazine from only partially ripened tannins. It has been such a problem of late in South Africa that our South African judges for the wine show were very keen to spot wines with this element in them and kept their scores correspondingly low when it was spotted. The one thing that is important to keep in mind in this regard is that varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon Blanc and Cabernet Franc (and Pinotage?) are also naturally inclined to some green elements in their youth, and that sometimes what our South African judges would find objectionably green and attribute to leaf roll virus issues, was to my palate simply the youthful side of these grapes and not particularly alarming. One hopes that the very real problems caused by leaf roll virus will not lead to a wholesale attempt to late harvest everything to make sure that no pyrazines end up in the finished wines, even if this means very high alcohols, overripe aromatics and flavors and flabby, low acid wines.



Back in the early 1980s, when Hugh Johnson was first putting together his *Modern Encyclopedia of Wine*, he listed only forty-two major wine producers in South Africa. Today, there are fully six hundred wineries registered within the country, which serves to underscore just how dynamic the changes have been here since the end of apartheid and the attendant loosening up of KWV's hold on the wine industry. The role of cooperatives here is still important in the overall scheme of things, as there continues to be an ocean of rather modest quality grapes grown that are earmarked either for the spirits market or for jug wines. In fact, South Africa's most important export market today, the United Kingdom, is primarily focused on their lower end bottlings, which are seen as excellent value by the UK supermarket chains that feature them. However, the real excitement in wine country here is with the private wineries who

are focusing more and more on higher quality wines and looking to exploit South Africa's incredibly complex variations of *terroir* and grape variety. While the country in general is quite warm, many of the best grape-growing regions are amongst the coolest areas of South Africa, and as Jancis Robinson observes, the overall summer temperatures here are not particularly warmer than Bordeaux. Rainfall is primarily a winter event in South Africa's winelands, so irrigation is pretty much necessary everywhere, but one seems to find that producers who use irrigation as a last resort and dry farm as much as possible are producing the best wines these days. Biodiversity is now quite important to winegrowers in the vineyards of South Africa, which is a good sign, and one hopes that a less interventionist mindset in the cellars will soon follow the improvements that have been made in the vineyards in the last decade and will become the norm, rather than the exception. However, the very real success that established producers such as Eben Sadie or Chris and Andrea Mullineaux have realized in the last decade with less modern-styled wines produced from old vines is clearly acting as a catalyst of younger, up and coming winegrowers such as J.D. Pretorius of Steenberg Vineyards, Craig Hawkins at Lammershoek and Trizanne Barnard of Trizanne Signature Wine. It is quite easy to imagine that some of the more overtly "over the top" styled wines still produced here, that emulate similarly muscular and heady wines from California and Australia, will soon become a very small minority of what is produced in the various wine regions, as they are not going to find a strong audience in export markets in the future and are probably not all that cherished within South Africa itself these days.

One of the unfortunate side effects of all of the new plantings in some vineyards in South Africa in the last twenty years is that a lot of old vines have been grubbed up, so that winegrowers today are having to deal with both the loss of great old bush vines of Chenin Blanc, Grenache or Cinsaut, but are also forced to work with a large percentage of fruit from young vines. Happily, a significant percentage of the vineyards that have been planted since things first started to move here in the 1980s are producing grape varieties that seem to really be doing well in South Africa, such as Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Sémillon and Syrah. However, the jury is still out on some of the other varieties that have been planted in the last couple of decades, as Pinot Noir, Merlot and Cabernet Franc may or may not eventually find similar success here. Certainly, at least based on the sizable number of Pinot Noirs I tasted as part of the Old Mutual Trophy Wine Show, it is a varietal that winemakers in the country have not yet found peace with in the cellars, and there is plenty of work still to be done on this front. Back in the old days of South African wine, blending was a very, very important element in the success of many of the very top wines in the country, and this tradition continues to play an important role today. As Michael Fridjhon, the Chairman of the Old Mutual Trophy Wine Show and one of South Africa's most respected wine journalists was quick to point out when we were working through the very fine, old wine tasting held in Paarl, "a great many of the wines labeled as Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinotage or Shiraz back in the 1970s were actually blends, and a very significant percentage of each blend would have been made up of grapes that did not appear on the labels, with old vine Cinsaut being one of the most important constituent components in each wine." While much of this variety has been grubbed up in favor of more trendy grapes, one hopes that the remaining old vines in the country of Cinsaut are preserved and that this grape starts to figure more prominently in blended red wines here, as it obviously worked quite brilliantly in the 1980s and 1970s in South Africa.

Back in the first half of the twentieth century, South Africa was far more famous for the quality of its white wines than it was for its reds, but this began to change in the 1960s and 1970s, and by the time Hugh Johnson was writing about the country's wines, red wines were far the more prestigious of the two and he wrote that "Cabernet Sauvignon has long made the Cape's best red wines." Writing back in 1983, he noted that the Cabernets here were often big and structurally "blunt" back in the 1960s and 1970s, but he noted that the styles were becoming a bit more sophisticated in the 1980s. This may have been a result of the short-term embrace of roto-fermenters here (as with the modernists in Barolo), but given how beautifully the older Cabernets showed at our tasting, there was something to be said for those "blunt" old wines. Of course, sweet dessert wines were the most famous here for centuries, as the fortified elixirs of Constantia were world renowned as far back as Napoleon's time. In fact, the first wines I ever tasted from South Africa were a couple of vintages of Constantia from the 1970s, when I first got started in the wine trade in the early 1980s. Since 1994, white wines have bounced back in prestige, primarily due to the excellence of South African chardonnays and sauvignon blancs (which started to come of age as the early plantations of the 1980s began to show results), and it is hard to say that any one color or varietal is now of primary importance in the country. What I hope is that winegrowers will start to cherish the remaining old vines that are still scattered around in many wine-producing regions (and which have been part of the basis for Eben Sadie's great success with his Sadie Family wines), as there remains still some important holdings of bush-trained Chenin Blanc, Grenache, Cinsaut and other varieties that can serve as very important building blocks to first class wines in South Africa.

As is the case in wine-producing regions such as the Alentejo in Portugal, the Rhône, Bordeaux or Languedoc in France, blending is certainly a very strong tool for winegrowers in South Africa and one that has played a very important role historically and, it seems to me, still has great potential for the future. Today, one sees this primarily in the Bordeaux-inspired blends produced here, but one hopes that South African winemakers will realize that a great Cabernet Sauvignon-based wine can be made equally compelling (or perhaps even more so) with additions of Cinsaut or Syrah in the blend, as it can with young vines Cabernet Franc, Merlot or Petit Verdot. Some of my favorite wines of the entire trip were the 1970s-era "Cabernets" which could have been made up of as much as fifty or sixty percent Cinsaut back in these days, and one hopes that the producers here will look back to their own rich history of ageworthy wines from this era and not be hesitant to utilize some of these old vines from grapes that are not found in Bordeaux, if it will make the finished wine superior. It was quite clear from the wine show session of blended red wines which I judged, that there are still plenty of wineries that treat their red blends as a dumping ground for whatever juice is left in the tanks after the varietal wines are bottled, and that more care could go into some of these blends, so that the various components accentuate each other, rather than cancelling each other out in chunky, nondescript wines. These days, varietally-labeled wines must include at least seventy-five percent of the stated wine in the blend (as is the case in California), and this still leaves plenty of room for a judicious addition of old vine Cinsaut in the blend and still allow the wine to be sold as Cabernet Sauvignon. And there is nothing less desirable about a wine that is simply labeled as a blend (with either a proprietary name or simply with the percentages of each varietal in the finished wine on the label), if the quality is in the bottle.

As I alluded to above, in many ways, South Africa is a very young wine-producing region these days, despite its long and rich history of winemaking in the country, as the dynamics have changed profoundly in this industry (as is the case across a wide spectrum of the economy) in the wake of the end of apartheid and the country's isolation. There are good sides and bad sides to this phenomenon, as one can see some of the typical winemaking mistakes that are also familiar in other, young wine-producing regions around the globe, such as the use of too much new oak, overtly high alcohol levels, widespread use of screwcaps and excessive reliance on cellar techniques like extraction enzymes, cultured yeasts, powdered tannins and the use of wood chips in some less expensive wines. These are growing pains and there are already plenty of signs that many of these trends are on the wane already, or soon will be, and that even higher quality wines will be the end result for a much larger percentage of the country's wine production in the future. During the era of apartheid, the wine industry was very much a white enclave, and more cultural diversity in this industry can only bring a deeper and broader domestic market for the wines of South Africa, and one can see the signs of this already on many fronts in the country. Several of South Africa's most well-known sommeliers are people of color these days, and of those that I had the pleasure to meet during this trip, their level of knowledge of their country's wines was quite impressive. But, one has to remember that South Africa is still a Third World country, and some of the options for quality that are so readily embraced in better-known regions such as Burgundy or Bordeaux (like a very strict selection process) are simply not economically feasible today for many winegrowers in South Africa, so one must be patient with the pace of evolution in the winelands here. There are already some very important foundations laid for winemaking excellence in the country, and things are only going to continue to get better here as the years go by, and today is a very good time for wine connoisseurs to start to pay more attention to what is going on in South Africa today.

The following notes are arranged first with the wines tasted at the Old Wine tasting to start the show, and then younger wines I tasted outside of the confines of the show follow.

White Wines Served at Older South African Wine Tasting- May 3rd

1999 Rhine Riesling- Thelema Mountain Vineyards (Stellenbosch)

Thelema Mountain Vineyards is one of the stars in South African wine these days, and their 1999 Rhine Riesling is a nice old wine that is starting to slide down the far side of its plateau of maturity, but still retains some interest on both the nose and palate. The nose offers up a fine, fully mature and tertiary mélange of apricot, new leather, a touch of tea leaves and sea salts. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and complex, with still good, solid structural elements, but with the fruit starting to fade a bit. The finish is still pretty long and there is nice complexity remaining, but it is time to drink this up. 2015-2018. **85.**

1999 Chardonnay- Chamonix (Franschhoek Valley)

The Franschhoek Valley is located east of Stellenbosch and the Chamonix vineyards here sit at a high altitude, in the foothills of the surrounding mountains, making this one of the cooler sub-regions to be found in the Stellenbosch area. The regular bottling of chardonnay from Chamonix (the winery also produces an "un-oaked" version and a reserve bottling) is barrel fermented and aged in around fifty percent new oak. These days the wine is bottled under screwcaps, but back in 1999, this was natural cork finished, which no doubt has helped it to age so gracefully. The color on the 1999 is still quite youthfully lemon-straw, with the wine offering up a vibrant and classy nose of candied lemon, tangerine, salty soil tones, dried flowers and a

nice touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and tangy, with good complexity, a fine core and lovely length and grip on the focused and *à point* finish. This is drinking beautifully and shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. 2015-2025+. **90.**

1998 Chardonnay “Finesse”- De Wetshof Estate Nederburg Auction Bottling (Robertson)

The De Wetshof Estate is located in the region of Robertson, which is in the Breede River Valley, roughly one hundred and thirty kilometers due east of Cape Town. This is a warmer region, but with impressive limestone soils and some mitigating cooling effects from the southeasterly breezes that blow in from the Indian Ocean help keep the evenings cooler during the growing season. It is ideal for white wines and De Wetshof was one of the first producers to plant chardonnay in their vineyards back in the 1970s. Their 1998 “Finesse” bottling of chardonnay from De Wetshof is a bit more advanced along its arc than the fine ’99 Chamonix, but the wine is still quite a good drink in its more tertiary guise. The bouquet delivers scents of peach, leather, a nice touch of soil and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full and quite mature, but still with good core and grip, fine, old wine complexity and still good, solid acidity on the finish. Not a bad drink for the next few years. 2015-2018. **87.**

1997 Chardonnay “Kaaaimansgat” Limited Edition- Bouchard Finlayson (Walker Bay)

Walker Bay is located near the tip of South Africa, seventy-five kilometers southeast of Cape Town. The Kaaaimansgat Vineyard is one of the coolest farmed by the Bouchard Finlayson winery, with its high elevation, ocean breezes and very cool evening temperatures slowing the grape maturation, so this is typically harvest three to four weeks later than most western Cape vineyards. Bouchard Finlayson limits itself to producing wines solely from three varieties: chardonnay, sauvignon blanc and pinot noir. The winemaking team here barrel ferments half of the Kaaaimansgat Vineyard cuvée, with the other half raised in stainless steel, with the wine aged three years in bottle at the winery prior to release. The 1997 is outstanding and in its prime of life, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of lemon oil, peach pit, salty soil tones, a nice touch of cress, white lilies and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite zesty, with a fine core, lovely balance and a long, complex and beautifully focused finish. Fine juice with years of life still ahead of it. 2015-2025. **90.**

1994 Sauvignon Blanc- Buitenverwachting (Constantia)

Buitenverwachting is one of the oldest grape producing estates in the Cape, as a significant percentage of the farm’s land was planted to vineyards as far back as 1825, with the estate sitting just outside of Cape Town. However, when the current owners of the estate, the Mueller family, purchased it roughly fifteen years ago, no wine had been produced here for nearly thirty years, so this is one of South Africa’s finest wine restoration projects. Their sauvignon blanc is raised entirely in stainless steel and the 1994 is a very good indicator of how well this wine can age in South Africa, as it offers up plenty of freshness in its mature bouquet of pineapple, fresh-cut grass, petrol, citrus peel and a nice dollop of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a good round attack, a fine core and lovely brightness on the complex and silky finish. There is not a ton of acidity left here, but the wine is softening very gracefully and has lost none of its freshness or bounce and is really a lovely drink for the near-term. 2015-2020. **88.**

1993 Sauvignon Blanc- Villierà (Stellenbosch)

Villierà was founded in 1983 by cousins Jeff and Simon Grier, with Jeff handling the winemaking since the first vintage here. Their 1993 Sauvignon Blanc is a very interesting wine that is getting towards the end of its plateau and today, really has more of a sémillon personality on both the nose and palate (though the wine is one hundred percent sauvignon blanc), offering

up a bouquet of beeswax, oranges, marzipan and vanilla. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and getting quite gentle in structure, with the fruit starting to fade a bit and the finish pretty linear. Not bad, but this was probably far more interesting to drink five years ago. 2015-2018. **85.**

1992 Chardonnay- Neil Ellis (Stellenbosch)

Neil Ellis began his career at the giant KWV, prior to moving on to make wines at the Groot Constantia estate and Zevenwacht, becoming this winery's first winemaker. He started his own *négociant* business in 1986, stepping in to purchase grapes from some of the top vineyards in Stellenbosch to craft his own wines. In 1993, he formed a partnership with Hans-Peter Schroder, who had purchased an estate in Stellenbosch the very same year that Neil began his *négociant* activities. Today, Neil Ellis produces wines both from the vineyards from Hans-Peter's Oude Nektar Estate in Stellenbosch, as well as from some of his original vineyard sources. However, his 1992 chardonnay would have still been purely a *négociant* bottling, and it showed quite well at our old wine tasting. 1992 was a very hot vintage, and perhaps this wine has not stood the test of time as well as other vintages from this era might have. The nose is quite tertiary in its mélange of candied lemon and pear, salty soil tones and a nice touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is fullish and now getting a bit four-square, but still with decent depth and length on the finish. It is now time to drink this wine up, but it is not an unpleasant drink, even in its older and softer stage. 2015-2020. **87.**

1988 Chardonnay- Hamilton Russell Vineyards (Walker Bay)

Tim Hamilton Russell founded this estate in 1975, seeking unplanted land in the Walker Bay region for its cool climate, stony soils and proximity to the ocean. Today, the estate is run by his son, Anthony Hamilton Russell, who took over the reins of the winery in 1991 and only produces chardonnay and pinot noir. Their chardonnay is barrel fermented and raised in one third new oak, with crop loads typically kept quite low at around thirty hectoliters per hectare. The 1988 chardonnay would have still been made by Tim and would have been primarily young vines at this date, but the wine is drinking still quite well and offers up a tertiary nose of orange, almond paste, a touch of leather, nutskin and a very discreet touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fullish and starting to slide, but hanging on tenaciously and still offering up quite a bit of flavor interest and good balance on the sneaky long finish. This needs drinking up over the very near-term, but it is not a bad drink today or for the next couple of years, in that fully mature style of old chardonnay. 2015-2018. **87.**

1980 Dry Steen (Chenin Blanc)- Oude Libertas (Stellenbosch)

The 1980 Dry Steen from Oude Libertas is a nice old bottle of chenin blanc, but it has been fully mature for decades and the fruit is now pretty much faded away on the palate, though the wine remains structurally sound. The old nose offers up musky scents of honey, leather, a bit of lanolin and peach pit. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and losing its fruit, with a modest core, still good acids, but not enough fruit left to protect to make the wine more than archeologically interesting at this point in time. Still, one can see that this was once a pretty good drink, but time has had its way with it and it is now over the hill. Drink up. **83.**

1979 Stein (Chenin Blanc)- Zonnebloem (Stellenbosch)

These days, Zonnebloem does not make a single varietal chenin blanc, as they now blend this with sauvignon blanc and bottle the wine under a "Blanc de Blancs" label. However, based on how beautifully this 1979 chenin was still showing, perhaps it is time to start to bottle this varietal on its own again! The superb nose wafts from the glass in a mature, but vibrant blend of fresh apricot, honey, barley sugar, salty soil tones and orange peel. On the palate the wine is

medium-full, round and complex, with a lovely core, fine focus and balance, fairly gentle acids, but plenty of freshness on the long and very classy finish. Based on this wine's exquisite balance, it should continue to drink well for at least another decade and maybe longer. A superb example of how well chenin blanc can do here in South Africa. 2015-2025+. **91.**

1973 Steen (Chenin Blanc) "Johann Graue" (Auction Bottling)- Nederburg (Paarl)

Nederburg is one of the oldest private wineries in South Africa, having been founded in 1936 and the home to the famous wine auctions held each September since 1975. Most of their chenin blanc in this era was reserved for the winery's famous dessert wine, called Edelkeur, which is a botrytized wine that was almost always made from chenin (though on occasion a bit of riesling might find its way into the blend). Edelkeur was the first non-fortified dessert wine produced in South Africa and it was not legally allowed for the first few years after its inaugural vintage of 1969, so the first vintage was not sold until the debut auction in 1975. Therefore, this dry chenin was quite a rarity when it was auctioned off, which was probably sometime in the early 1980s. The wine has aged beautifully and is drinking still with great vigor and style at age forty-two, as it offers up mature scents of orange, guava, a bit of new leather, peach, salty soil tones and a nice touch of nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and complex, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip and a long, refined finish that closes with a nice touch of fruit skin. A lovely drink with plenty of life still in it. 2015-2025. **90.**

Red Wines Served at Older South African Wine Tasting- May 3rd

1986 Cabernet Sauvignon- Stellenryck (Stellenbosch)

The 1986 Cabernet Sauvignon from Stellenryck comes in at a very civilized octane of 12.5 percent, and despite having been raised in one hundred percent new oak, is really quite modestly oaky in personality and has blossomed into a complex and stylish middleweight. The fine nose wafts from the glass in a blend of cherries, woodsmoke, lovely spice tones, a touch of graphite, cigar ash and cedar. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, suave and intensely flavored, with lovely tertiary complexity, still a good core and a long, focused and tangy finish. A lovely example at its apogee. 2015-2030. **90.**

1983 Rozendal Farm Red (Stellenbosch)

The Rozendal vineyards have been farmed organically since 1994 and have been *biodynamique* since 2001, which is very laudable, but I imagine that things were more typically farmed back in 1983. In any case, the '83 Rozendal Farm Red is produced from a vineyard planted with a sixty year-old field blend of bush vines, probably with some cinsaut to go along with the merlot and cabernet sauvignon, and the wine was raised entirely in new wood back in this era. The wine offers up a lovely nose of cherries, cloves, dried eucalyptus, a touch of spiced meats, rose petals and cedar. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and beautifully balanced, with lovely focus and balance, a good core and excellent length and grip on the bright and very elegant finish. This is a dynamite bottle in its absolute prime, with plenty of life still ahead of it. 2015-2030+. **93.**

1982 Cabernet Sauvignon- Le Bonheur Estate (Stellenbosch)

The sixty-five hectares of vines on the Le Bonheur Estate lie at altitudes of two hundred to three hundred meters above sea level, with the cabernet sauvignon planted at the highest altitudes on a base of decomposed granite. The 1982 is a good solid wine, but a bit dense in style and is not currently showing a whole lot of charm on the palate. The bouquet is a mix of black cherries, damp soil, charred wood, red curry and a touch of *garrigue* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite vigorous, but also fairly four-square in style.

The finish is long, modestly tannic still and shows good grip, but this is not quite as polished as many of its contemporaries in this tasting. 2015-2030+. **87.**

1976 Cabernet Sauvignon “Auction Bottling”- Nederburg (Paarl)

The 1976 cabernet sauvignon from Nederburg is excellent and really is a world class wine at its apogee of peak drinkability today. The beautiful nose wafts from the glass in a red fruity blend of cherries, blood orange, dried eucalyptus, cigar smoke, a lovely base of soil, cloves and a deft framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and *à point*, with a fine core, impeccable focus and balance, melted tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. Just a beautiful bottle for current drinking, and with plenty of life still ahead of it. 2015-2035. **93+.**



Nkulu Mkhwanazi, a judge at the Old Mutual Trophy Wine Show, working through a lineup of Shiraz-based blends.

1976 Pinotage- Meerlust Estate (Stellenbosch)

The Meerlust Estate is located in southern Stellenbosch, only a couple of miles inland from False Bay, so maritime influences here help to keep the evenings cool in the summertime. The estate has been owned by the Myburgh family since 1756, with Hannes Myburgh the current proprietor. Back in 1976, it was his father, Nico, who was in charge of the family winery, and in this era, he was in the process of planting more cabernet sauvignon, merlot and pinot noir in the family vineyards, with an eye towards making a couple of varietal bottlings and his flagship, Bordeaux-styled blend, called Rubicon. The old Pinotage fines that produced this superb wine are probably all gone today as a result, but the '76 Pinotage is a beautiful testament to the possibility of this quite maligned grape variety to produce excellent wines, if cropped lovingly and vinified with a light hand. The wine offers up a superb and meaty nose of cherries, lovely

spice tones, a bit of new leather, woodsmoke, spiced meats and a touch of Hermitage-like straw in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully complex, with a fine sweet core of fruit, lovely focus and balance, melted tannins and a long, tangy and very classy finish. This really tastes like a classy example of old Hermitage, which is not bad at all for a grape with such a lackluster reputation as Pinotage! 2015-2035. **93.**

1975 Cabernet Sauvignon- Meerlust Estate (Stellenbosch)

Hugh Johnson, writing back in 1983, cited the 1975 and 1976 vintages of Meerlust Cabernet Sauvignon as the first to show the great potential of this estate, which has become one of the benchmark producers in Stellenbosch since that time. The '75 Cabernet, which first put the estate firmly on the map, is drinking very well still, but cannot quite keep pace with the breed and complexity of the '76 Pinotage! The wine wafts from the glass in a fine aromatic blend of black cherries, eucalyptus, dark soil tones, charred wood and a touch of lead pencil in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and drinking very well, with melted tannins and good length on the poised and classy finish. Ironically, the 1976 Pinotage is a touch more structured today and looks to have even a longer window of peak drinkability, but this is still a very tasty and quite classy bottle of fully mature Cabernet. 2015-2025. **90.**

1973 Carlonet (Cabernet Sauvignon)- Uitkyk (Stellenbosch)

Uitkyk is a very old estate in Stellenbosch, with the manor house on the property dating all the way back to 1788. However, it was only established an independent winery in 1973 and this is its first vintage, which I have to assume was produced from purchased grapes, as the vineyards were just being put in on these mountainside slopes at that time. In fact, the cabernet sauvignon vineyards here had to be replanted, as they originally went into the highest elevations and had trouble ripening, so that they were moved to lower altitudes in 1989. In any case, the 1973 Carlonet is a very good wine, with a bit more “noble rusticity” than the Nederburg and Meerlust versions from this same era, but plenty of depth and complexity. The bouquet offers up a complex constellation of black cherries, dried eucalyptus, cloves, charred wood and just a hint of barnyard. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fully mature, with a good core, very good balance, melted tannins, impressive backend energy and lovely length and grip on the long finish. This is not the most polished winemaking style, but this wine has depth and substance and is drinking very well indeed today, with no signs of slowing down anytime soon. Good juice. 2015-2030+. **91.**

1973 Alto Rouge (Stellenbosch)

The Alto estate is another of Stellenbosch's top performers which takes advantage of the cooling effects of altitude to mitigate the heat of summer, as the vineyards lie in the foothills of the Helderberg Mountain, rising from one hundred and sixty meters to five hundred meters above sea level. In the early 1970s, they were just beginning to experiment with this bottling, which at the time was made from a blend of shiraz, cinsaut and a bit of cabernet sauvignon, though today (sadly), the cinsaut is no longer part of the blend. The 1973 Alto Rouge is a lovely, red fruity wine at its peak of drinkability today, offering up a fine nose of cherries, a touch of spiced meats, autumnal notes of bonfires, forest floor and cedar. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and tangy, with a good core, faded tannin, but still fine length and grip on the very well-balanced and autumnally complex finish. A lovely middleweight. 2015-2022. **90.**

1973 Cabernet Sauvignon “Vintage”- Nederburg (Paarl)

The cabernet sauvignon “Vintage” bottling from Nederburg was their regular cuvée from this varietal, with their Auction Bottling being their reserve in this era. This is a nice old cabernet sauvignon, but lacks the depth and complexity of the auction wine here. The nose offers up a

mature nose of cherries, coffee, dried eucalyptus and charred wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and nicely chunky in personality, with a solid core, melted tannin and good length on the velvety, but ultimately pretty simple finish. I would guess that this was made from younger vines at this time and was probably a good, serviceable wine in its youth, but was not really meant to be kept for this long a time. Not bad. 2015-2025. **87.**

1972 Paarl Cinsaut- KWV (Stellenbosch)

The 1972 Paarl Cinsaut from KWV has probably been fully mature for nearly thirty-five years, but it is still hanging on tenaciously as it slides down the far side of its plateau of maturity and has not yet fully given up the ghost. The bouquet is a tertiary and slightly *sauvage* blend of dark berries, pepper, charred wood and venison. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite soft in structure, with still a fair bit of interest, but with time clearly in hand. This wine is not a bad drink, as it is not yet oxidative, but it has time in hand and should be drunk up soon. 2015-2018. **86.**

1972 Pinotage- KWV (Stellenbosch)

The 1972 Pinotage from KWV is also getting quite long in the tooth, but it still has some life in it and is not too bad for current drinking. The mature and slightly rustic nose offers up scents of cherries, dried eucalyptus, woodsmoke and coffee. On the palate the wine is fullish, four-square and low acid, with reasonable depth at the core, no remaining tannin and a reasonably long, but flat finish. Drink up. 2015-2018. **85.**

1970 Cabernet Sauvignon- Zonnebloem (Stellenbosch)

The 1970 cabernet sauvignon from Zonnebloem is really a superb bottle that still has plenty of life in it, and though it is not quite as polished as the wines above from the mid-1970s, there is a lot of personality here and plenty to like. Back in these days, this probably contained plenty of cinsaut in the blend, but it has simply added to the complexity here, as the wine offers up a fine bouquet of red and black cherries, lovely meaty tones (from the cinsaut?), cigar ash, dried eucalyptus, woodsmoke and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still rock solid at the core, with a bit of remaining tannin, excellent focus and grip and a long, complex finish. Fine, old school juice that still has decades of life ahead of it. 2015-2040. **92.**

1970 Cabernet Sauvignon- Alto (Stellenbosch)

In contrast to the 1973 Alto Rouge bottling, the winery's 1970 cabernet sauvignon is starting to get a bit long in the tooth and showing the first signs of oxidation. The bouquet is a tertiary blend of black fruit, shoe polish, leather, chicory and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is still full-bodied and vigorous in structure, with a good core, a fairly four-square personality and an overt touch of backend oxidation on the fairly long finish. Time to drink up. 2015-2017. **80.**

1969 Pinotage "Meerendal Estate"- KWV (Durbanville)

Today, Meerendal is an independent winery, but back in this era, KWV produced the wines made from the fruit grown on the estate. This wine was produced from Pinotage vines planted in 1955 and which are still used today, though the winery currently over-oaks their bottling from these old bush vines, and the new release that I tasted was really very pedestrian. In any case, the 1969 Meerendal Pinotage was the first wine ever produced by KWV solely from this parcel of vines and it is still drinking quite well, as it offers up a fine old nose of coffee, dried red berries, new leather, *garrigue* and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and still quite vigorous, with good, but not great complexity, melted tannins and lovely length and grip on the chunky, but very solid finish. This is really quite a tasty bottle of old Pinotage and still has plenty of life in it. 2015-2025. **87.**

1965 Cabernet Sauvignon “Selected”- Alto (Stellenbosch)

The 1965 vintage was the first cabernet sauvignon single varietal wine ever bottled by Alto, and fifty years on, the wine is still drinking very well indeed and shows just how well those sturdy, old school South African wines can age. In this era, prior to the labeling regulations of 1973, there did not have to be seventy-five percent cabernet in the blend to label the wine as cabernet, and this probably contained more than twenty-five percent cinsaut at this time, but it has not hurt it one bit! The fine old nose offers up a complex mélange of dried cherries, a bit of game, coffee, dried eucalyptus, a fine base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit rustic in personality, but with still a good core, fine balance and a long, robust and complex finish that is long on personality and still has plenty of life in it. Really a tasty old wine! 2015-2030+. **89.**

1965 Cabernet Sauvignon- Zonnebloem (Stellenbosch)

The comments about the inclusion of cinsaut in the blend for the 1965 Alto certainly apply here as well for the 1965 Zonnebloem cabernet sauvignon, and this shows quite a bit of old, Châteauneuf du Pape character that probably is a result of plenty of old vine cinsaut in the cuvée. But, the wine is very good still as it wafts from the glass in a mature nose of desiccated cherries, hung game, dried eucalyptus and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and starting to show its age just a bit more than the Alto version, as the threat of oxidation is starting to hover around here a bit. However, the wine is still long on the finish and well-balanced, and for drinking over the near-term, there is still a lot to enjoy here (not to mention there may still be more vigorous bottles out there). 2015-2020+. **87.**

1965 Château Libertas (Stellenbosch)

Château Libertas was first produced in the 1932 vintage, by winery founder Dr. William Winshaw first turned his hand to commercial winemaking on his estate in Stellenbosch, after a few years of making wine on an amateur basis. The blend is cabernet sauvignon-based blend, with plenty of cinsaut also used in this era. The 1965 is still alive and kicking, but was the oldest and most fragile of the three 1965s with which we finished up our tasting. It is still perfectly drinkable, but starting to slide down the far side of its plateau, as it offers up scents of cherries, leather, a bit of toffee and a topnote of dried eucalyptus. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and laid back, with fading structure and a low acid finish. This was probably a very tasty drink as recently as ten years ago, but it is now more of a museum piece. 2015-2020. **84.**

Wines Tasted Outside the Confines of the Old Mutual Trophy Wine Show:

White and Sparkling Wines

Graham Beck Brut NV (Western Cape) Disgorged November 2014

The current release of Graham Beck’s non-vintage Brut is really a very good bottle of sparkling wine. The wine is comprised of a blend of chardonnay and pinot noir, and then aged on its fine lees for fifteen to eighteen months prior to disgorgement. The wine offers up a lovely nose of apple, lemon, gentle smokiness, salty minerality and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and fairly complex, with fine balance, a good core, pinpoint bubbles and good length and grip on the tangy finish. This is a bit fuller than most topline Cava bottlings, and offers up comparable complexity and length. Good juice that should age nicely for a decade. 2015-2025. **89.**



The Simonsberg Mountain range in Paarl, overlooking some sleepy, late autumn vineyards.

2013 Raats “Original” Chenin Blanc (Stellenbosch) Screwcap

Raats is a very good Stellenbosch winery and they produce two distinct bottlings of chenin blanc, their “Original” which is fermented in stainless steel and aged six months on the fine lees prior to bottling, and their “Old Vine” that sees some barrel aging. The “Original” bottling hails from thirty-five year-old bush vines of chenin, that are split between decomposed granite and sandstone soils, with the fruit from each soil type fermented on its own and then the two blended prior to aging in tank. The only problem with the 2013 is its closure, as the wine is already showing some ill effects from reduction on the backend, as it is clamped down and pinched, but the wine itself is clearly of first rate quality. The bouquet is an unsullied blend of apple, lemon, spring flowers, a nice signature of soil and a gentle touch of honeycomb in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and well-balanced, with a good core, fine focus and sound complexity on the finish, until the screw gets the upper hand with incipient reduction. Please bottle this puppy under cork in the future, as it is an excellent wine! The 2013 needs drinking up pronto under screwcap, but under cork, this would clearly be a 90+ point wine and a total steal at its price. 2015-2016. **88.**

2013 Raats “Old Vine” Chenin Blanc (Stellenbosch) Screwcap

The 2013 Old Vine bottling of chenin blanc from Raats is a really superb bottle of wine, and at this point in time, it is not showing any signs of reduction from its screwcap and is drinking beautifully. This is produced from vines in excess of forty-five years of age, with thirty

percent of the blend barrel fermented in three hundred liter casks and the remainder fermented and aged in stainless steel tanks. As is the case with the Raats “Original” chenin in 2013, the wine comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol and offers up a truly superb bouquet of apple, pineapple, a touch of lanolin, lovely soil tones and a gentle framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely round on the attack, with a fine core, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the complex and beautifully balanced finish. This would age marvelously under natural cork, but I have no idea how it will fare under the screw. But for drinking now, there is an awful lot of pleasure to be had here. 2015-2025+? **92.**

2012 Chenin Blanc “Touch of Oak”- Rijks (Tulbagh)

The Tulbagh region, which is located due east of Swartland, is essentially an amphitheater hemmed in on three sides by mountains, so that cool evening air can get trapped in here and help mitigate high daily temperatures. Rijks picks their chenin blanc grapes at night to take advantage of this dramatic diurnal temperature swings, and their “Touch of Oak” bottling is comprised of seventy percent of the blend fermented in stainless steel and thirty percent barrel fermented. The 2012 is quite good, though a bit riper than ideal at 14.1 percent alcohol, but still clean and well-balanced, with no signs of struggling to keep its octane in check. The nose is a fine youthful blend of pineapple, apple, gentle notes of lanolin, a touch of soil and a very discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and bright, with good acids, a fine core and very good length and grip on the youthful finish. This opens up nicely with some time in the glass and shows likely to improve with a bit of bottle age, and as it is cork-finished, it should have a very good chance of aging gracefully. Good juice. 2015-2025+. **89+.**

2014 Sauvignon Blanc- Terra d’Aria (Durbanville) Screwcap

Other than the use of screwcap, the 2014 sauvignon blanc from Terra d’Aria should possess all the attributes that I look for in this varietal, as it is sourced from cooler sites in Durbanville and is picked on the early side to keep the alcohol at a good level, as the 2014 comes in at thirteen percent. However, maybe this is from young vines, as it really lacks a bit of intensity in the mid-palate, though it is aromatically quite complex. The bouquet is a blend of lime, orange zest, fresh-cut grass, white flowers and a nice touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full and bright, but fairly delicate in structure and grip on the focused and fairly long finish. Not bad, but not top division for this varietal in South Africa, where the grape really can make fine wines. 2015-2016. **87.**

2013 Sauvignon Blanc “The Young Airhawk”- Nederburg (Western Cape) Screwcap

The “Young Airhawk” bottling of sauvignon blanc from Nederburg is sourced from a variety from cooler vineyard sites in the regions of Elgin, Darling and Durbanville, rather than from any of the winery’s vineyards in Paarl. The wine is barrel-fermented in new and one year-old casks, and despite it being quite ripe at 14.5 percent alcohol, it shows no signs of heat or *sur maturité* on either the nose or palate. The fine bouquet is a blend of gooseberry, lime, fresh cut grass, a touch of green pepper and a fairly discreet framing of smoky oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, tangy acids and fine complexity. The finish is already showing a bit “pinched” from its screwcap, with the length and volume being compromised slightly at this early date from the coming reductive issues. I would drink this up right away, before the screw gets more prominent on the finish, as it is really very tasty right now. 2015-2017+? **89.**

2005 Sauvignon Blanc- Thelema Mountain Vineyards (Western Cape)

The 2005 Sauvignon Blanc from Thelema Mountain Vineyards is a very nice wine, but at fourteen percent alcohol, it was a bit too ripe to age this long and at age ten it is getting just a bit past its best. The nose is still quite pretty, offering up scents of green apple, lime, fresh-cut grass and petrol. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, ripe and reasonably complex, but today, it is a touch flat and is getting a bit short on the finish. This was a good wine in its day, but it is time to drink it up. 2015-2016. **85.**

2012 Sémillon- Steenberg Farm (Constantia)

The 2012 Sémillon from Cellar Master J.D. Pretorius (one of South Africa's top young winemakers) is a really lovely wine that is drinking at its apogee at age three, but shows a fine structural chassis to carry it easily for another decade. The lovely nose jumps from the glass in a complex and classic constellation of pear, fresh fig, beeswax, white soil tones and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, crisp acids and lovely length and grip on the ripe and classy finish. This is fourteen percent alcohol, but is well-balanced and should age very nicely indeed, but I would love to see it picked just a touch earlier, as I imagine one could gain a decade's worth of potential aging capacity at between thirteen and 13.5 percent alcohol. But that said, this is classy juice. 2015-2025+. **91.**

2014 Riesling "Sutherland"- Thelema Mountain Vineyards (Elgin) Screwcap

The 2014 Riesling "Sutherland" bottling from Thelema Mountain Vineyards is a very, very nice bottle of riesling that is already starting to be a bit reductive from its screwcap, which is a pity, as there is a lovely wine underneath. This is produced from ten year-old vines, so this is a relatively recent planting in the cooler region of Elgin, and this seems like a really promising bottling from this fine winery, if it can find its way into bottle in the future under natural cork. With a bit of swirling, the early reduction here can be pushed away and the bouquet deliver notes of apple, lime, a touch of petrol, discreet, salty minerality and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and nicely balanced, with good length and grip and the first signs of the metallic "minerality" that comes from the closure, rather than the soil. I would drink it sooner, rather than later, because of its screwcap, though the structure and balance here should produce a long-lived wine under natural cork. This could be excellent. 2015-2020? **88.**

2013 Gewurztraminer- Paul Clüver (Elgin) Screwcap

The 2013 Gewurztraminer from Paul Clüver is really a lovely wine. This is a very thoughtfully crafted wine, with the fermentation stopped here to keep the alcohol at twelve percent and a bit of residual sugar left, to balance the wine nicely at 9.2 grams per liter. The bouquet is very elegant today, wafting from the glass in a cool fruit blend of lychee, rosewater, a fine base of soil, a touch of spiced meats and a nice topnote of sea salts. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and impressively light on its feet, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, moderate acids and lovely length and grip on the complex and bouncy finish. This is really a classy example and I only wish it was bottled under cork, as it would age marvelously with such balance! But, today, it is showing no signs of ill effect from its screwcap and is a lovely drink. 2015-2019+? **92.**

Red Wines

2012 Radford Dale “Black Rock” Red Blend (Swartland) Screwcap

Radford Dale is a brand produced by the Cape of Good Hope Winery, though this only appears on the fine print on the back of the label. The 2012 Black Rock blend from the Radford Dale label is comprised of a blend of cinsaut, grenache, syrah, carignan and a touch of viognier, with all of the red varieties dry-farmed and produced from old bush vines on decomposed granite soils. The 2012 version comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol, but is bottled under screwcap. The nose is still quite good, as it offers up scents of dark berries, pepper, meaty tones, a bit of coffee grounds from the carignan and a topnote of chocolate. On the palate the wine is already a touch reduced on the backend, but has a good core, moderate tannins and good length and grip on the slightly clamped down finish. There are some fine raw materials here, but bottling this wine under screwcap seems ill-conceived to me, as the tannins really could use another year to resolve a bit more, but the wine is already starting to show reduction from its closure, so the future is not promising. I would drink it soon, through the bit of tannin, rather than let it die from closure issues. This could really be a dynamite wine under natural cork, as there is plenty of old vine intensity here and loads of personality. 2015-2025? **87.**

2007 Constantia Glen “Five” (Constantia)

The Constantia Glen “Five” is a Bordeaux blend that is comprised of the classic grapes from the Médoc- cabernet sauvignon, merlot, cabernet franc, malbec and petit verdot. This vineyard was only planted in 2000, so it is still the product of young vines, but it is a very well done wine and once this vineyard gets a bit older, this could be a really special bottling. The 2007 hails from a pretty ripe vintage, as the wine comes in at 14.5 percent octane and shows just a bit of heat on the backend, so a bit lower alcohol would certainly be well rewarded here. However, the nose is quite good, offering up a ripe blend of black cherries, dark chocolate, smoke, a bit of bell pepper and a well-measured framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and well-focused, with a good core, ripe tannins and good length and grip on the very slightly hot finish. Not bad and I am sure this is going to be even better when the vines are a bit older and the octane gets reined in a bit. I was very happy to see that it was bottled under cork. 2015-2025. **87.**

2013 Raats “Dolomite” Cabernet Franc (Stellenbosch) Screwcap

The 2013 Raats “Dolomite” Cabernet Franc takes its name from the decomposed Dolomitic granite in which the vineyard is planted. The blend here includes five percent malbec and the wines are fermented in stainless steel and raised in three and four year-old casks. The wine came in at 13.5 percent alcohol in this vintage and offers up an excellent nose of dark berries, cassis, a touch of cigar smoke, a whisper of oak (even from its older casks) and a dollop of tobacco leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and nicely light on its feet, with fine intensity of flavor, tangy acids, just a touch of tannin and fine length and grip on the complex finish. I have no idea how this will age under screwcap (poorly I am guessing), but the wine shows no signs of reduction at the present time and is a delightful drink. 2015-2025+? **91.**

2010 Cabernet Sauvignon- Hartenberg Estate (Stellenbosch)

The 2012 cabernet sauvignon from the Hartenberg Estate is an okay, modern wine, but, in my opinion, it might be well-served to use Château Cantemerle as its model, rather than a more modern estate such as Château Pavie. The wine is 14.5 percent alcohol in 2012, with the wine receiving a fifteen day “cold soak” prior the start of its alcoholic fermentation, with seventy

percent of the blend undergoing its malolactic in cask. The wine is raised in sixty percent new wood and forty percent one year-old barrels. The wine is a bit overripe on the nose, offering up scents of jammy cassis and black cherries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, chocolate and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush, with low acids, modest tannins and okay length and grip on the fairly flat and heavy-handed finish. The backend also shows some uncovered alcohol. This is solid, but at a point lower in octane, it could be much brighter and energetic on the palate. 2015-2025. **86.**

2010 Cabernet Sauvignon- Thelema Mountain Vineyards (Stellenbosch)

The 2010 Thelema Mountain Vineyards cabernet sauvignon is a very fine bottle in the making and still a few years away from fully blossoming. This hails primarily from vineyards planted in the late 1980s and was raised in forty-five percent new oak, with the malo done in barrels. The bouquet offers up a fine, youthful nose of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, a nice touch of soil tones, coffee bean and a stylish base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a fine core, ripe, substantial tannins and excellent length and grip on the still quite primary finish. This will take another five years to really start to soften, but its true apogee is probably still a decade in the future. At fourteen percent alcohol, it is ripe, but shows no signs of *sur maturité* or heat on the backend. Good juice and happily, bottled under a cork and will age gracefully. 2020-2045+. **91+.**

2013 Syrah “Lam”- Lammershoek (Swartland)

Lammershoek is one of the cutting edge producers in South Africa looking to redefine their wines at a lower octane and more natural style, and the label on their “Lam” bottling of syrah proudly states that the “wine is made with no enzymes, cultured yeasts or other winemaking additives, just high quality grapes.” The winery is relatively new, having only been created around the turn of the century and is one of the top estates to look for in Swartland. Their 2013 Lam syrah comes in at a cool and classy 12.5 percent alcohol and offers up a superb bouquet of black raspberries, eucalyptus, pepper, gentle meaty tones, new leather, a lovely base of soil and a discreet topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and very light on its feet, with lovely intensity of flavor, tangy acids, modest tannins and lovely length and grip on the peppery and complex finish,. Picture a classic aromatic and flavor profile of syrah, with the weight and shape of top Cru Beaujolais. A very exciting style of syrah and perhaps, a window into the future of South African wines! 2015-2030+. **92+.**

2011 Lismore Syrah (Greyton)

Lismore is the new winery project of transplanted American, Samantha O’Keefe, who purchased land and planted vineyards in the region of Greyton back in 2004, so the 2011 Syrah is the product of seven year-old vines. Greyton lies due east of Cape Town and the vineyards here are planted at an elevation of one thousand feet above sea level, keeping summer temperatures moderate and the wine came in at an octane of 13.5 percent. The bouquet is quite new oaky, but also deep and balanced, as it wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, cassis, a touch of meatiness, pepper, gentle notes of eucalyptus, raw cocoa and a generous coating of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very refined in style, with a good core, lovely focus and grip, modest tannins and a long, complex and gently oaky finish. A very tasty bottle and I cannot wait to see how this wine is a decade down the road, when the vines start to reach a good age. 2015-2035. **90+.**

2011 Carignan “Pegleg”- Fairview (Paarl)

Cobus Basson, the current proprietor of Fairview, lost a leg in a tractor accident in the family vineyards when he was seventeen, and has good humoredly brandished the nickname of “Pegleg” since that day, so this cuvée is named for him. The family’s carignan vineyards were planted in 1972 and these old bush vines produced excellent fruit. The 2011 comes in at fourteen percent octane and offers up a ripe, but complex and classy bouquet of sweet cassis, chocolate, dark soil tones, lovely spice tones, woodsmoke, vanillin oak and a gentle topnote of fresh mint. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, melting tannins and fine balance on the long and classy finish. This is nicely cool in the mouth for fourteen percent and shows a lovely synthesis of modern styling and old world sensibilities. Fine juice. 2015-2025. **90.**

Dessert Wines

2008 Vin de Constance- Klein Constantia (Constantia)

This is one of the great sweet wines of the world and the wine that South Africa first earned vinous fame for centuries ago. It is produced from Muscat grapes that are allowed to dehydrate on the vine prior to picking, so that sugars and acids are concentrated. It is aged for five years prior to bottling and the 2008 came in at fourteen percent alcohol and offers up a lovely nose of fresh apricot, baked peach, orange peel, a hint of new leather and a topnote of grapefruit zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and beautifully balanced, with fine acids and lovely length and grip on the focused and classy finish. Fine juice. 2015-2025+. **91.**

2011 Edelspatz Riesling “Noble Late Harvest Botrytis”- Delheim (Stellenbosch)

The 2011 Edelspatz late harvest Riesling is a good solid example of its genre, but it is not overly complex. The pretty and nicely glazed nose offers up scents of apricot, tangerine, tea leaves and honey. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and nicely light on its feet, with a good core, but modest complexity and not a whole lot of length on the bouncy finish. Not bad, but not first division either. 2015-2018. **87.**

2012 Rustenberg “Straw Wine”

The Straw Wine from Rustenberg is produced from a blend of viognier, chenin blanc and crouchen, which are dried on straw mats after picking until the bunches raisin, concentrating sugars and acidity. The wine is then aged in cask for eight months prior to bottling, with the 2012 vintage coming in at 10.5 percent alcohol. The wine offers up a pretty straightforward bouquet of pear, poached pineapple, lemongrass and honey, with a slightly odd, savory topnote that seems almost tomato-like. On the palate the wine is medium-full and a bit prettier than the nose suggests, with crisp acids and a good core, with moderate complexity, but good length and grip on the bouncy finish. This is okay, but not sufficiently complex for a top flight dessert wine. 2015-2020. **87.**

2004 Morris Muscadel

This is a fortified wine that comes in at 16.5 percent alcohol and is really a superb bottle. The excellent nose jumps from the glass in a blend of white cherries, orange peel, caramel, a potpourri of spice tones, a touch of salty soil tones and a fine topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, lovely focus and balance and a long, classy and very vibrant finish. Fine, fine juice. 2015-2035+. **93.**

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Maison Louis Roederer (Reims): 2009 Louis Roederer Brut Rosé; 2008 Louis Roederer Brut Rosé; 2004 Louis Roederer Brut Rosé; 2003 Louis Roederer Brut Rosé; 2002 Louis Roederer Brut Rosé; 1999 Louis Roederer Brut Rosé; 1996 Louis Roederer Brut Rosé; 1995 Louis Roederer Brut Rosé; 2006 Louis Roederer Brut Nature.

Domaine Chartogne-Taillet (Merfy): Chartogne-Taillet "Cuvée Sainte Anne" Brut; 2008 Chartogne-Taillet "Brut Millésime"; Chartogne-Taillet "Le Rosé" Brut NV (Disgorged May 2015); Chartogne-Taillet "Le Rosé" Brut NV (Disgorged December 2014); 2010 Chartogne-Taillet "les Orizeaux" Extra Brut; 2010 Chartogne-Taillet "les Couarres Château" Extra Brut; 2010 Chartogne-Taillet "Lettre de Mon Meunier" Extra Brut; 2008 Chartogne-Taillet "les Heurtebise" Extra Brut; 2008 Chartogne-Taillet "les Barres" Extra Brut; 2007 Chartogne-Taillet "les Alliées" Extra Brut.

Charlot-Tanneux (Mardeuil): Vincent Charlot "le Fruit de Ma Passion" Extra Brut NV (Base Year 2011); Vincent Charlot "le Rubis de la Dune" Rosé de Saignée Extra Brut NV (Base Year

2012); Vincent Charlot “Extravagant” Extra Brut NV (No Sulfur Bottling); 2006 Vincent Charlot “Grand Cru Ay” Non-Dosé; 2006 Vincent Charlot “Cuvée Micheline Tanneux” Extra Brut; 2002 Vincent Charlot “Cuvée Micheline Tanneux” Extra Brut.

Marie-Noëlle Ledru (Ambonnay): Marie-Noëlle Ledru Extra Brut NV; 2008 Marie-Noëlle Ledru Brut Nature Millésime; Marie-Noëlle Ledru Brut NV (Disgorged in January 2015); 2009 Marie-Noëlle Ledru Brut Millésime (Disgorged January 2015); 2009 Marie-Noëlle Ledru “Cuvée Goulte” Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut; 2006 Marie-Noëlle Ledru Brut Nature Millésime (disgorged in 2014); 1988 Marie-Noëlle Ledru Brut Nature Millésime (disgorged right before tasting).

Champagne Tarlant (Oeuilly): Champagne Tarlant “Zero” Brut Nature NV (Disgorged September 2014); Champagne Tarlant “Rosé Zero” Brut Nature NV (Disgorged September 2014); 2003 “La Matinale” Brut Nature Millésime- Champagne Tarlant (Disgorged June 2014); Champagne Tarlant “BAM!” Brut Nature NV (Disgorged February 2014); Champagne Tarlant “La Vigne d’Or” Brut Nature NV (Disgorged March 2015); Champagne Tarlant “La Vigne Royale” Brut Nature NV (Disgorged June 2014); Champagne Tarlant “La Vignes d’Antan” Brut Nature NV (Disgorged May 2014); Champagne Tarlant “Cuvée Louis” Brut Nature NV (Disgorged March of 2015).

Vazart-Coquart et Fils (Chouilly): Vazart-Coquart et Fils Blanc de Blancs Brut Zero NV (Disgorged March 2015); 2008 Vazart-Coquart et Fils “Grand Bouquet” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime; 2008 Vazart-Coquart et Fils “Special Club” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime; 2007 Vazart-Coquart et Fils “Grand Bouquet” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime; 2007 Vazart-Coquart et Fils “Special Club” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime; 2006 Vazart-Coquart et Fils “Special Club” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime; 1996 Vazart-Coquart et Fils “Special Club” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime; Vazart-Coquart et Fils Blanc de Blancs Brut NV- (Base year 2004- Natural Cork); Vazart-Coquart et Fils Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Base year 2004- Metek or Diam).

Demièvre-Ansiot (Oger): Demièvre-Ansiot Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV; 2010 Demièvre-Ansiot Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime Grand Cru; 2010 Demièvre-Ansiot Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime Grand Cru; 2008 Demièvre-Ansiot Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime Grand Cru; 2006 Demièvre-Ansiot Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime Grand Cru; 1983 Demièvre-Ansiot Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime Grand Cru.

Champagne Bonnaire (Cramant): Champagne Bonnaire “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Disgorged October 2014); Champagne Bonnaire “Ver Sacrum” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Disgorged October 2014); Champagne Bonnaire “Variance” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; 2008 Champagne Bonnaire “Variance Noire” Brut Millésime; 2006 Champagne Bonnaire “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime; 1995 Champagne Bonnaire “Variance” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; 1991 Champagne Bonnaire “Collection” Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime; 1985 Champagne Bonnaire “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime; 1985 Champagne Bonnaire “Special Club” Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime.

Paul Clouët (Bouzy): Paul Clouët “Brut Grand Cru” NV (Disgorged June 2013); 2007 Paul Clouët Brut Millésime; Paul Clouët “Cuvée Prestige” Brut NV; 1992 Paul Clouët “Cuvée Millésime” Brut.

Champagne Robert Barbichon et Fils (Gyé sur Seine): Robert Barbichon et Fils Extra Brut NV (Disgorged April 2nd, 2015); Robert Barbichon et Fils Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Disgorged Dec. 2013); Robert Barbichon et Fils “Réserve 4 Cépages” Brut Réserve NV (dosage 8 gr./lt.); Robert Barbichon et Fils “Réserve 4 Cépages” Brut Réserve NV (dosage 5 grams/lt.); Robert Barbichon et Fils Blanc de Noirs Brut NV (Disgorged January 2015); Robert Barbichon et Fils Rosé de Saignée Brut NV.

Aurélien Suenen (Cramant): Champagne Suenen “Cuvée Réserve” Brut NV (Disgorged March 2015); Champagne Suenen Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Disgorged March 2015); Champagne Suenen “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Cramant-Chouilly Blend); 2012 Champagne Suenen “Les Roberts” Extra Brut Millésime (Cramant); 2013 Champagne Suenen “La Cocluette” Extra Brut Millésime (Oiry); 2013 Champagne Suenen “La Montaigu” Extra Brut Millésime (Chouilly); 2013 Champagne Suenen “Les Roberts” Extra Brut Millésime (Cramant); 2013 Champagne Suenen “La Grande Vigne” Pinot Meunier “Vieilles Vignes Extra Brut; Champagne Suenen “MBDA” Extra Brut NV.

Mouzon-Leroux et Fils (Verzy): Mouzon-Leroux et Fils “l’Atavique” Brut Réserve NV (Disgorged October 2014); Mouzon-Leroux et Fils “l’Ineffable” Blanc de Noirs Brut NV (Disgorged July 2014); Mouzon-Leroux et Fils “l’Incandescent” Rosé Saignée Brut NV; Mouzon-Leroux et Fils “l’Opiniâtre” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV.

Champagne Alexandre Filaine (Damery): Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Spéciale” Brut NV (Damery) Base Year 2012; Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Spéciale” Brut NV (Damery) Base Year 2011 (magnum); Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Spéciale” Brut NV (Damery) Base Year 2007 (magnum); Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Spéciale” Brut NV (Damery) Base Year 2006 (magnum); Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Spéciale” Brut NV (Damery) Base Year 2004 (magnum); Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Confidence” Brut NV (Damery) 2008 Base Year (magnum); Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Confidence” Brut NV (Damery) 2004 Base Year (magnum); Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Confidence” Brut NV (Damery) 1997 Base Year (magnum); Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Confidence” Brut NV (Damery) 1995 Base Year (magnum); Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Confidence” Brut NV (Damery) 1994 Base Year (magnum); 2007 Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Sensuum Vertigo” Brut NV (Damery) magnum; 2013 Pinot Meunier Rouge- Fabrice Gass

Champagne Corbon (Avize): Champagne Corbon Absolument Brut NV (Disgorged March 2015); Champagne Corbon “Anthracite” Brut NV (Disgorged March 2015); Champagne Corbon “Brut Autrefois” NV (Disgorged Spring 2014); Champagne Corbon “Cuvée 598” Brut NV (Disgorged March 2015); 2009 Champagne Corbon “Blanc de Blancs” Brut Millésime (aged under crown cap); 2009 Champagne Corbon “Blanc de Blancs” Brut Millésime (aged under cork); 2008 Champagne Corbon “Blanc de Blancs” Chardonnay Grand Brut Millésime; 2007 Champagne Corbon “Blanc de Blancs” Chardonnay Grand Brut Millésime; 2006 Champagne Corbon “Blanc de Blancs” Chardonnay Grand Brut Millésime; 2005 Champagne Corbon “Blanc de Blancs” Chardonnay Grand Brut Millésime; 2003 Champagne Corbon

“Blanc de Blancs” Chardonnay Grand Brut Millésime; 1994 Champagne Corbon “Blanc de Blancs” Chardonnay Grand Brut Millésime (mag); 1991 Champagne Corbon “Blanc de Blancs” Chardonnay Grand Brut Millésime; 1989 Champagne Corbon “Blanc de Blancs” Chardonnay Grand Brut Millésime; 1988 Champagne Corbon “Blanc de Blancs” Chardonnay Grand Brut Millésime (mag).

Laherte Frères (Chavot): *Laherte Frères “Extra Brut Tradition” NV (Disgorged October 2014); Laherte Frères “Ultra-Tradition” Brut NV (Disgorged October 2014); Laherte Frères Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature NV (Disgorged April 2014); Laherte Frères “Les Vignes d’Autrefois” Extra Brut NV (Disgorged December 2014); Laherte Frères “Le Sept” Extra Brut NV (Disgorged November 2014); Laherte Frères “Les Empreintes” Extra Brut NV (Disgorged April 2013); Laherte Frères “Rosé Tradition” Brut NV (Disgorged December 2014); Laherte Frères “Les Beaudiers” Rosé Saignée Extra Brut (Base Year 2012); Laherte Frères “Les Beaudiers” Rosé Saignée Extra Brut (Base Year 2005).*

Domaine Georges Laval (Cumières): *Domaine Georges Laval “Cumières” Brut Nature Rosé NV (Base Year 2013); Domaine Georges Laval “Cumières” Brut Nature NV (Base Year 2012); Domaine Georges Laval “Cumières” Brut Nature NV (Base Year 2006); Domaine Georges Laval “Cumières” Brut Nature NV (Base Year 2002); Domaine Georges Laval “Cumières” Brut Nature NV (Base Year 2000); 2005 Domaine Georges Laval “Les Chênes” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature; 2005 Domaine Georges Laval “Les Hautes Chèvres” Blanc de Noirs Brut Nature; 2006 Domaine Georges Laval “Le Meunier de But” Brut Nature NV (Disgorged 2009); 2012 Domaine Georges Laval “Les Hautes Chèvres” Blanc de Noirs Brut Nature.*

Individual Bottles Tasted in April, May and June of 2015

L. Aubry Fils (Jouy-les-Reims): *“Premier Cru” Brut NV (Disgorged July 2014);*

Bollinger (Aÿ): *2002 Grande Année Brut Millésime.*

Cédric Bouchard (Celles-sur-Ource): *“Inflorescence” Blanc de Noirs Brut NV.*

Bride Valley (England): *2009 Vintage Brut.*

Roger Brun (Aÿ): *2006 “Cuvée La Pelle” Grand Cru Brut Millésime.*

Le Brun Servenay (Avize): *“Brut Selection” Grand Cru NV; 2006 “Exhilarante” Vieilles Vignes Brut; 2005 Vieilles Vignes Grand Cru.*

Pierre Callot (Avize): *“Grande Réserve” Blanc de Blancs 1er Cru Brut NV;*

Claude Cazals (Mesnil-sur-Oger): *Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (served from magnum); 2002 Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime.*

Gaston Chiquet(Dizy): *“Blanc de Blancs d’Aÿ” Grand Cru Brut NV (Disgorged Oct. 2014); Premier Cru Brut Rosé NV (Disgorged Oct. 2013).*

Dalys (Cramant): *Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV.*

Benoît Déhu: *“La Rue des Noyers” Extra Brut NV (Disgorged June 2014).*

Joseph Desruets (Hautvillers): *“Premier Cru” Brut NV.*

José Dhondt (Oger): *2009 “Mes Vieilles Vignes” Blanc de Blancs Brut Grand Cru; 2004 Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (served from magnum).*

Champagne Duc de Romet (Vandières): *“Brut Prestige” NV (Disgorged Feb. 2015)*

Egly-Ouriet (Ambonnay): “les Crayères” Blanc de Noirs Brut NV (Disgorged July 2014); “Brut Tradition” Grand Cru Brut NV (Disgorged July 2014); “Grand Cru” Brut Rosé NV (Disgorged July 2014); 2005 “Grand Cru” Brut Millésime (Disgorged July 2014).

Champagne Geoffroy (Aÿ): “Brut Expression” Premier Cru NV (Disgorged Jan. 2014); “Rosé de Saignée” Premier Cru Brut NV (Disgorged Sept. 2014); 2008 “Empreinte” 1er Cru Brut Millésime (Disgorged Nov. 2014).

Pierre Gimmonet et Fils (Cuis): “Cuvée Cuis” Premier Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; 2009 “Cuvée Gastronome” Blanc de Blancs Brut; 2008 “Cuvée Oenophile” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut; 2006 “Grands Terroirs de Chardonnay” Special Club Brut.

Godmé Père et Fils (Verzenay): Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Disgorged Dec. 2014); 2006 Meunier “Les Romaines” Extra Brut; 2006 Pinot Noir “Les Champs St. Martin” Extra Brut; 2006 Chardonnay “Les Alouettes St. Bets” Extra Brut.

Paul Goerg (Vertus): Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; Brut Rosé NV.

Henri Goutorbe (Aÿ): “Brut Tradition” NV; “Cuvée Prestige” Premier Cru Brut NV (Disgorged April 2014); 2005 “Special Club” Brut Millésime (Disgorged March 2014).

Alfred Gratien (Épernay): Brut NV; Brut Rosé NV; “Cuvée Paradis” Brut Rosé NV; 2006 “Cuvée Paradis” Brut Millésime; 2000 Brut Millésime.

Champagne Grongnet (Étoges): “Carpe Diem” Extra Brut NV (Disgorged Feb. 2015); Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Disgorged Feb. 2015); “Cuvée Tradition” Brut NV (Disgorged Feb. 2015); “Cuvée Rosé” Brut NV; 2008 “Special Club” Brut Millésime (Disgorged Feb. 2015).

Marc Hébrart (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ): “Cuvée de Réserve” Premier Cru NV (Disgorged July 2014); “Brut Sélection” Premier Cru NV (Disgorged May 2014); 2008 “Rive Gauche-Rive Droite” Grand Cru Extra Brut Millésime.

Charles Heidsieck (Reims): Brut NV (Disgorged 2012).

D. Henriët-Bazin (Villers-Marmery): Blanc de Noirs Grand Cru Brut NV;

Champagne Huré Frères (Ludes): “Mémoire” Extra Brut NV (Disgorged August 2014); 2009 “Inattendue” Blanc de Blanc Extra Brut; 2006 “Instantanée” Extra Brut; 2002 “Terre Natale” Brut (Disgorged Aug. 2014).

Jacquesson (Dizy): “Cuvée Number 738” Extra Brut NV (Disgorged Sept. 2014);

Jean Lallement et Fils (Verzenay): “Cuvée Réserve” Brut NV (Disgorged July 2014);

Lanson (Reims): “Extra Age” Brut NV (Disgorged Nov. 2012).

Pierre Lebeouf (Aÿ): “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Half Bottle).

Alexandre Le Brun (Chouilly): “Fascination” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Extra Brut.

David Léclapart (Trépail): “l’Artiste” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Premier Cru NV.

Champagne Lelarge-Pugeot (Vrigny): “les Meuniers de Clemence” Extra Brut NV;

Aurélien Lurquin (Romery): 2013 “Meunier Non-Dosé” Brut Nature NV.

Rémy Massin et Fils (Ville-sur-Arce): “Brut Tradition” NV; “Cuvée Louis-Aristide” Brut NV; 2009 “Special Club” Brut Millésime.

José Michel et Fils (Moussy): 2006 Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime.

Jean Milan (Oger): “Spécial” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut NV (Disgorged June 2013); “Grande Réserve 1864” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut NV; “Glamour” Grand Cru Brut Rosé NV (Disgorged June 2013); 2009 “Terres de Noël” Blanc de Blancs Vieilles Vignes Grand Cru Brut.

Moussé Fils (Cuisles): “Noire Réserve” Blanc de Noirs Brut NV (Disgorged March 2014); “Rosé Tradition” Brut NV (Disgorged May 2014); 2009 Blanc de Noirs Brut Millésime (Disgorged Jan. 2014).

Franck Pascal (Baslieux-sous-Châtillon): 2004 *“Harmonie” Blanc de Noirs Brut Millésime.*

Pehu-Simonet (Verzenay): *“Transparence” Grand Cru Extra Brut NV (Disgorged Sept. 2013); “Face Nord” Grand Cru Brut NV (Disgorged Jan. 2014);*

Clément Perseval (Chamery): *Extra Brut “Premier Cru” NV; Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut “Premier Cru” NV; Extra Brut Rosé “Premier Cru” NV.*

Thomas Perseval (Chamery): *“Tradition” Extra Brut NV (Disgorged Sept. 2014); Grande Cuvée” Extra Brut NV (Disgorged April 2015); “1er Cru” Rosé Extra Brut NV (Disgorged Sept. 2013).*

Pierre Péters (Mesnil-sur-Oger): *“Cuvée de Réserve” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut NV*

Ployez-Jacquemart (Ludes): 1998 *“Liesse d’Harbonville” Brut Millésime.*

Pol Roger (Épernay): 2006 *Brut Rosé.*

René Roger (Aÿ): *“Brut Tradition” NV.*

Camille Savès (Bouzy): *“Carte d’Or Grand Cru Brut NV (Disgorged March 2014); 2008 “Cuvée Anaïs Jolicoeur” Brut Millésime (Disgorged Dec. 2014).*

Jacques Selosse (Avize): *“Initial” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Disgorged July 2012) “Version Originale” Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut NV.*

Guillaume Sergent (Vrigny): 2013 *Blanc de Blancs “Les Prés Dieu” Extra Brut NV;* 2012 *Blanc de Blancs “Les Prés Dieu” Extra Brut NV.*

Serveaux Fils (Passy-sur-Marne): *“Carte Noire” Brut NV; “Carte d’Or” Brut NV; “Rosé Saignée” Brut NV.*

Taittinger (Reims): *“Folies de la Marquetterie” Brut NV (2014 Release).*

Tennis Club Avize: *“Côte des Blancs” Brut NV (Disgorged July 2014).*

Varnier-Fannière (Avize): *“Grand Cru” Brut NV (Disgorged June 2014); “Grand Cru” Brut Rosé NV (Disgorged Sept. 2013);*

Vilmart et Cie (Rilly la Montagne): *“Grand Cellier” Brut NV (Disgorged May 2014); 2006 “Coeur de Cuvée” Premier Cru Brut Millésime.*

THE JUNE 2015 CHAMPAGNE AND SPARKLING WINE REPORT

TALES FROM TWO WEEKS IN THE REGION IN APRIL



One of the sweeping vistas in the rolling vineyard land of the Aube, near Thomas Barbichon's parcels.

I spent two weeks in the Champagne region in the latter half of April of this year and had a chance to visit a number of my favorite estates in the region during the trip. As this was only my second extended stay in Champagne, I tried to visit primarily producers who I did not see during last spring's trip (with a couple of exceptions), so that I could get a better feel for each estate's winemaking and viticultural philosophies. The latter seems to be more and more important these days in Champagne, as the bad old days of industrial viticulture are still alive in many, many vineyards in this region, with heavy doses of herbicides and insecticides still liberally applied to a very significant percentage of the region's vineyards. Given the fact that it is unequivocally not safe to drink tap water in a fairly large number of villages in Champagne these days, it is pretty clear that the aggressive application of chemicals in the vineyards here went on for far too long in Champagne and that it is high time to change matters, and it was very gratifying to see that this year's strolls through the vineyards showed a lot more organically-farmed parcels of vines than was the case only last year, though this number still remains a pretty minor percentage of the total acreage under vine in the region. But, change is coming here and step by step, a growing number of the *Champenois* seem to be embracing sounder environmental

practices in an expanding number of vineyards and one day, perhaps, we will see this region catch up with Burgundy and the Loire Valley in utilizing a far more enlightened approach to viticulture. A similar awakening also seems to be starting to inch across the landscape in Bordeaux, so we may well be on the verge of a renaissance in the vineyard patrimony of a couple of the largest and most important vineyard regions in France and which will make the future better than the past.

The ironic thing about changing the viticultural mentality in Champagne is that organic farming also happens to produce far better quality fruit, and hence wine, so it would seem very self-serving for *vignerons* to changeover to a more organic approach to their vineyard parcels. This should be the key incentive to getting everyone to change in the future, as there will come a point (and perhaps we are already getting close to that juncture?) where the producers who farm organically will be producing such superior quality wines that it will become increasingly difficult for the chemical folks to sell their grapes or their wines for comparable prices, as the gap in quality of fruit will become increasingly apparent as the years unfold. Of course, farming without heavy doses of chemicals requires more work- which is still the major disincentive for those still applying big servings of herbicides and insecticides to their vineyards in Champagne- but it is work that is well-rewarded when harvest time comes, as the quality of the wines being produced from properly farmed vineyards is already starting to stretch out ahead of those doing things the old way. Of course, it is not necessary for growers to all embrace *biodynamique* methods, though there are a growing number who are doing so across Champagne with outstanding results, but it is already high time that everyone in the region started to rein in their use of chemicals and start to create a healthier environment for their families to live in and their grapes to come from. There are plenty of alternatives to chemicals to treat most annual challenges in the vineyards, and it seems to me, that except in very dire circumstances, where the potential loss of a total crop is imminent, *vignerons* should really already be using little or no chemicals in their vines. As Aurélien Suenen in Cramant commented (Monsieur Suenen is unequivocally one of the up and coming stars in the region, but more on his exciting domaine a bit later), “I am not going to state on my labels that I am one hundred percent organic or *biodynamique*, as I do not really know what I would do if something popped up that meant a potential loss of an entire crop, but let’s say that barring an imminent disaster, I will always farm my vineyards completely organically, as it just produces far better fruit and therefore, better wines, not to mention it is also far better for the planet.”

Walking around the vineyards this year, in an early and warm spring where the leaves were already unfurling on many vines, it was pretty easy to appreciate just how dramatic the differences are between parcels farmed organically, which were already abundant in their biodiversity and bountiful in the numbers of different flowers and grasses growing between the rows of vines, and those barren, moonscape vineyards that had already been blasted by their first heavy servings of herbicides and looked like they were straight out of Mordor. As Champagne is a region where *biodynamiques* is still relatively new, the ardent practitioners of this method of farming are still very much in their early days of proselytizing about the benefits of this approach, so that one can hear plenty of passionate dissertations about *biodynamiques* in cellars these days during visits with producers who are now farming *biodynamically*. I hope their efforts, and those of the organic farmers in the region, bear even more fruit in the coming years, as one does really worry a bit when wandering around the vineyards of Champagne in the spring,

when it is high spraying season for the practitioners of chemical farming, as the smell of herbicides on the wind is a pretty frequent occurrence. As I joined a group of sommeliers and merchants from New York and Connecticut for the last half of my stay in the region, we were often a sizable crowd of twelve stomping around out in the vineyards and got some pretty surprised looks from workers out in the vines laying down the chemicals, wondering why a bunch of crazy Americans were out in the vineyards looking at different producers' farming methods, rather than comfortably ensconced in the well-appointed tasting rooms back at the winery. But, as one organically-minded *vigneron* commented during my trip, "the time when secrecy would cover up the chemical abuses in the vineyards of Champagne is now over, and any producer who thinks they can still get away with bad farming is mistaken, because clients are already starting to know what is going on and change in methodology is going to be the only way to hang onto one's customers in the future." And indeed, this is probably already the case, as after looking on some particularly unsavory parcels owned or earmarked for Billecart-Salmon, with the *Grande Marque's* placards in the vineyards proudly stating this association, several of our group stated that they were absolutely done buying wines from that house until the farming gets a whole lot healthier, based on how remarkably poisoned their parcels looked to our unseasoned eyes.

As I noted in my February piece on the region, the *Champenois* have not historically been particularly open about discussing their viticultural or winemaking philosophies, which is perfectly understandable, given the historical emphasis on blending and keeping one's master blending secrets was one key to staying a bit ahead of one's competition. But, it seems to me that this historical and legitimate need to keep blending philosophies secretive morphed in the 1960s and 1970s into not discussing what was going on in the vineyards, when things were really bad-like trucking in the trash from Paris to use as compost in many vineyards- and these days, openness to legitimate queries about what goes on in the vineyards and cellars is going to be one of the keys to success in the very dramatic changing market realities of Champagne. One already sees this more open mentality at important *Grandes Marques* such as Krug and Louis Roederer, where technical and vineyard information behind their various blends is now quite happily provided to visitors who are curious, and there is little doubt that these two prestigious houses are amongst the leaders when it comes to transparency with visiting journalists. I also found that a great, great many (all?) of the smaller grower-récoltants that I visited during my two weeks in the region in April were also very open about talking about their winemaking and viticultural philosophies, and not surprisingly, there is much more of a Burgundian openness amongst many of these smaller independent producers who often look to the Côte d'Or for their inspiration. Of course, and this was almost completely by coincidence, I tended to visit mostly small growers who are practicing either organic or *biodynamique* viticulture, and so questions about farming methodology are far less uncomfortable for such producers. I did not set out by design to visit producers who are farming more organically than their neighbors, but simply set up my appointments to visit grower-récoltants whose wines I have very much liked in the past, but most of whom I had not had the chance to visit previously during trips to the region. It just happened that again and again, I would arrive at a domaine and we would start chatting about viticulture and the producer would turn out to be organic or *biodynamique* in their approach in the vines, and after a while it no longer surprised me that there was a direct correlation between how well a vineyard was farmed and the correspondingly high quality in the bottle. It does not take long to come to the conclusion that organically farmed vineyards translate directly into far better wines.

I was able to spend quite a bit of time out in the vineyards during this most recent trip, which can be a bit of an eye-opener for those used to regions like Burgundy or the Loire Valley these days (where organic and *biodynamique* farming has a firm ten or fifteen year head start on Champagne), as there is still an amazingly heavy use of chemical products in the vineyards in Champagne. Whether this heavy reliance on herbicides and pesticides is just habitual, inherited from the previous generation who were the first really targeted by chemical companies, or if it is out of laziness is still an open question, but there can be absolutely no doubt that this type of farming really produces poorer quality grapes. To be fair to *vignerons* in the region, one does have to realize that Champagne is far more parcelated than Burgundy is, and that is an enormously larger region as well, so you have a huge number of small farmers working fairly tiny plots, most of whom still continue to sell off the entirety of their tiny production to one of the *Grandes Marques* or one of the numerous cooperatives in the region. As the farmers are not paid a premium for quality grapes, and indeed, the actual allowed yields for each year are set in July by the CIVC (the region's regulatory oversight committee)- based on the perceived market needs in terms of bottles in the market, rather than on the quality or style of the vintage- there is absolutely no financial incentive for small plot holders to farm well. In fact, in my opinion, one of the great impediments to viticultural progress in the vineyards of Champagne is probably the CIVC itself, who seems completely in bed with the old ways of doing things chemically in the vineyards and seems to this journalist about as unenlightened and obscurantist an organization as one could ever imagine. They have even gone so far as to preposterously challenge Vincent Laval, whose family has been farming organically in Cumières now for two full generations, that "all of the pollution out in the vineyards of Champagne is being caused by organic and *biodynamique* farmers and their use of sulfur and copper in the vines!" One simply cannot make this stuff up.

Happily, a lot of the producers themselves seem to be awakening to the fact that laying such heavy doses of chemicals on their vines is not good for the health of the vineyard or the health of people who have to go out and work the vines, and I saw dramatically more vineyards in conversion to organic farming methods this year than I did only one year ago, and that is certainly an extremely positive sign. Not that there is not still a very, very long way to go in the *vignobles* of Champagne before this can really be considered a healthy environment, but the stirrings of change are very evident and things may get better quickly here in this regard. It is probably high time that the CIVC got with the program and stopped protecting the chemical farmers in the region and at least started endorsing those making the sacrifice to farm organically or *biodynamically*, rather than ludicrously accusing them of being "responsible for the pollution" in the *vignobles* of Champagne. One has to understand that when the CIVC sets the acceptable yields in July, it is based on their market analysis of what will be needed to keep prices up for bottles down the road. Consequently, growers are really encouraged to prune very gently in the winter and early spring, so that the vines can carry excessive yields if the CIVC's limits are set high (and hence not be caught short, if the CIVC determines in July that the market is going to need a large quantity of wine from this year's harvest), and then just not picking a significant percentage of their crop, if the July limits end up being set lower. It is really a completely dysfunctional methodology for regulating one of the finest wine-producing regions in the world, and we are long overdue to see some changes on this front to bring Champagne more in line with

quality-minded regulation of the production limits in the *vignobles* of other top wine-producing regions in France.



When I asked Agnès Corbon, of the fine Avize-based house of Champagne Corbon, about this system, she commented that as the system now exists, there is one potential benefit to which so few producers avail themselves, but which she and her father having been doing for many years, and this is to pick the entire crop and only make their Champagnes from the first pressing, or the *Cuvée*, rather than using a significant percentage of the second pressing juice, the *Tailles* in the finished wines. This of course costs more, as one has to pay a team of pickers longer to collect all the grapes out on the vines, rather than leave thirty percent out there unpicked for the birds, and one has to have the space to work in the *chais* with a fully-harvested crop load, but it also gives a *vigneron* the possibility of only working with the very, very finest juice to make their wines. As the *Champenois* are all taxed by the government in alcohol, which is typically delivered in third pressed juice called *Rébourbage* that goes off to the distillery to make industrial alcohols, there is no reason why more growers cannot harvest their entire crop, use only the *Cuvée* for their wines, send the second pressing *Tailles* juice (which normally constitutes twenty or so percent of most bottled Champagne as the system stands now) off to the taxman and throw out the rubbish. Except, it costs a bit more to do so and there is no financial incentive for most small *vignerons* to pursue this philosophy, even if they were so inclined. But,

if the financial incentives could be built into the pricing structure in Champagne today, we could see dramatically better wine across the board in a single harvest!

I do not mean to sound overly negative about what is going on today in the vineyards of Champagne, as most of this has been going on for at least forty or fifty years and there has been an awful lot of really great wine produced here over that period of time (though also plenty of really poor wines that only a grocery store chain could love), but the fact that there is so much great wine made in the region should not serve as an excuse to ignore some of the very obvious changes needed in the system to make the tap water safe to drink, lower the incidence of cancer for the *Champenois* (which is reported to be significantly higher than the average in France), improve the health of the vineyards and, just as an aside, produce even better wines across the board. In any case, what follows is my report from two weeks on the ground here in the region from mid-April to the end of the month, augmented by a plethora of wines tasted out of the bottle while in France on that same trip. I came to Champagne in April after ten days in Burgundy, where Becky Wasserman's staff had also sent me a sizable chunk of new releases from the grower-récoltants with whom they work, so there is an awful lot of in the bottle notes included here in addition to my visits to the domaines. I started out this trip with a very nice visit to Maison Louis Roederer in Reims, where the Technical Director, Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon and I tasted through a very fine vertical of their Brut Rosé Millésime, as I am currently at work on a project to show just how beautifully Rosé Champagne can age. As I have written about in the past, a great many of the *Champenois* continue to believe that Rosé Champagne is an inherently flawed category of wine to age over the long-term, with the vast majority made with an addition of still red wine to add the color to the bottling, and which they see as incompatible with long-term cellaring (they view the still red wine as aging faster than the sparkling wine with which it is blended). My gut feeling, based on a great many very positive experiences with aged Rosé bubbly over the years, is that this is simply not the case- particularly if the Rosé Champagne is bottled in green or brown glass, rather than the clear glass that is so useful for marketing, but does not protect the wine from ultraviolet rays. So my visit to Louis Roederer focused exclusively on our vertical tasting of their Brut Rosé Millésime, though I did get a chance to also try their exciting new Brut Zero bottling from the 2006 vintage that they are just now releasing for the first time in the market.

From there, I went to the Krug blending seminar that is held each summer for a small handful of visiting journalists. I had attended and written up my experiences from the same event four years ago, and fully enjoyed my total immersion in all things Krug for two and a half days (what is not to enjoy!), after which I started to focus the remainder of my visits on grower-récoltants. I will write about my Krug visit in the next issue of the newsletter. I did try to schedule a visit to Taittinger as well this time around, to write up a vertical tasting of their superb, grand cru bottling of Prélude, which remains one of my favorite (recent) new arrivals on the market from any of the *Grandes Marques*, but scheduling issues postponed this vertical for yet another year. During the course of my remaining stay in Champagne, I primarily visited some of my favorite small producers, though with a couple of broader tastings also tossed in, as the second week of my time in the region coincided with the grower *Salons* that are now a very important part of the annual calendar in Champagne, and which are modeled on the *Les Grands Jours* tastings in Burgundy. These were invariably more social events, rather than serious tasting opportunities, based on the absolute crush of people and the often inadequately petite facilities

for the large turnout that were used for the couple that I went to, but it was a good opportunity to see friends from New York and elsewhere in the US, as there were tons of American wine trade folks in attendance. I hope that the organizers will note the growing popularity of the *Salons* and find significantly bigger spaces and a hell of a lot more spittoons for next year's version, as it was really not conducive to serious tasting as it was organized this year- though some of the completely drunk attendees that I saw did not seem to mind!

Given how long this report is going to be, just based on how much wine I tasted during my two weeks in Champagne (and the samples tasted in Burgundy the week before), I will only include here notes from my winery visits and on the (rather hefty) number of individual bottles tasted during the spring trip or in its immediate aftermath in this report. I will do a second feature on the majority of current releases in the market in the next issue and include an article on Krug in that newsletter as well (as part of the tenth anniversary series of domaine profiles, it seems fitting to run another one on this special Champagne house). I have already started to gather samples of new releases in my cellars in New York for the next article, but it seems to make sense to break this already long report into two sections, with further tasting time dedicated to current releases to be published in the next newsletter. The other visit that I am holding back for the next issue, in addition to my feature on Champagne Krug, is the morning that we spent tasting with Benoit Marguet of the fine Ambonnay-based house of Marguet Père et Fils. Benoit has ushered in so many profound changes at the family estate since 2008 that a full-length feature on his utterly superb Champagnes and his profound changes in farming and winemaking philosophies is simply required, and I will include that as well in the next issue. I have listed the notes that follow with my domaine visits appearing first, in the order I visited the producers, rather than alphabetically (so readers can get some sense of how my fortnight in the region unfolded), followed by the individual bottles tasted, with my customary sorting by non-vintage Brut Nature and Extra Brut, followed by non-vintage Blanc de Blancs Brut, non-vintage Blanc de Noirs Brut, non-vintage Brut cuvées, non-vintage Brut Rosé and then vintage-dated bottlings. Within each of these broader categories, the wines are listed alphabetically, and in the vintage-dated sections, they are grouped first by vintage year and then listed alphabetically within each year. For individual wines covered, folks can refer to the index that appears prior to the start of the article. I should note that I have started to use a new descriptor for some of the wines, that was stolen from Eric Lebel, *Chef de Cave* of Champagne Krug, which is "*patissière*" (or pastry), which he uses very nicely to describe slightly sweeter, bread elements in a wine. I really liked this term, which I had not heard used before in the context of Champagne and which really is spot on for an aromatic and flavor element that one finds in many examples, particularly those with larger percentages of either pinot noir or pinot meunier in the blend.

Domaines and Grandes Marques Visited On the April Trip

Maison Louis Roederer (Reims)

Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon, the Technical Director of Maison Louis Roederer, is doing marvelous things at this most prestigious of *Grandes Marques*. I am in the process of working on a full feature on this great house for a future issue of the newsletter, as all of the changes that have been implemented by Monsieur Lécaillon and his team in the last several years are fundamentally changing the landscape of Champagne in a very, very positive manner and are going to be directly responsible in the future for a far, far healthier grape-growing environment

in the region. When a small and high-quality family domaine such as Champagne Georges Laval in Cumières undertakes to switch all of its farming over to organic viticultural methods, which Vincent Laval's father did more than a quarter century ago, the neighbors notice, but it is hardly important news in Champagne. However, when Maison Louis Roederer decides to do the same with its two hundred and thirty hectares of vineyards, and is now in full conversion over to *biodynamique* farming for all of its parcels of vines, then producers and *négociants* across the region take a far more serious look at their own farming practices and start to consider changes. By all reports that I hear from small *biodynamique* and organic *vignerons* in the region that happen to be neighbors to any of the Louis Roederer parcels, the maison is doing very, very good farming work these days in their vineyards (though we did walk by a Roederer parcel in Verzenay that has not yet been converted), and the next step in their progress will be to get the farmers from whom they still buy grapes to also take the plunge and move away from unnecessary use of chemical products (Louis Roederer owns enough vineyard land to provide seventy percent of their grape requirements, but still has to contract for thirty percent of their production needs) and start to emulate the success of Louis Roederer and start farming more organically. But, I imagine that it will only be a matter of time before this next stage in the evolution of the house's farming philosophy takes root and the house's suppliers also start to farm organically.

As I noted in the introduction, the purpose of my visit with Monsieur Lécaillon on this trip was to investigate how their vintage-dated Brut Rosé evolves with bottle age, and we worked through a nice vertical of this bottling on a warm spring afternoon in Reims during my visit. I will include notes on the house's current releases in the next issue of the newsletter, as I managed to exercise self-restraint during this tasting and not ask to also taste the house's new releases (including the new vintage of Cristal) and stay focused on the excellent Rosé Millésime bottling of Maison Louis Roederer. The house uses fruit from the same vineyards each year to produce their bottling of Rosé Millésime, which is the only non-Cristal Rosé cuvée that they now produce. This includes seventy percent pinot noir grapes solely from the house's own vineyards in the village of Cumières, which lie on either side of the well-known (to Vincent Laval fans) *lieu à dit* of les Chèvres and which are found on the western side of the village in the direction of Damery. These parcels are in the *lieux à dits* of le Moulin à Vent, les Chalmonts and les Pêchers, and here, as in les Chèvres, there is a higher limestone content in the soil than vineyards on the eastern end of the village. This is a warmer area and Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon and his team like to pick their grapes earmarked for the Rosé Millésime on the riper side, so that the seeds and skins are thoroughly ripe and will impart no green elements during the skin contact. Acidity levels are of secondary importance for the pinot noir in the cuvée, as Monsieur Lécaillon explains that "we will get the good acidity we need for this cuvée from the chardonnay that we include in the blend." All the chardonnay comes from the domaine's vineyards in the village of Cuis in the Côte des Blancs, which is blessed with a northerly exposition that allows for high acidity- just perfect for giving a fine spine of acid to go in the blend with the riper pinot noir grapes the house picks in Cumières. Monsieur Lécaillon's team picks the Cumières pinot noir in the afternoon and then transports the grapes in refrigerated trucks to the press house, where they will receive a ten day pre-fermentation maceration to set the color (no addition of still red wine for color in the Roederer Rosé Millésime and virtually no pressing of the pinot grapes according to Jean-Baptiste) before it is co-fermented with the chardonnay grapes from Cuis.

For Maison Roederer's Rosé Millésime bottling, malolactic fermentation for the *vins clairs* tends to be a reflection of the style of the vintage, so that some wines will undergo malo and others will not, depending on each year's characteristics. However, whether or not a batch of the *vins clairs* for this bottling go through malo is not necessarily what one might expect based on a general vintage's characteristics, but is specific for the parcels of vines earmarked exclusively for this cuvée. For example, the 1996 Rosé Millésime (a ripe and very high acid year) saw thirty to forty percent of its *vins clairs* go through malolactic, whereas the 1995 version was fully a seventy percent malo wine. For Monsieur Lécaillon, he likes to differentiate vintages in Champagne as either "Oceanic Vintages" or "Continental Vintages", with the former influenced by weather coming in from the west and typically wet and cool growing seasons, whereas the latter are more influenced by weather from the south and are always warmer (though can be either dry or wet over the course of the summer) and "it is the Continental vintages that are always our greatest years in Champagne" and most often the ones where a Rosé Millésime will be produced. The wine tends to be one of the lightest Rosés in Champagne (as is the case with their Cristal Rosé), as the color comes primarily from the ten day "cold soak" prior to the onset of fermentation, as the pressing is very, very gentle for the pinot noir in the cuvée. As the blend is always made from the same vineyards in Cumières and Cuis, slight variations in the percentage of each varietal in the finished wine are simply a reflection of respective yields in a given year, as the seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay are always the targets and the grapes are co-fermented together, so there is no blending of *vins clairs* after fermentation to make the final cuvée. Today, the wine ages at least five full years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement, though the minimum used to be only four years in the past, and will spend an additional six months in the Roederer cellars after disgorgement to allow it to fully recover prior to its release into the market. It is an extremely ageworthy bottling of Brut Rosé and one of the great wines produced at Maison Louis Roederer.

2009 Louis Roederer Brut Rosé Millésime (Reims)

The 2009 vintage of Rosé Millésime is the newest release from Maison Roederer is a lovely wine from this very ripe and warm vintage. The bouquet is deep, young and superb, wafting from the glass in a mix of white cherries, tangerine, wheat toast, a complex base of soil and a smoky topnote. There is a slightly baked fruit element to the fruit here that is quite similar to what the 1982 Bordeaux vintage displayed out of the blocks and is reflective of this "Continental Vintage". On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and absolutely rock solid at the core, with refined *mousse*, great focus and balance and superb backend cut and grip on the very long and youthful finish. This is a terrific bottle in the making, but I would still give it a couple of years in the cellar to allow it to more fully blossom. 2017-2035+. **93.**

2008 Louis Roederer Brut Rosé Millésime (Reims)

I really love the style and shape of the 2008 vintage in Champagne and Maison Roederer's Rosé Millésime is an outstanding example of this lovely year. The bouquet is more refined and filigreed than its 2009 counterpart, offering up a classy, youthful and very fresh constellation of apple, white cherries, discreet smokiness, a complex base of limestone minerality, *pain grillé*, lovely spice tones and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very tightly-knit today, with a rock solid core, superb mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and outstanding focus and grip on the very long and utterly refined finish. This is a beautiful bottle in the making, but it will demand a bit longer in the cellar to fully blossom than the 2009 version. 2020-2045+. **93+.**

2004 Louis Roederer Brut Rosé Millésime (Reims)

At age eleven, the 2004 Roederer Rosé Millésime is starting to develop some lovely secondary elements on both the nose and palate and is just starting to reach its plateau of peak drinkability. The excellent bouquet delivers a complex mélange of dried cherries, tangerine, smoky tones, rye bread, gorgeous minerality and a nice touch of brioche in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with pinpoint bubbles, fine focus and cut and a very long, complex and vibrant finish. This wine is now wide open on the palate, but still retains the zesty acid chassis of a young wine and will age beautifully for many years to come. Fine juice. 2015-2035. **93.**



2003 Louis Roederer Brut Rosé Millésime (Reims)

Our bottle of the 2003 was ever so slightly influenced by a less than ideal cork, which did not show any signs of TCA taint on either the nose or within its flavor spectrum, but certainly made the wine quite a bit shorter on the finish than any of these other examples. I would love to see a pristine bottle of this wine, as interestingly, the fruit tones here in this very hot growing season were actually fresher than in the 2009! The bouquet is a fine blend of oranges, cherries, wheat bread, smoke and a fine base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and wide open, with lovely focus and complexity. The acids here are lovely and I have little doubt that a perfect example would be very long and drinking with great style today.

Unfortunately, there was no time during my visit to chill another bottle of the '03, so I will have to wait for a future opportunity to taste a pristine example of this wine.

2002 Louis Roederer Brut Rosé Millésime (Reims)

In the mind of Monsieur Lécaillon, “2002 is one of the great Continental Vintages in recent times” and his '02 Rosé Millésime is a stunning wine in the making. The bouquet is a step up in both depth and intensity than any of the vintages that have preceded it, as it offers up a youthful blend of white peach, tangerine, plenty of smokiness, a superb base of soil, wheat toast, orange peel and the first signs of the nuttiness to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly reserved, with a rock solid core, elegant *mousse*, superb acidity and great length and grip on the complex, focused and laser-like finish. This is a fairly powerful wine that is impeccably balanced and will age for decades to come. It is quite drinkable today, but still a puppy and really should be left alone in the cellar for a minimum of another five or six years before one starts to drink it with abandon. A great wine. 2021-2050. **95.**

1999 Louis Roederer Brut Rosé Millésime (Reims)

1999 was Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon's first vintage as *Chef de Cave* at Maison Roederer, and as he noted, “1999 was the lowest acid vintage here since 1959 and this wine did not go through malolactic fermentation.” The wine is now fully at its apogee at age sixteen and is drinking beautifully, wafting from the glass in a complex mélange of white cherries, orange zest, woodsmoke, chalky soil tones, a touch of cinnamon, hints of *sous bois* and a lovely topnote of *pain grillé*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, superb complexity and excellent grip on the very long and poised finish. A superb wine that is drinking with great style and generosity today, but has the structure still to cruise along at this very high level for another couple of decades. 2015-2035. **94.**

1996 Louis Roederer Brut Rosé Millésime (Reims)

The 1996 vintage of Rosé Millésime is fully mature and drinking with great breed and complexity today. The lovely nose offers up an aromatic constellation of peach, melon, chalky minerality, fresh-baked bread and a lovely touch of sea salts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows lovely elements of maturity, but also an excellent spine of acidity and no signs of losing vibrancy or energy on the backend. The *mousse* is vigorous and refined, with the finish defined by excellent cut and mineral drive. A first class vintage for this lovely cuvée, the 1996 Rosé Millésime is fully mature and should continue to drink with great refinement for at least another dozen years. 2015-2030+. **94.**

1995 Louis Roederer Brut Rosé Millésime (Reims)

The 1995 vintage of Rosé Millésime from Maison Roederer is far more evolved than the 1996 (no surprise here) and is quite tertiary in its aromatic and flavor profile, but it is drinking beautifully and still offers up plenty of pleasure and shows no imminent signs of senility. The lovely nose offers up scents of dried red berries, smoke, a touch of fresh porcini, chalky soil tones, gentle nuttiness and a dollop of honeycomb in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and bright, with a lovely core of mature fruit, still good *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the well-balanced finish that closes with a fine note of orange peel. Probably a good idea to drink up the 1995 Rosé Millésime in the next several years, unless one really has a penchant for aged Champagne. 2015-2022+. **92.**

2006 Louis Roederer Brut Nature Millésime (Reims) Disgorged December 2014

The first release of a *non-dosé* wine from Louis Roederer, the 2006 Brut Nature was produced entirely from fruit grown in the house's parcels in the vineyard of le Chèvres in Cumières. It is a blend of fifty-five percent pinot noir, twenty-five percent pinot meunier and

thirty percent chardonnay, with all of the grapes co-fermented. Half of the *vins clairs* were barrel-fermented and half were fermented in stainless steel, with none going through malolactic fermentation in 2006. Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon decided to bottle this at a lower pressure, and it was disgorged after seven and a half years on the lees, with both decisions obviously intended to prevent the wine from being unduly tensile on the palate when released. The wine is absolutely excellent, as it offers up a superb bouquet of pear, apple, a touch of menthol, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and a long, racy finish where the acids are very well-buffered by depth of fruit and bottle age. A very, very auspicious first bottling of Brut Nature from Maison Louis Roederer. 2015-2030+. **93.**

Domaine Chartogne-Taillet (Merfy)

Alexandre Chartogne is one of the most universally respected young growers in all of Champagne, and it is not surprising that he is good friends with several other of the young, inspired *vignerons* such as Aurelian Suenen and Sébastien Mouzon who represent the new wave of future stars in the region. As I had written back last year, Alexandre had worked several years with Anselme Selosse in Avize prior to returning to take over his family's estate in the village of Merfy, which lies northwest of the city of Reims. The village of Merfy is a bit off the beaten path these days and not one of the well-known villages in Champagne, but Alexandre showed me a book on Champagne written in the mid-nineteenth century that ranked Merfy right up in the top division with all of the villages that are so well known today, such as Avize, Mesnil, Aÿ, Ambonnay, Verzy, Verzenay and the like. So, it seems pretty clear that Merfy is one of the great village in the Champagne region, and Alexandre took time to explain why this is so, as much of the surrounding villages further north or west of Merfy are planted in pretty poor, sandy soils. However, in Merfy, the vineyards lie on a fine section where the sandy topsoil lies on a fine bed of argilo-calcaire or tuffeau and further down a base of hard limestone, so that the topsoils here are the only place where sand has its place and the underlying *terroir* is excellent. Monsieur Chartogne drew me a topographical map of the vineyards of Merfy to better assist in understanding the breakdown of the various soil types in the village, with the vineyards further up the hillside here having less sandy topsoil, which has eroded down to the flatter vineyards in the village, and these have the far more interesting central section of soil of argilo-calcaire or *tuffeau*, and it is from these vineyards further up the hillsides that he produces his single vineyard bottlings. In some of the other *lieux à dits* in which the family has vines, the fruit from these is used for the two blended bottlings of the Cuvée Ste. Anne and Brut Rosé, and into each of these wines also go the younger vine plots of vines in the vineyards where he makes his single vineyard bottlings from the old vines. Monsieur Chartogne also produces a Brut Millésime bottling, which does not carry any vineyard designation on it, but which in fact all hails from his *lieu à dit* of les Couarres.

Alexandre currently makes five different *lieux à dits* bottlings that are produced in small quantities, in addition to his Cuvée Ste. Anne, Brut Millésime and Brut Rosé. His single vineyard bottlings are “les Orizeaux”, in which he has fifty-five *ares* of pinot noir planted in 1961; “les Heurtebise”, in which he has just over a hectare of chardonnay planted in 1972 and 1985; “les Couarres Château”, where the family has fifty-one *ares* of pinot noir vines all planted in 1987; “les Barres”, in which the Chartognes own two parcels, with the first just over forty *ares* that was replanted to pinot noir in 2008, and the second and more important, old vine pinot meunier

planted in 1952 and still on its own indigenous, *Franc de Pieds* rootstocks; and “les Alliées” which is just over a half hectare in size and comprised of pinot meunier planted in 1969. One of the great advantage’s Merfy’s sandy layers of topsoil is that phylloxera is extremely unlikely to take hold here, which is why the pinot meunier in les Barres have survived more than sixty years on their *Franc de Pieds* rootstocks, and there are a few other tiny, older parcels scattered around in other vineyards in the village that are also on *Francs de Pieds* as well. Monsieur Chartogne is evolving towards a strategy for his *lieux à dits* bottlings of “one wine, one *terroir*, one *cépage* and one vintage”, and this will probably be a reality in the next few years, and one imagines that he may expand his roster of single vineyard wines as time goes by. However, he was quick to caution that he fully understands that he needs to be flexible in this approach, and this strategy will only be pursued in higher quality vintages.



Alexandre Chartogne in the courtyard of the family winery in Merfy.

I arrived in Merfy at Domaine Chartogne-Taillet straight from a few days immersed in the wines of Louis Roederer and Krug, and I cannot really think of a better grower-récoltant to have started my visit to small estates than this one, as Monsieur Chartogne is extremely thoughtful and dedicated to both his viticulture and cellar work. As my extended period tasting at Krug had been focused primarily (though the ancillary benefits of tasting at Krug over a couple of days cannot be overstated!) on the blending of Grande Cuvée, so that plenty of examples of young *vins clairs* had been tasted and analyzed, and I had given my palate a bit of time off and spent the morning writing prior to my visit to Alexandre Chartogne and had allocated plenty of time for my visit in Merfy. This turned out to be a very good thing, as I had an enormous number of questions and was absolutely delighted to hear about the winemaking and viticultural practices here, as they strike me as amongst the most enlightened to be found in Champagne these days.

Alexandre Chartogne is quite philosophical about his approach to his vinification of *vins clairs* in the cellars, as he is perfectly content to allow them to go through malo or not as they see fit, observing “if it happens, it happens- it is for the wine to decide.” He is very much interested in being as non-interventionist as possible in the cellars, after working extremely hard in the vineyards, and it is not surprising that all of his parcels are farmed organically. As he likes to say, “the vineyards, the vines, the *terroir*, these are permanent; man just passes through during our brief moment in the history of the region.” The domaine currently works with Claude Bourguignon, France’s most respected soil expert, with biodiversity promoted in the vineyards and no herbicides or pesticides used. Alexandre is also moving to plowing more and more parcels by horse, rather than tractor, to keep from compacting the soils. As he likes to say, “replacing man by machine saves time, but it can also have a negative impact on the nature that sustains us”, so that “machinery is only used (here) where it benefits the plant, the soil and the grapes.”

Alexandre has just bought some large, oak *foudres* from an Austrian *tonnelier*, Stockinger, that I see quite often used in the cellar of the best producers in Germany, and he is very excited about the possibilities evident with these very large casks. He also uses a variety of older Burgundy barrels for fermentation and *elevage*, as well as some stainless steel tanks, and also had purchased a few cement eggs to experiment with, but was emphatically not happy with the results, as he found “the wines just stop developing in the cement.” The eggs will no doubt be completely replaced by more Stockinger *foudres* in the future and sold off to someone else looking to experiment. His started goal is to eventually ferment all of his *vins clairs* in wood- either older casks or *foudres*, but realizes that there may always be a *terroir* or two that takes better to fermentation in stainless steel tank (the cement eggs are already history here). Like many of the brightest young stars in Champagne these days, Alexandre is not enamored of generous *dosage* levels for his wines, and most will be finished off at Extra Brut levels, though several bottlings still state Brut on the label. He is also very, very serious about selection in the cellars, and if a growing season is not favorable to a parcel or grape variety, he is not going to allow any of the substandard fruit into his flagship wines. For example, because 2010 was so difficult for his pinot meunier, and the yields were so low with what he had left after selection, he decided to blend all his pinot meunier into a single bottling, which he calls “Lettre de Mon Meunier” and which is not a single vineyard cuvée. In the notes that follow, I have included vintage dates for each wine, though this information only appears on the back labels. The various Chartogne-Taillet bottlings are some of the finest wines being made in Champagne today and I am already looking forward to my next visit with Alexandre Chartogne.

Chartogne-Taillet “Cuvée Sainte Anne” Brut (Merfy)

The new release of Alexandre Chartogne’s Cuvée Sainte Anne bottling hails from several different *lieux à dits* in Merfy and is comprised of a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir. The current release is excellent, as fifty-five percent is from the base year of 2012 and forty-five percent from a combination of 2011 and 2010 vintage wines. Though the wine is labeled as Brut, it was finished off with a *dosage* of only four grams per liter. The wine offers up a fine and still quite youthful nose of apple, tart pear, a lovely, complex base of soil tones, white flowers, bread dough and a discreet topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite soil-driven in personality, with a rock solid core, crisp acids, elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, bright and still fairly primary finish. This is an excellent wine in

the making, and though it is quite approachable today, it will be even better with a bit of bottle age. 2015-2035. **91+**.

2008 Chartogne-Taillet “Brut Millésime”

As I noted in the introduction, all of the fruit for the Brut Millésime bottling hails from les Couarres, but this is not indicated on the label. This vineyard has a base of *argilo-calcaire* under its thin topsoil of sand, with the vineyard planted to sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay. The wine was finished off with four grams per liter of *dosage* and is really an Extra Brut, but this is not on the label. The wine is superb, offering up a very deep and nascently complex nose of apple, lemon peel, a bit of bread fruit, brioche, fresh almond, spring flowers and a nice base of chalky soil tones (despite the vineyard being mostly clay). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with brisk acids, elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the focused and still quite youthful finish. This is quite approachable already, but I would be inclined to give it a couple more years in the cellar and really let it blossom. 2015-2035. **93**.

Chartogne-Taillet “Le Rosé” Brut NV (Disgorged May 2015)

This too had not yet been disgorged prior to my visit, but was due to be quite soon and will be in the market in the near future. It is from the base year of 2011 and is going to be a lovely wine, as it offers up scents of white cherries, strawberries, a fine base of soil tones, a nice touch of warm bread and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles and fine length and grip on the complex finish. This is very nicely light on its feet and will be accessible right from the start. I am probably underestimating it a touch, as it was disgorged immediately before serving, but it is not from as strong a vintage as the 2010 below and a little distance in score seems warranted, though I should note that I did not taste them side by side. 2015-2025. **90+**.

Chartogne-Taillet “Le Rosé” Brut NV (Disgorged December 2014)

Having tasted the base year 2011 bottling of Le Rosé at the domaine in Merfy, I was very happy to see that the US importer was still stocking the 2010 base year of this bottling. The wine is comprised of a blend of sixty percent chardonnay and forty percent pinot noir and was finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter, after having spent three and a half years aging *sur latte*. The wine is fairly pale in color for a Brut Rosé, with lovely salmon tones and a superb bouquet of peach, woodsmoke, rye toast, tangerine, a touch of clove and a beautifully complex signature of soil. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine *mousse*, lovely focus and complexity, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the poised and beautifully balanced finish. This wine will age very well for a couple of decades, but good luck keeping your hands off of it that long! 2015-2035. **92**.

2010 Chartogne-Taillet “les Orizeaux” Extra Brut

The les Orizeaux bottling hails entirely from pinot noir vines planted in 1961, with the vintage producing nine barrels, with all of the casks ranging from two to six years of age. The wine was still resting on its lees and was disgorged moments before we tasted it, so it had no *dosage*, but offered up a marvelous nose of very pure fruit tones, redolent of apple and white peach, as well as notes of bee pollen, brioche, just a hint of buttery oak and a marvelous base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a marvelous core of fruit, lovely soil signature, bright acids, refined *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the poised and quite extroverted finish. It is still early days for this wine, but it looks likely to be the most forward of the *lieux à dits* bottlings when it is released, though still with the structural balance to age long and gracefully. Fine juice. 2015-2035. **94**.

2010 Chartogne-Taillet “les Couarres Château” Extra Brut

The 2010 version of les Couarres Château was also disgorged right before we tasted it, so its *dosage* had not yet been considered. As I noted above, this is produced entirely from pinot noir vines planted in 1987, so these are not particularly venerable by the standards of the Chartogne family, but they are now at a good age and the wine is absolutely superb in 2010. The soils here have more *Tuffeau* and chalk than in neighboring les Couarres, and consequently the wine is more detailed and racy in personality. The super nose is a bit reserved today, but shows enormous potential in its constellation of apple, smoke, a bit of fresh-baked bread, very complex minerality, white flowers and just a hint of supporting oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully structured, with a great core, refined *mousse*, and a very, very long, pure and complex finish. Another superb wine in the making, but here, I would tuck this in the cellar for at least a year or two after it is released to allow it to really emerge from behind its structural elements. 2017-2035+. **94.**

2010 Chartogne-Taillet “Lettre de Mon Meunier” Extra Brut

The 2010 Lettre de Mon Meunier is a collection of all the best pinot meunier parcels that survived the challenges posed by rot, rain and burst skins in this vintage. The wine is very, very lovely, but obviously, not quite as soil-driven as the single vineyard bottlings. The bouquet is a fine blend of white peach, bread fruit, smoky tones, a touch of warm biscuit and the gentle floral tones of fine meunier. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, elegant and complex, with pinpoint bubbles, lovely focus and balance, a perfectly good core and a long, classy finish. There is not quite the same length here as in the *lieux à dits* cuvées, but this is still a very lovely bottle of wine and drinking very well already. 2015-2030. **92.**

2008 Chartogne-Taillet “les Heurtebise” Extra Brut

Les Heurtebise lies just to the west of Orizeaux, with beautiful sandstone soils and relatively old vine chardonnay. This is great juice and is really drinking very well indeed already, though like all of the *lieux à dits* bottlings, it will have no difficulty aging. The beautiful nose jumps from the glass in a blaze of pear, delicious apple, almond, brioche, superb soil tones, citrus zest and a touch of honeysuckle in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and a very long, classy and quite wide open finish. There is plenty of cut and grip on the backend here, but this wine is already drinking with great style. That said, I would still try to keep my hands off of this lovely wine for another three or four years and really let its secondary layers of complexity emerge more fully! 2018-2035+. **94.**

2008 Chartogne-Taillet “les Barres” Extra Brut (Merfy)

I tasted this release of Alexandre Chartogne’s les Barres bottling at les Avizés during my spring trip, and the wine is absolutely stellar. I have included it again this year, to give a more complete picture of his single vineyard bottlings. Last year, I did not note the date of disgorgement, but the wine is from the base year of 2008 and is made entirely from sixty year-old pinot meunier vines in the *lieu à dit* of les Barres in the village of Merfy. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter. This is an absolutely superb bottle of bubbly, offering up a deep and very complex nose of apple, fresh almond, a dollop of lychee, gentle brioche, a very, very complex base of soil tones, lime blossoms, just a hint of mossiness and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with lovely acidity and focus, great backend mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly balanced finish. This is great juice. 2014-2035+. **94.**

2007 Chartogne-Taillet “les Alliées” Extra Brut (Merfy)

The 2007 bottling of Les Alliées was finished with a *dosage* of two grams per liter and is not a bad drink by any stretch of the imagination today, though still with years and years ahead of it. The lovely nose of this one hundred percent, old vine pinot meunier cuvées wafts from the glass in a blend of white peach, apple, *patissière*, complex soil tones, gentle smokiness and a lovely, floral topnote redolent of all the discreet flowers of meunier. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very minerally in personality, with a lovely core, refined *mousse*, brisk acids and a long, complex and very classy finish. This is quite approachable today, but I would be inclined to keep this in the cellar for several more years and let it relax a bit more structurally, before I start to drink it in earnest. 2018-2035+. **93+**.

Charlot-Tanneux (Mardeuil)

Vincent Charlot is one of the true believers in *biodynamique* viticulture, which he began to practice seven years ago. I had no idea that he was farming *biodynamically* when I made my appointment to visit him, but had loved his wines, which just exude personality, and felt I really needed to visit and taste *sur place* during this trip. Happily, we did not begin our visit in the cellars, but in the vineyards, as Monsieur Charlot grabbed a shovel and we headed out to his parcels of vines to look more closely at his soils and vines. He farms now 4.1 hectares of vineyards, almost entirely in the fine village of Mardeuil, just to the west of Épernay, though with a few parcels in neighboring village of Pierry, which lies just over a ridge from Mardeuil. He also has a small plot of vines in Aÿ in the *lieu à dit* of La Croix, from which he produces a separate grand cru bottling. I was joined on the visit by a couple of folks from California whom I had met previously back when I was working on my estate feature on Joseph Swan Vineyards several years ago, as we were all together at one of the tastings for that article, so it was nice to catch up and share a couple of hours together with Monsieur Charlot. Vincent Charlot is very, very passionate about *biodynamics* and we spent a good hour out in his vines, comparing his soils with those of his neighbors (which were pretty easy to see were farmed with plenty of chemical applications), and in fact, several already had short grass that was turning bright orange in color in their death throes, as they had been blasted with herbicides the week before. In contrast, Monsieur Charlot's parcels are the epitome of healthy biodiversity, with scores of different flowers and grasses growing between the rows of vines. Vincent will pull out his shovel and dig up a section of soil so that visitors can smell the earth, and indeed it is quite clearly healthy and alive. Shovelfuls of soil from neighbors' plots (judiciously returned in place after a brief sniff of the shovel) do not show the same vitality, to put it politely! He will plow between the rows or closer to the vines, depending on what he feels will be best in a particular parcel, as the goal is to cut the superficial surface roots a bit and force everything below ground even deeper down in search of more minerality. Vincent Charlot states that there are only a couple of other *biodynamique* farmers in Champagne, but he is clearly a bit pessimistic on this count, but he is correct that they still remain a very small (though vocal) minority of *biodynamistes* in Champagne. He likes to state that “almost all of the soils in Champagne are simply dead, and one cannot make really good wine from dead soils.” This is of course a bit of an overstatement, but for many *vignerons*, it is sadly not all that far from the truth.



Vincent Charlot and his shovel in one of his beautifully-farmed vineyards in Mardeuil.

In the cellars, Monsieur Charlot favors barrel fermentation for his *vins clairs* in old, neutral barrels, with each parcel or sub-parcel fermented on its own. On occasion, he will co-ferment different grape varieties, if the plot is small, but mostly he favors isolating by *cépages* as well as parcel, and using different older barrels for different grapes. He buys his old barrels from Bordeaux, favoring used Sauternes barrels for his chardonnays and used casks from Château Meyney for his red varieties. His *vins clairs* do not undergo malolactic fermentation, and of course, he uses solely indigenous yeasts. He is not a big fan of *dosage* and is also experimenting with a bottling that will have no sulfur added anywhere along the way during its fermentation or *elevage*. Several of his wines have no *dosage* at all, and most of the rest have quite low levels of sugar in them, but due to the really excellent depth of fruit his vineyards produce, there is never an issue here with the *non-dosé* bottlings being too severe. Monsieur Charlot also ages some of his wines under cork, rather than crown cap. He has several old vine parcels and is really making some stunning wines, though across the board, his style favors bold wines with plenty of personality, coupled with lovely structural elements, fine *mousse* and good acidity for aging. To some lovers of Champagne, these may seem a bit too extroverted in personality for classic bubbly, but I find the wines really distinctive and elegant in their bolder styles, and Monsieur Charlot definitely ranks right up towards the top of my list of the grower-récoltants in Champagne. His very first vintage here was 1992. As I noted in my February article, Monsieur Charlot continues to use the family domaine name of Charlot-Tanneux for his blended wines and

labels his single vineyard bottlings under the “Vincent Charlot” label, though all are produced in the same cellars under the family house in Mardeuil.

Vincent Charlot “le Fruit de Ma Passion” Extra Brut NV (Base Year 2011)

The upcoming release of le Fruit de Ma Passion, which is produced from two of Monsieur Charlot’s top *lieux à dits* in Mardeuil (les Chapottes and la Genette) is comprised of a blend of sixty-five percent pinot meunier, twenty-two percent pinot noir and thirteen percent chardonnay. The wine was finished off with 3.5 grams per liter of *dosage* and offers up a very fine nose of white peach, apple, complex soil tones, spring flowers and just a touch of buttery oak influence from its older casks. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and complex, with refined *mousse*, excellent mid-palate depth, fine balance and a long, vibrant and classy finish. Fine juice that should age beautifully for a couple of decades. 2015-2035. **92+**.

Vincent Charlot “le Rubis de la Dune” Rosé de Saignée Extra Brut NV (Base Year 2012)

The next iteration of le Rubis de la Dune is going to be another lovely bottle from Vincent Charlot. As readers may recall, this small parcel of roughly a quarter hectare was planted by Vincent’s family back in 1955 and is produced from eighty percent pinot meunier and twenty percent pinot noir, which are co-fermented by Monsieur Charlot. Last year’s version was quite ruby in color, but this release will be a touch lighter in color. The upcoming release is also a touch drier than the last bottling that I reviewed back in February, as this was finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter (in comparison to six for the last release). This lovely wine delivers a complex and vibrant bouquet of wild strawberries, fresh baked bread, a very complex base of soil tones, gentle smokiness and a pungent topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with lovely vinosity, elegant *mousse* and really impressive lightness of step on the long, crisp and complex finish. A lovely follow-up to last year’s release. 2015-2030. **92**.

Vincent Charlot “Extravagant” Extra Brut NV (No Sulfur Bottling)

The Extravagant bottling is raised without any sulfur used during the fermentation or *elevage* and is comprised of a blend of fifty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier. The wine has a tiny blush color to it, as Monsieur Charlot comments that “if you do not use sulfur, you do not bleach out the color.” The bouquet is absolutely beautiful, wafting from the glass in a complex constellation of discreet white fruit tones, chalky soil, pinot meunier floral tones, a bit of *patisserie* and a delicately spicy topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and quite vinous on the attack, with a lovely core, refined *mousse* and impressive delicacy and elegance on the very long and crisp finish. I am not sure how long this wine will last without any SO₂, but for at least the next decade it will be stellar. 2015-2025+? **93**.

2006 Vincent Charlot “Grand Cru Aÿ” Non-Dosé

The 2006 Grand Cru Aÿ bottling that we tasted was still aging under cork in the Charlot cellars, having never been disgorged, and it showed no signs of needing any *dosage*. The wine is almost entirely pinot noir, with only a very touch of chardonnay and offers up a truly superb bouquet of apple, peach, brioche, a superb base of soil and just a touch of what Eric Bedel at Krug calls *patissière* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a lovely core, refined *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the complex and very, very classy finish. Stellar wine. 2015-2030+. **92+**.

2006 Vincent Charlot “Cuvée Micheline Tanneux” Extra Brut (Pierry)

The Cuvée Micheline Tanneux is made entirely from the family’s steep parcel in Pierry, which has a due south exposition and where the vines are planted east-west, rather than north-south, as this allows the vines a much more gentle exposure to the sun over the course of the day. The 2006 version is a blend of seventy percent chardonnay and thirty percent pinot noir and is an absolutely exceptional bottle of Champagne, perfectly synthesizing the extroverted personalities of Monsieur Charlot’s wines with the elegance and refinement of great bubbly. The superb nose wafts from the glass in a complex blend of pear, white peach, *patissière*, floral tones, beautiful chalkiness and a topnote of vanilla custard. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with beautiful balance, a superb core, excellent, pinpoint bubbles and a very long, focused and complex finish. A truly lovely wine. 2015-2030+. **94.**

2002 Vincent Charlot “Cuvée Micheline Tanneux” Extra Brut (Pierry)

The 2002 Cuvée Micheline Tanneux was finished off with one gram per liter of *dosage* and is again a blend of seventy percent chardonnay and thirty percent pinot noir. The wine is absolutely brilliant, soaring from the glass in a blaze of pear, apple, very salty minerality, brioche, a touch of *crème patissière* and a lovely floral topnote redolent of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with a great core, zesty acids, elegant *mousse* and stunning length and grip on the perfectly balanced and very classy finish. A great bottle that could still use a few years in the cellar, as it is a classically big-boned and backwards 2002. It is hard to pick a favorite between this and the outstanding 2006 version, but perhaps in the long haul, this will slightly nose out the ’06 and land at a slightly higher plateau, though both wines are truly stunning! 2018-2035+. **95.**

Marie-Noëlle Ledru (Ambonnay)

Marie-Noëlle Ledru is one of the great, legendary winegrowers in Champagne. She is now getting close to the age of retirement and her production continues to shrink a bit as other family members start to plan for her eventual retirement and make other arrangements for their parcels of vines, which had previously been leased to Madame Ledru. As I wrote back in February, she formerly farmed five hectares of vines in Ambonnay and Bouzy, but this had been cut back to two hectares as other Ledru family members made other arrangements, and this will be cut back again in the growing season of 2015 to 1.75 hectares of vines- for the same reason. As Madame Ledru said, “I am getting close to retirement age and 1.75 hectares will be enough for me to continue to take care of for the time being.” She is an incredibly warm and engaging person, with a very tastefully done small tasting room where she welcomes visitors in the foyer of her house. Given how hard it was to make an appointment at the domaine (her American importer simply ignored my numerous email requests to at least provide contact information for Madame Ledru, if he was uninterested in assisting to schedule a *rendez-vous*), I was very surprised to see that her placard outside of the domaine was quite easy to see from the main street in Ambonnay. Not surprisingly, once one has met Madame Ledru, her philosophy is to “do everything as naturally as possible- both in the cellars and in the vineyards”, so no chemical products are used in the vines and her cellar regimen is quite straightforward and meticulous. As she notes, all of her *vins clairs* go through malolactic fermentation, “as this is just nature and I try to not intervene during the winemaking process.” The wines are fermented in a combination of either stainless steel or enamel tanks and she prefers very little or no *dosage* for her wines.



The Ledru family was originally from Bouzy, as her great, great grandfather, Gabriel Ledru was a winemaker and *vigneron* in Bouzy during his career, but with Madame Ledru's great grandfather's generation, the family vineyards in Ambonnay arrived via her great grandmother's side of the family, and today, almost all of the Ledru parcels are in Ambonnay. The remaining 1.75 hectares of vines that she will continue to work from 2015 onwards are scattered in several smaller plots, most of them up on the hillsides of Ambonnay or just over the border in Bouzy, and I would have loved to have had time to visit her parcels with her on this trip, but Madame Ledru had an appointment that evening after our tasting and I clearly did not want to make her run late. When I asked in my rather poor French about the possibility of visiting the vineyards the next time I am in the region, she misunderstood my meaning and looked at her watch and said "okay, let's go." I deferred, knowing her time constraints, but her willingness to do so just fully underscores her friendly character and generosity with her time. Marie-Noëlle Ledru's first solo vintage was 1988, with her father's retirement having been in the previous year, and she has been a legendary fixture in the village of Ambonnay now for several decades. In fact, when other *vignerons* hear her name mentioned, they all seem to take a moment to express how much they have respected all that she has done during her long career, and as she gets ready to usher in her thirty-seventh growing season, she shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. These are great wines that are fully built to age, and it is a pity to buy these wines and drink them without allowing them to fully blossom with extended cellaring time. That said, of course I drank a few when opportunity allowed while I was in the region, as they are a bit

easier to find in the shops in Reims and are rather more difficult (at least for me) to find in New York. Given the very short supply of these wines and their truly exceptional quality, I fully understand her American importer's reticence when I asked about making an appointment, as I am sure that allocating his dwindling supply of Madame Ledru's wines is not easy matter. However, given that Marie-Noëlle Ledru is getting closer and closer to the age of mandatory retirement, it is important for Champagne lovers who are not yet familiar with her superb wines to search some out as soon as possible and tuck them away in the cellars, as it will not be that many more years that she will continue to produce a commercially viable quantity of bottles.

Marie-Noëlle Ledru Extra Brut NV

The current release of Madame Ledru's non-vintage Extra Brut bottling is the same one I tasted in December in France and reported on in February. As I noted then, it is comprised of eighty-five percent pinot noir and fifteen percent chardonnay, and I was able to confirm that it is from the base year of 2010. Also, it saw no *dosage*, though it is labeled as an Extra Brut. Other than these couple of new details, the wine showed exactly as it did four months previously, wafting from the glass in a bright and youthfully classy bouquet of apple, a bit of lemon peel, warm bread, beautifully complex soil tones, plenty of Ambonnay smokiness and a discreet topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with a rock solid core, excellent buffered acidity, outstanding focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and a very long, complex and still quite youthful finish. This is probably already very tasty to lovers of *non-dosé* bubbly, but having now revisited the wine, I would opt for tucking it away for three or four more years and really allowing it to blossom fully. High class juice from one of Champagne's finest traditionalists. 2018-2040+. **92+**.

2008 Marie-Noëlle Ledru Brut Nature Millésime

The 2008 Brut Nature Millésime is made from the same blend of eighty-five percent pinot noir and fifteen percent chardonnay as the non-vintage Extra Brut and spent fully six years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. This is a stellar wine in the making, from a vintage that Madame Ledru feels is absolutely classic, as it delivers a superb and youthful bouquet of apple, white peach, tangerine, bread dough, great minerality, incipient notes of the *pâtisserie* to come and a very gentle floral topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and impeccably balanced, with an outstanding core of fruit, great soil signature, pinpoint bubbles and superb length and grip on the still very youthful finish. 2020-2050+. **94**.

Marie-Noëlle Ledru Brut NV (Disgorged in January 2015)

The upcoming release of non-vintage Brut from Marie-Noëlle Ledru is from the base year of 2011, with fully fifty percent of the blend comprised of *vins de reserves* from 2010 back to 2005. The wine I reported on in February was from the base year of 2010. This is a superb bottle in the making, finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter and offering up a youthfully complex and very refined nose of apple, pear, chalky minerality, warm bread, discreet citrus overtones and a lovely topnote of Ambonnay smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows stellar mineral drive, with outstanding mid-palate depth, great focus and grip, very refined *mousse* and beautiful balance on the long and complex finish. Like the 2010 base year version I tasted in December, this wine is eminently drinkable today, but giving it at least three or four years in the cellar would be well-rewarded. 2018-2040. **92+**.



Marie-Noëlle Ledru in her tasting room in the family domaine in Ambonnay.

2009 Marie-Noëlle Ledru Brut Millésime (Disgorged January 2015)

The 2009 Marie-Noëlle Ledru Brut Millésime is also a blend of eighty-five percent pinot noir and fifteen percent chardonnay and was finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. This particular bottle had been opened in the fridge for a couple of days said Madame Ledru, but I saw no reason to open a second bottle, as it was showing very well and I simply was content to score it within a range and not ask her to open a second bottle. The bouquet is wide open from its bit of breathing, offering up scents of pear, apple, fresh almond, warm bread, citrus peel and classic Ambonnay minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the core, with superb structure and cut, elegant *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the finish. I have little doubt that this is a stunning wine. 2019-2040+. **93-95.**

2009 Marie-Noëlle Ledru “Cuvée Goulté” Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut

The 2009 Cuvée Goulté Blanc de Noirs is a simply beautiful wine on both the nose and palate. The first class bouquet offers up a complex constellation of white peach, tart orange, salty minerality, *pâtisserie*, white flowers and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and focused, with great mineral complexity on the backend, a lovely core, frothy *mousse* and stellar length and grip on the poised and still fairly youthful finish. Great juice. 2019-2040. **95.**

2006 Marie-Noëlle Ledru Brut Nature Millésime (disgorged in 2014)

I reported on the 2006 Marie-Noëlle Ledru “Brut Nature Millésime” back in February and the wine was every bit as fine at the domaine at the end of April. This is still quite youthful but its potential is enormous. The deep and nascently complex nose offers up scents of apple,

pear, a touch of *pâtisserie*, beautifully refined minerality, white flowers, fresh-baked bread and a gentle topnote of fresh almond. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still youthfully snappy, with a rock solid core, great purity and focus, refined *mousse* and simply stunning length and grip on the still very primary finish. I would definitely give this plenty more age to allow all of its secondary layers to emerge, and given how well the 1988 was drinking (and still how youthful it was), I would be strongly inclined to not touch a bottle of this excellent '06 for several more years. 2020-2040+. **94+**.

1988 Marie-Noëlle Ledru Brut Nature Millésime (disgorged right before tasting)

Madame Ledru disgorged this immediately prior to our tasting it, as it had been resting, crown cap down, on a shelf in the cellar. The wine was obviously *non-dosé* as a result, but needed nothing added but more time for the two of us to finish off the bottle! The still very vibrant nose soars from the glass in a blend of green apple, lemon peel, complex, very salty minerality, gentle mossy tones, a touch of *pâtisserie* and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully complex, with a great mid-palate depth, elegant *mousse* and lovely focus and precision on the very mineral finish. A beautiful bottle of bubbly. 2015-2035. **96**.

Champagne Tarlant (Oeuilly)

This was my first visit to Champagne Tarlant in Oeuilly, as I had been very impressed with a few of their bottlings that I tasted while in Beaune this past November. I was greeted warmly by Benoit Tarlant, who has now been working alongside of his father, Jean-Mary Tarlant at the family winery for several years and is primarily responsible for the winemaking today. Just recently, Benoit's sister, Mélanie has also joined the team here, with she and Benoit representing the twelfth generation of the Tarlant family to operate this fine family estate. The Tarlants were one of the first small *vigneron* families to start bottling a bit of bubbly on their own, as they first produced their own Champagne in 1928! The village of Oeuilly lies just west of Damery and Mardeuil in the *Vallée de la Marne*, and the Tarlant family cultivates fourteen hectares of vines here in the commune of Oeuilly (and in a couple of smaller neighboring villages). Their vineyards are planted to fifty percent Pinot Noir, thirty percent Chardonnay, fifteen percent Pinot Meunier and five percent of ancient varieties such as Arbanne and Petit Meslier. The family is fortunate to have several parcels of very old vines, with several of their vineyard plots having been planted right after the end of World War II. As this was my first visit to Champagne Tarlant, I was quite surprised to discover that fully eighty percent of their production is in Brut Nature bottlings, as Jean-Mary Tarlant began producing *non-dosé* cuvées more than thirty years ago and they proved to be very popular with the Tarlants' clientele, so that over time, more and more production has been bottled without *dosage*. Benoit Tarlant's first vintage here at the family estate was 1999 and he is now widely recognized amongst his colleagues as one of the top young *vignerons* in Champagne. While I am not sure that the estate would be classified as organic in terms of viticulture, they are certainly working on biodiversity in their vineyards, growing cover crops and using *lutte raisonnée* farming methods in their parcels.

Benoit Tarlant ferments his *vins clairs* in a combination of stainless steel tanks and Burgundy casks, with many of these barrels now more than thirty years of age, as the practice of barrel-fermenting was started here by his father, Jean-Mary back in the late 1970s. Benoit observed that, "as we do not want our *vins clairs* to go through malolactic fermentation, we buy the barrels new- so that there is no residual malolactic bacteria in the wood from previous wines-

but we do not want to impart any oak flavors or aromatics to the wines, so we season them for several years before we will use the wines from new casks in our blends.” Benoit’s father and grandfather (Monsieur Georges Tarlant is now over one hundred years of age, but still in good health and always happy to hang around the winery at harvest time and see the new vintage’s grapes coming in from the vineyards) first began to experiment with fermenting different parcels on their own back thirty years ago or more, and Benoit Tarlant has sought to expand this over time to raise more *lieux à dits* on their own in the cellars since his arrival in 1999. With an expanded roster of smaller lots to isolate on their own in the Tarlant cellars, the small Burgundy barrels are the preferred units for fermentation and aging, as these give Benoit more flexibility when it comes time to make some final blends, and he has also expanded the roster of single vineyard bottlings offered by the *maison* since 1999. As he recounts, “I will blind taste the *vins clairs* many, many times over the course of the winter and spring following the harvest, prior to deciding which parcels might be bottled on their own as a single vineyard bottling.” In the next few years, everything will be barrel fermented here, so that all the various *lieux à dits* can be raised on their own, but Benoit does not want to add too many new barrels at one time, as they all have to be seasoned prior to going into the rotation, as the goal is the use the casks for their flexibility in fermenting and raising smaller lots of individual wines, rather than imparting and oaky character to the Tarlant lineup.

As the wines here are non-malo wines and most often, also *non-dosé*, the Tarlant family has developed a tradition of aging the wines for a long time *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, to soften up the structural edges a bit and to allow the wines to really develop depth and complexity. For example, their basic non-vintage Brut Nature bottling, called “Zero” is aged fully six years on the lees prior to disgorgement, and for their single vineyard bottlings, the aging can be even longer. The house is very discreet with its use of *dosage* for the wines that they bottle as Brut, as no wines here are given more than six grams per liter, even if they are designated as Brut on the label, which in effect makes everything produced here an Extra Brut or Brut Nature bottling. For the reserve wines that the family utilizes for their various bottlings, these are aged in old casks, rather than tanks. Since Benoit’s arrival in 1999, he has added four *cuvées de terroir* to build upon the work of his father and grandfather: an old vine bottling of pinot meunier called La Vigne d’Or, and old vine pinot noir *cuvée* called “La Vigne Royale”, a special chardonnay bottling from ungrafted rootstocks in a sandy parcel called “La Vigne d’Antan” and “BAM!” which is made from the ancient varieties that have nearly disappeared in Champagne, Pinot Blanc, Arbanne and Petit Meslier. They are only produced in exceptional years, with some iterations produced from a single vintage and some being a blend of a few. The top of the line *cuvée* at Champagne Tarlant is the old vine *Cuvée Louis*, named for Benoit’s great, great grandfather, which was first created by his father Jean-Mary in the 1982 vintage. This is a first class estate where each and every wine is loaded with personality and breed, and though I did not taste it on my visit here in April, I love the non-vintage Brut bottling produced here and which I reported on back in February.

Champagne Tarlant “Zero” Brut Nature NV (Disgorged September 2014)

The non-vintage Brut Nature bottling of “Zero” from the Tarlant family is comprised of a blend of one third each of pinot noir, chardonnay and pinot meunier, with stainless steel tanks used for the fermentation still of this *cuvée*. The current release is base year 2007, with reserve wines included from 2006 and 2005. The bouquet is lovely and shows fine secondary elements

of complexity from its six years on the lees, as it wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, complex soil tones, a bit of *crème patissière*, a bit of hazelnut, warm bread and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, refined *mousse* and a very long, zesty and complex finish. High class Brut Nature. 2015-2030. **90+.**

Champagne Tarlant “Rosé Zero” Brut Nature NV (Disgorged September 2014)

The current release of the Tarlant family’s “Rosé Zero” non-vintage Brut Nature hails from the 2008 vintage, with reserve wines included from 2007. It is made up of a blend of eighty-five percent chardonnay and fifteen percent pinot noir still wine to give it this lovely salmon color. The *vins clairs* for this bottling are aged in a combination of stainless steel and casks. The bouquet is excellent, offering up scents of tangerine, white cherries, chalky minerality, rye bread, orange peel and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and well-balanced, with a fine core, lovely *mousse* and a long, complex and zesty finish. This too is high class non-vintage bubbly. 2015-2030+. **90+.**

2003 “La Matinale” Brut Nature Millésime- Champagne Tarlant (Disgorged June 2014)

The 2003 La Matinale is a special cuvée that was produced for the first time in the torrid summer of 2003, when Monsieur Tarlant harvested in August. All the grapes for this bottling were picked in the morning (between 6 and 11 AM) to preserve freshness, with the wine comprised of a blend of forty-five percent pinot noir, twenty-seven percent pinot meunier and twenty-eight percent chardonnay. All of the *vins clairs* were barrel fermented and none underwent malo. The wine is really very lovely, as it offers up a rich nose of apple, peach, fresh almond, *pain grillé*, lovely minerality and musky floral tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with zesty acids, fine, pinpoint bubbles and lovely cut and grip on the focused and classy finish. Fine juice and one of the freshest 2003s I have tasted. 2015-2030. **92.**

Champagne Tarlant “BAM!” Brut Nature NV (Disgorged February 2014)

The “BAM!” cuvée is named from an acronym of its *cépages*, as it is made from a blend of sixty-four percent Petit Meslier and equal parts of Pinot Blanc and Arbanne. The current release is half 2008 base year and half 2007. Like the above wine, the non-malo *vins clairs* were barrel-fermented, but here, the wines spent eight months aging in cask after fermentation, prior to bottling and spent just short of five years on its fine lees. The bouquet is pure and utterly exotic, as it jumps from the glass in a superb blend of peach, lemon, zest, loads of musky floral tones, chalky minerality, a hint of butter and a nice topnote of brioche. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with fine *mousse*, racy acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long, vibrant finish. This is really lovely juice and I would be inclined to give it a year more in the cellar to really let it blossom in all of its exotica. 2016-2030+. **92+.**

Champagne Tarlant “La Vigne d’Or” Brut Nature NV (Disgorged March 2015)

La Vigne d’Or is a special old vine cuvée made from pinot meunier vines planted in 1947 in the *lieu à dit* of Pierre de Bellevue in the village of Oeuilly. This is a vintage bottling, thought it does not appear on the label and Benoit Tarlant has produced this in only four vintages since his arrival at the estate: 1999, 2002, 2003 and 2004. The 2004 iteration offer sup a superb and utterly classic meunier bouquet of fresh-baked bread, gentle nutty tones, apple, orange zest, chalky soil tones, a touch of *patissière* and a potpourri of gentle floral nuances. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and refined, with excellent mid-palate depth, zesty acids, frothy *mousse* and exquisite balance on the very long, complex finish. Just a superb bottle, with the wine’s

more than ten years on the fine lees allowing the structure to beautifully integrate into the body of the wine. 2015-2030+. **92+**.

Champagne Tarlant “La Vigne Royale” Brut Nature NV (Disgorged June 2014)

The La Vigne Royale bottling is one hundred percent pinot noir produced from thirty year-old vines planted in the steepest vineyard in the neighboring village of Celles-lès-Condé. As Benoit explains, “the vineyard here is so steep that after phylloxera, it was abandoned, rather than replanted, and vines were not reintroduced here until the late 1960s.” The current release is base year 2003 and was disgorged after ten years *sur latte*. The wine is truly stunning, soaring from the glass in a blaze of peach, warm bread, *patissière*, a stunningly complex base of chalky minerality, a touch of dried flowers and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite powerful in style, with a rock solid core, snappy acids, refined *mousse* and huge backend mineral drive on the perfectly balanced and stunning finish. This is a great bottle of bubbly. 2015-2035+. **94**.



Benoit Tarlant in the family domaine's fine and spacious tasting room in Oeuilly.

Champagne Tarlant “La Vignes d’Antan” Brut Nature NV(Disgorged May 2014)

The La Vigne d’Antan bottling is one hundred percent chardonnay produced from old vines planted on their indigenous French rootstocks in the sandy soils of this particular parcel in Oeuilly. The wine is base year 2002 and absolutely superb, as it offers up a deep and vibrant nose of apple, pear, a touch of butter, plenty of smokiness, a lovely base of soil, incipient notes of *crème patissière* and a floral topnote redolent of lilacs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex, and like so many top 2002s, still quite youthfully structured. It has a great core,

elegant *mousse* and a very long, intense and primary finish. This will be a great bottle, but I would not touch it for another three or four years minimum, so that it can more fully blossom from behind the vintage's superb structural elements. 2019-2035+. **93+**.

Champagne Tarlant “Cuvée Louis” Brut Nature NV (Disgorged March of 2015)

The Cuvée Louis bottling is the top of the line from the Tarlant family, with its first vintage having been the 1982. Today, it is not a vintage-dated bottling, but rather one that is based on eighty-five percent of a base year and fifteen percent a blend of reserve wines from the three previous vintages. In this case, the wine is base year 1999, so that the reserve part of the blend hails from 1998, 1997 and 1996. The wine is a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir, planted in the *lieu à dit* of “Les Crayons” in Oeuilly back in 1946. The wine was barrel-fermented in four year-old casks and aged until May of 2000 in barrel prior to blending and bottling. This is a stunning wine, offering up a superb bouquet of pear, white peach, fresh-baked bread, a stunning soil signature, pastry tones, gentle smokiness, an exotic touch of saffron and a bit of butteriness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very complex, with lovely secondary layers already emerging, a fine core, elegant *mousse* and excellent mineral drive on the very long, beautifully balanced and classy finish. Great juice. 2015-2040. **94+**.

Vazart-Coquart et Fils (Chouilly)

This was my first visit to Jean-Pierre Vazart's lovely domaine in the heart of Chouilly. The Vazart family farms eleven hectares of vineyards, all of which are in Chouilly, and much to my surprise, in this bastion of the Côte des Blancs, forty *ares* are planted to pinot noir. The domaine's vineyards were certified by the HVE (*Haute Valeur Environnementale*) three years ago, which is a relatively new French governmental organization which gives biodiversity accreditation to *vignerons* and farmers who pass their grading system, and which has to be reaffirmed every three years. In fact, Monsieur Vazart was in the process of studying up in anticipation of his visit from the officials at HVE the following Monday after my Saturday morning appointment. I have often written about how much I liked the style of the Vazart-Coquart wines, which I have always felt were loaded with personality, if a touch youthfully zesty in their early years on the market, but structured to really age well. One of my goals on this trip was to visit the domaine, taste a few older examples and try to confirm this gut impression, and this was certainly accomplished on my Saturday morning visit, as the wines gained lovely refinement to go along with all their youthful complexity with bottle age. However, even if the wines had not shown as beautifully as they did, I would have become a lifelong fan of the estate for a bit of history that Jean-Pierre shared with me during our conversation, as it turns out that his father, Jacques Vazart, was the man that managed to stop the reckless dumping of Paris' garbage on the vineyards of Champagne as compost, back in the second half of the 1980s, when he was a member of the CIVC. The tale Jean-Pierre Vazart related is worth retelling, as today, it just seems inconceivable that the garbage from such a huge city would be added to vineyard land, but this is indeed what happened for forty years.

After World War II, when *vignerons* in Champagne were suffering as much as everyone else in France, and trying to repair the damage to their vineyard lands that war had passed over, everyone was extremely short for money and the offer of using Paris' garbage for fertilizing compost in the vineyards seemed like a win-win solution. Of course, at that time, almost all of Paris' garbage would have been organic material, as plastic was unheard of for food packaging

and glass was in such short supply after the war that bottles were reused again and again and again. With the garbage organic in nature, it was really a good way to fertilize the vineyards for impoverished farmers in Champagne, and this practice just continued on out of habit for years and years and years. However, as the world moved out from the tragedy of the Second World War and entered the modern age, the nature of Paris garbage began to change profoundly, as was the case in all of the western world's biggest cities. Soon, plastic, glass and other undesirable components began to outweigh the organic material, but the tradition of continuing to dump this stuff on the vineyards in Champagne persisted. Monsieur Vazart started to question this practice within the CIVC and was told "that we have always done so" without anyone really thinking about the consequences, and there was absolutely no interest within the CIVC to arrest this, though it had long ceased to be beneficial for the vineyards. Finally, after a couple of years of getting nowhere with the CIVC (*quelle surprise*), Monsieur Vazart took a kilogram of the "compost" when it was delivered and sorted out all of the undesirable elements in it and put them all in separate bags. He brought these into the next CIVC executive committee meeting and dumped them one by one on the table, to the outrage of his fellow committee members, saying "see, this is the crap that we are continuing to dump on our vineyards year after year!" The practice was stopped the very next year. Bravo.

Vazart-Coquart, even without its historical footnote, is really making superb wines these days, and it may well be with the HVE certification and more bio-diverse farming, the quality of the fruit is moving up here and the wines will continue to get even better with each passing year. We did not discuss organic farming methods during our conversation, but if Jean-Pierre is not farming organically yet, he seems poised to do so and I hope he will take the plunge (if he has not already), as his wines will only get better. Given how important his father was in stopping the abuse of the vineyards in the 1980s by adding Paris' garbage, it would seem only fitting for Jean-Pierre to take a central role in the next step in vineyard health in Champagne. But, as I said, we did not discuss this facet of his viticultural practices and perhaps he is already farming organically. In the cellars, Jean-Pierre ferments all of his *vins clairs* in stainless steel tanks and all of the wines go through full malolactic fermentation. Jean-Pierre Vazart took over for his father as the head of the family estate in 1996 when Jacques Vazart retired, but before Monsieur Vazart senior had retired, he had made a significant change in the cellars with how their vintage bottlings were aged on the lees, as he started aging all of those bottlings under cork, rather than crown cap with the 1993 vintage. He had been experimenting with this technique since 1983 and was very happy with how the wines aged under cork, which he found superior to under crown cap. Ironically, when his 1993 was released a few years after he retired, the estate's clientele vastly preferred previous vintages aged under crown cap! Therefore, to keep clients happy, Jean-Pierre Vazart, who had succeeded to the head of the domaine in 1996, decided to switch back to aging the vintage-dated wines under crown cap and return the wines to the same style prior to the switch to cork-aging on the lees. However, the experiment's fine results and they were not lost on Jean-Pierre.

A few years on, when the estate was invited to enter the *Club Trésor* or Special Club, Jean-Pierre thought it might be a good idea to revisit aging *sur lies* under cork, rather than crown cap, and since then, the domaine's Special Club bottlings are all aged under cork. In fact, according to Monsieur Vazart, the sole difference between their standard vintage-dated bottling, called "Grand Bouquet" and their Special Club bottling is that the former is still aged under

crown cap, but the latter is now aged under cork, and year in and year out, the Special Club bottling is a bit superior. I know “the customer is always right”, but if I were Monsieur Vazart, I might be inclined to switch everything back over to aging under cork for the vintage-dated wines and see if a new generation of clients would mind! All of the Special Club bottlings are also disgorged by hand here, with the wines generally spending six to seven years on their fine lees. Monsieur Vazart is also starting to lower his *dosage* for his wines a bit in recent years, so that Brut bottlings that might have been routinely finished off a few years ago at eight or nine grams are now seeing a *dosage* of six grams per liter or a bit less. Additionally, when we finished tasting our range of vintage wines that Monsieur Vazart had prepared for my visit, we tasted the first Brut Zero ever produced at the estate, which hails from the base year of 2007 and was aged fully seven years on its fine lees. Additionally, we also tasted an experiment that Jean-Pierre had done with the non-vintage Brut from the 2004 base year, where he had aged one bottle under natural cork and another under Diam (or Mestek, as it was called at the time), with interesting results. Good things are indeed happening at Vazart-Coquart et Fils these days.



Jean-Pierre Vazart in his tasting room at the domaine in Chouilly.

Vazart-Coquart et Fils Blanc de Blancs Brut Zero NV (Disgorged March 2015)

This is the first iteration of Brut Zero that Jean-Pierre Vazart has fashioned. It is from the base year of 2007 and spent fully seven years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and preparation for release. With its additional time on the fine lees, it has really developed a

beautiful sense of balance, as it wafts from the glass in a complex nose of pear, apple, a touch of nutskin, salty minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with absolutely no sharp edges, bright acids, elegant *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the focused and classy finish. A lovely example of *non-dosé* Blanc de Blancs. 2015-2025. **92.**

2008 Vazart-Coquart et Fils “Grand Bouquet” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime

The 2008 Grand Bouquet from Vazart-Coquart et Fils is an excellent young wine, but even after spending nearly six years on its fine lees, it could still use a bit more bottle age. The wine was disgorged in October of 2014 and offers up a complex and expressive bouquet of pear, delicious apple, incipient *crème patissière*, chalky minerality, smoke, brioche and just a hint of fresh nutmeg in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, brisk acids and lovely backend minerality on the long and snappy finish. Give this lovely bottle at least another two or three years in the cellar to fully blossom. 2018-2035. **92+.**

2008 Vazart-Coquart et Fils “Special Club” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime

The 2008 Special Club from Jean-Pierre Vazart is another lovely wine in the making, with a bit “rounder” and deeper fruit elements showing on the nose from its *elevage* under cork. The bouquet is first class, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, apple, brioche, lovely chalkiness, a touch of pastry cream and fine topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and more elegant structurally than the 2008 Grand Bouquet, with a fine core, excellent cut and grip, more elegant *mousse* as well (in comparison to the above) and a long, nascently complex and very classy finish. Given that this is exactly the same wine as the above, other than its different six-plus years of *elevage* under cork, it is pretty hard not to lobby to changing all the vintage-dated bottlings over to this technique. Both examples are first rate, but this one is just a bit better and certainly more refined on both the nose and palate from its natural cork aging. 2017-2035+. **93+.**

2007 Vazart-Coquart et Fils “Grand Bouquet” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime

I last tasted the 2007 Grand Bouquet a year or two ago and the wine is blossoming very nicely, showing some fine secondary layers of complexity now on both the nose and palate. This was disgorged back in late 2013 and finished with a bit higher *dosage* than the 2008, at 8.5 grams per liter. The wine is lovely on the nose, offering up scents of apple, pear, a nice touch of almond, brioche, plenty of smokiness and a gentle bass note of *crème patissière*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and wide open now on the attack, with a very good core, elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the complex finish. The 2007 Grand Bouquet is aging very gracefully and is now starting to drink with generosity and style. 2015-2025+. **92.**

2007 Vazart-Coquart et Fils “Special Club” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime

The 2007 Special Club bottling from Vazart-Coquart is really outstanding, with superb depth and complexity evident on both the nose and palate, harnessed to a fine chassis of acidity and minerality that gives the wine great vibrancy and bounce on the backend. The superb bouquet delivers a complex mélange of delicious apple, pear, almond-infused *crème patissière*, chalky soil tones and a gentle topnote of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a creamy core of fruit, superb soil signature, lovely *mousse* and a long, zesty and superbly focused finish. Great juice. 2015-2030. **94.**

2006 Vazart-Coquart et Fils “Special Club” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime

The 2006 Special Club received just a touch lower *dosage* than the 2007 (perhaps reflecting the two vintages’ different acid structures?), as it was finished with six grams per liter.

This is a very good wine, but today, it is a bit more angular on the palate than either the 2007 or 2008 versions. The wine delivers a maturing aromatic constellation of smoke, tangerine, apple, chalky, stony soil tones and wheat toast. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just slightly four-square, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and good, solid length and grip on the finish, but not quite the length of the two succeeding vintages of Special Club here. This is a good wine, but it has been eclipsed in this range. 2015-2020+. **89.**

1996 Vazart-Coquart et Fils “Special Club” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime

This was served at the Special Club tasting in Reims, rather than at the domaine in Chouilly. The 1996 Special Club bottling is now fully mature and drinking very well indeed, with a fine layer of tertiary, nutty complexity now defining its aromatic constellation of baked apples and pears, walnuts, warm bread, limestone soil tones and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with fairly delicate *mousse* (though this bottle had been used for probably twenty samples by the time I tasted it, so perhaps the *mousse* had faded a bit with the constant pouring?), sound acids and a long, wide open and fully mature finish. Good juice. 2015-2020+. **91.**

Vazart-Coquart et Fils Blanc de Blancs Brut NV- (Base year 2004- Natural Cork)

The non-vintage bottling of Blanc de Blancs from the 2004 base year is aging very nicely, and once opened, showed a bit of nutty, older wine development. However, with some oxygen, much of this old wine character disappeared and the wine showed great vigor on both the nose and palate and was clearly the superior of these two wines. The wine offers up a lovely, mature nose of baked apples, nutskin, brioche, chalky soil tones, almond pastry cream and a nice touch of acacia blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and nicely refined, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This has evolved splendidly and is at its apogee today. 2015-2020+. **92.**

Vazart-Coquart et Fils Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Base year 2004- Mestek or Diam)

The same bottle of 2004 Base Year non-vintage Blanc de Blancs, aged under the Mestek agglomerated cork (also called Diam) has really not evolved under its closure, as it remains fresh and youthful, but does not show anywhere near as much complexity or evolutionary nuance as the above wine. The clean and correct nose offers up scents of apple, pear, smoky tones, chalk and *crème patissière*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and much like it must have been when it was first released, with crisp acids, frothy *mousse* and good length and grip on the youthful finish. While it is admirable that this wine has retained such freshness and vigor eight years out from release, it is really a stillborn wine and has not developed any secondary layers of complexity. 2015-2030. **88.**

Demièrre-Ansiot (Oger)

This was my first visit with Nicolas Demièrre at his small family domaine in Oger. I have liked his wines very well over the years and was delighted to have a chance to visit with him on a sunny and blustery Saturday morning in April. Monsieur Demièrre is the fourth generation of his family to farm their three and a half hectares of vines, which are situated in Oger or in Mesnil-sur-Oger. The family still sells off about thirty percent of their production each year to the Grandes Marques, with the rest estate-bottled. The first year that the estate sold any wine off in bottle was 1981, as previously everything was sold in bulk, and the first vintage-dated bottling ever produced was from the 1983 vintage, which Nicolas Demièrre was kind enough to open during my visit. Demièrre-Ansiot has a good age of vines in the family parcels of chardonnay, with the average age of vines here more than forty years-old at the present time. Monsieur

Demi re practices *lutte raisonn e* viticulture, with grass grown between the rows. The *vins clairs* here are all fermented in stainless steel tanks, with the wines not undergoing malolactic fermentation. The fine non-vintage Blanc de Blancs bottling ages for three years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and release and the vintage-dated bottlings spending four to five years on their fine lees. Typically the estate has produced solely two bottlings- a Brut non-vintage Blanc de Blancs and a vintage-dated bottling, but Monsieur Demi re has now begun to experiment with a few wines finished off as Extra Brut and we had the chance to sample a few of these during my visit. Of the following notes, the first two wines were tasted in Beaune during my ten days there prior to visiting Champagne, and the remainder of the lineup was sampled during our Saturday morning tasting at the domaine in mid-April.



Nicolas Demi re in the courtyard of the small family domaine in Oger.

Demi re-Ansiot Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Oger)

The new release of the consistently excellent non-vintage Blanc de Blancs bottling from Demi re-Ansiot was disgorged in December of 2014 and is base year 2011, with a finishing *dosage* of six grams per liter. The thirty percent reserve wines used here hail from 2010 and 2008. The youthful bouquet wafts from the glass in a classic blend of pear, apple, a touch of fresh almond, incipient notes of *cr me patiss re*, chalky minerality, brioche and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still youthfully snappy, with a lovely core, excellent *mousse*, crisp acids and a long, pure and beautifully balanced finish. This

is certainly approachable today, but I will keep my bottles tucked away for a couple of years to allow this wine to come forward a bit from behind its fine structure. 2015-2033+. **90+**.

2010 Demièvre-Ansiot Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime Grand Cru (Oger)

The 2010 Demièvre-Ansiot Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime spent nearly four years on its fine lees prior to being disgorged October 2014. The wine has been finished off quite dry, despite its Brut classification, with only four grams per liter of *dosage*. The wine offers up a lovely nose of delicious apple, pear, brioche, a nice base of chalky soil tones, a touch of citrus zest and *crème patissière*. On the palate the wine is young, but deep, beautifully balanced and offers outstanding promise, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, piercing young acids and outstanding length and grip on the focused and youthfully structured finish. This is still very early days for this excellent wine, but tuck it away in the cellar for another four or five years and this will be stunning. 2019-2040. **92+**.

2010 Demièvre-Ansiot Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime Grand Cru (Oger)

I liked the Brut rendition of this wine a bit better than the Extra Brut iteration, as the judicious *dosage* of the Brut bottling (four grams per liter) seemed to nicely buffer the structural elements here out of the blocks and give the wine a bit more mid-palate amplitude. However, the 2010 Extra Brut bottling certainly shares the same lovely fruit tones as the above, wafting from the glass in a blend of par, gold delicious apple, pastry cream, chalky soil tones and a lovely topnote of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and well-balanced, with a good core and a long, complex and snappy finish. This is a very pretty wine, but oddly, it seems a bit more forward in style than the 2010 Brut Millesime at this point in its evolution! 2017-2025+. **90+**.

2008 Demièvre-Ansiot Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime Grand Cru (Oger)

The 2008 Extra Brut Millésime is really a lovely bottle, which was disgorged from the family stocks in the cellar on the morning before my visit (as was also the case with the 2006 version). The wine offer sup a lovely and quite classic bouquet of pear, delicious apple, *crème patissière*, chalky minerality, lemon peel and a floral topnote redolent of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the core, with snappy acids, lovely focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and lovely balance on the long and youthful finish. This needs a few years to blossom, but I really like its balance and it will be very harmonious once it has come into its own. 2018-2030. **92**.

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

The 2006 Extra Brut Millésime was never made commercially available, as this was one of the first experimental bottlings done with this low *dosage* level. The wine is still quite tensile on the palate, as the structure is not quite as neatly buffered as in the 2008 version, but the aromatic and flavor complexity here are quite good. The nose offers up a lovely blend of pear, apple, plenty of smokiness, chalky soil tones, bread dough and lemon zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and snappy, with a good core, fine focus and cut, frothy *mousse* and very good length and grip on the low fat and slightly severe finish. It is quite clear from tasting the 2010 and 2008 versions that Monsieur Demièvre is really starting to get a better feel for this wine as an Extra Brut bottling, but the 2006 is a tad sharp still and is a good wine, but not quite at the same level as the Brut bottling from this vintage. 2015-2025+. **90**.

1983 Demièvre-Ansiot Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime Grand Cru (Oger)

The 1983 Demièvre-Ansiot Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime is the first vintage-dated bottling produced by the family and it was extremely generous of Monsieur Demièvre to open this bottle for us to taste. The wine is now fully mature, but drinking nicely still, as it offers up a

tertiary bouquet of baked apples, hazelnuts, *pain grillé*, a lovely base of soil tones, a dollop of smokiness and a bit of walnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and *à point*, with still a solid core, lovely focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, suave and fully mature finish. A lovely drink that still has quite some life in it, but is now at its zenith. 2015-2025. 91.

Paul Clouët (Bouzy) and Champagne Bonnaire (Cramant)

I was unaware that the same family owned these two small houses, as I had only previously tasted the wines from Paul Clouët. But, in fact, the house of Bonnaire is the larger of the two producers, as the Bonnaire vineyards amount to twenty-two hectares (twelve of which are located in their home village of Cramant), while the Paul Clouët vineyards are only five hectares, of which four and a half are situated in Bouzy. The Bonnaire family owns both estates these days, as Champagne Paul Clouët arrived via the long and important historical avenue of marriage, as Marie-Thérèse Clouët married Jean-Louis Bonnaire several years ago and united the two houses under one roof, though each maintains a separate *maison* and cellars. Today, the sister properties are run by their children, the Bonnaire brothers, Jean-Etienne and Jean-Emmanuel, with whom I had the pleasure to visit with at the Champagne Bonnaire property in Cramant. I had previously only tasted the Paul Clouët wines here in New York, but the Bonnaire wines were completely new to me during this visit and I found that there were some real gems here amongst their lineup and I was delighted to have had the opportunity to be introduced to their wines. The Paul Clouët wines have always been very consistent, solid examples of Champagne, which perhaps do not quite scale the heights of the very finest small producers in the region today, but are always priced very fairly and offer up very good price-quality rapport across the board. The same thing can be said for the Bonnaire bottlings. The winemaking philosophy at both domaines is the same, with the vast, vast majority of *vins clairs* fermented in stainless steel tanks and undergoing full malolactic fermentation. There are a few notable experiments here with barrel-fermenting the *vins clairs* for certain bottlings, and indeed, one of the most exciting wines in the Bonnaire lineup is a result of this exception to the rule of fermenting and raising the wines in stainless steel. Interestingly, the Bonnaire wines are very popular in France (with one notable exception, as one cuvée here has not struck a chord with their clientele), whereas the Paul Clouët wines are their stronger export label. Jean-Etienne and Jean-Emmanuel Bonnaire are really doing some good work at both houses and they seem poised, based on some of the relatively new cuvées that they have created in the last decade, to take both labels up another level in the very near future. As we did not discuss viticulture in any detail during my visit, I would guess that the Bonnaire brothers are not (yet?) practicing organic farming and this may be the next step in their evolution to move up the quality hierarchy of top small growers in the region.

The Wines of Champagne Bonnaire (Cramant)

Champagne Bonnaire “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Disgorged October 2014)

The Bonnaire Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs is comprised entirely from fruit picked from their older vines in their vineyards in the village of Cramant, with the average age of the vines for this selection between thirty and thirty-five years of age. The wine is aged three years *sur latte* and this bottling is from the base year of 2011, with fifteen percent of the blend reserve wines. It was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter, which is nicely balanced by its acidity and does not come off sweet in the least. The bouquet is quite lovely and classic, wafting

from the glass in a mix of apple, pear, chalky minerality, a touch of pastry cream and a lovely topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and vivacious, with a good core, slightly coarse bubbles, but good cut and grip on the vibrant finish. This is not the most refined of Blanc de Blancs bottlings, but it has depth and dimension and the only factor that keeps its score down a bit is the size and texture of the bubbles. That said, it is very well-priced and I would have no difficulties drinking this wine again. 2015-2025. **89.**

Champagne Bonnaire “Ver Sacrum” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Disgorged October 2014)

The Ver Sacrum bottling of non-vintage Blanc de Blancs from the Bonnaire brothers is aged *sur latte* under cork, rather than crown cap, for a period of more than six years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. I did not take down the date of disgorgement for this bottle, but it is from the base year of 2006 and is comprised of sixty percent fruit from Cramant and forty percent from the premier cru village of Bergères-les-Vertus. The wine offers up an excellent bouquet of delicious apples, orange zest, *crème patissière*, white soil tones, brioche and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, vibrant and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, elegant *mousse*, fine focus and very fine length and grip on the lively and complex backend. This is really a lovely bottle at its prime, but with years and years of life ahead of it as well. 2015-2025+. **91+.**

Champagne Bonnaire “Variance” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV

As well as I liked the Ver Sacrum bottling at Champagne Bonnaire, the wine that really stole the show for me amongst their cuvées is their Variance, which is made entirely from barrel-fermented *vins clairs* from their top vineyards in Cramant. Ironically, this is the one wine that their French clients really do not care for and they have had difficulties selling this wine ever since they first released it, though I was absolutely blown away by its quality and find this the crown jewel in the Bonnaire lineup! The Bonnaire brothers first fabricated this wine in the 1995 vintage, and the wine spends a minimum of five full years aging on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The finishing *dosage* is six grams per liter. The bottling that we tasted first was from the base year of 2005 and is absolutely stellar, soaring from the glass in a complex and very classy constellation of apple, fresh almond, warm bread, a touch of spice tones and a superb signature of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, refined and rock solid at the core, with excellent *mousse*, lovely focus and balance and a very, very long, zesty and perfectly poised finish. This is high class juice and a sleeping giant in the world of grower bubbly! 2015-2030+. **93.**

2008 Champagne Bonnaire “Variance Noire” Brut Millésime

Variance Noire was an experiment that the Bonnaire family made for their own amusement and was never commercially released, but was simply for the family cellar. It is a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir from grand cru vineyards, with the *vins clairs* also barrel-fermented like the Bonnaire bottling of Variance Blanc de Blancs. This is a very pretty wine that is drinking beautifully today, as it offers up a fine nose of apple, pear, smoky overtones, a lovely base of soil, fresh-baked bread and lovely nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and showing lovely secondary elements, with a good core, pinpoint bubbles and nice length and grip on the wide open and fully mature finish. My only reservation with this wine is that it is a bit evolved for its relative age, but it is very tasty and will provide some fine drinking over the next decade, and will be well worth asking the Bonnaire brothers “how it is showing” if one is visiting the winery in Cramant any time in the near future! 2015-2025. **91.**

2006 Champagne Bonnaire “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime

The Brut Millésime bottling from the Bonnaire brothers is comprised of fruit entirely from their top parcels in Cramant, with the wine aged under cork *sur latte* for a minimum of six years prior to disgorgement. The 2006 is a lovely wine, offering up a fresh and complex nose of pear, apple, complex chalky minerality, warm bread, fresh almond and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and wide open in personality, with a fine core, lovely *mousse* and very good focus and grip on the long and classy finish. Classic Blanc de Blancs that is now into its apogee of peak drinkability, the 2006 Bonnaire retains plenty of life ahead of it. 2015-2025+. **91.**

1995 Champagne Bonnaire “Variance” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV

The 1995 was the first vintage of Variance produced by the Bonnaire family and the wine is still drinking with great flair at age twenty. The bouquet is deep, mature and complex, as it delivers scents of walnuts, baked apples and pears, chalky soil tones, wheat toast and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, bright and *à point*, with a very good core, refined *mousse*, crisp acids and very good length and grip on the mature, but still quite vibrant finish. This wine still has several years of life in it, but it is at its apogee and will be best over the next several years. Given that the Bonnaire brothers have gotten even better using barrel-fermented *vins clairs* over recent times, the fine curve of aging of the first iteration of Variance augurs very well for the current release, which is a cut above this lovely wine in terms of quality and precision. 2015-2022+. **91.**

1991 Champagne Bonnaire “Collection” Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime

1991 is not a particularly strong vintage in Champagne and the Bonnaire vintage-dated bottling of Blanc de Blancs is starting to get just a touch long in the tooth at age twenty-six. The tertiary nose offers up scents of walnuts, baked apples and peaches, buttery biscuits, smoke and a bit of oxidation in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and fully mature, with frothy *mousse*, solid length and core, but a slightly creaking finish that indicates it is high time to drink (at least) this bottle up. Maybe there are better examples out there? 2015-2018. **86.**

1985 Champagne Bonnaire “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime

The 1985 Bonnaire Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime is quite tertiary now in personality, but continues to drink quite well and offers up lovely complexity on both the nose and palate. The fine bouquet is a blend of baked pears and apples, walnuts, a nice dollop of remaining chalkiness and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and starting to get quite delicate in terms of *mousse*, with a solid core, mature flavors, sound framing acids and sneaky length on the well-balanced finish. It is time to drink this wine up in regular-sized formats, as it is getting a tad fragile, but it is still quite tasty as it slowly starts to slide down the far side of its plateau. 2015-2020. **88.**

1985 Champagne Bonnaire “Special Club” Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime

The 1985 Bonnaire Special Club bottling is really drinking beautifully still and remains more vibrant than the “regular” 1985 Brut Millésime. The beautiful nose wafts from the glass in a complex and mature blend of apple, pear, brioche, walnuts, a touch of caraway seed, a fine base of soil and a gentle topnote of honeycomb. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and absolutely *à point*, with a lovely core, fine complexity, still very lovely *mousse* and a long, fresh and complex finish. This is a lovely bottle of fully mature Blanc de Blancs at its apogee of peak drinkability. 2015-2025+. **92.**

The Wines of Paul Clouët (Bouzy)

Paul Clouët “Brut Grand Cru” NV (Disgorged June 2013)

The current release of the Paul Clouët non-vintage “Brut Sélection” is from the base year of 2009 and comprised of a blend of eighty percent pinot noir from Bouzy and twenty percent chardonnay from Chouilly. The blend was finished with fifteen percent reserve wines and aged for thirty-six months on its fine lees prior to disgorgement, finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter and then spent another six months in the cellars prior to release. The wine is quite good on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up notes of apple, white peach, bread dough, fine minerality and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and crisp, with a good core, fine *mousse* and good, solid length and grip on the finish. This is quite consistent of the Paul Clouët house style, with the broad shoulders of Bouzy bubbly, fine depth and structure and plenty of personality for its price tag. 2015-2025+. **89.**



2007 Paul Clouët Brut Millésime

The 2007 Paul Clouët Brut Millésime is an outstanding young bottle of bubbly and one of the best recent vintages that I can recall tasting from the domaine. Its *cépages* is the same as the non-vintage Grand Cru Brut, with eighty percent of the blend Bouzy pinot noir and twenty percent Chouilly chardonnay. The wine undergoes full malo and then spends a minimum of six years on the fine lees prior to disgorgement, with the finishing *dosage* a tad lower than the non-vintage bottling at seven grams per liter. This is truly an excellent bottle in the making, wafting

from the glass in a classy blend of apple, white peach, lovely minerality, plenty of smokiness, orange peel and bread dough. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and promising, with a lovely core, elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and fine focus and grip on the primary and still quite snappy finish. This needs a few years to blossom from behind its excellent structure, but it will be terrific bottle once it fully opens up. 2018-2040. **92+**.

Paul Clouët “Cuvée Prestige” Brut NV

The Paul Clouët “Cuvée Prestige” is comprised of the favored house blend of eighty percent Bouzy pinot noir and twenty percent Chouilly chardonnay, with twenty percent of the blend made up of reserve wines and the cuvée spending fully seven years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. This particular iteration is from the base year of 2005, with the reserve wines from the 2004 vintage. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. I like this bottle very much, as it is done in the old, oxidative style that once defined the wines of houses such as Bollinger. The bouquet offers up a complex blend of baked apple and peach, what toast, a lovely base of soil, smoky overtones and a nice touch of walnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and well-balanced, with fine mid-palate depth, sound acids, fairly discreet *mousse* and a long, complex finish that closes with very good grip and plenty of mature flavors. Good juice for drinking over the next decade and really a wine for those of us who like to age our bubbly. 2015-2025. **91**.

1992 Paul Clouët “Cuvée Millésime” Brut

The 1992 Paul Clouët “Cuvée Millésime” is fully mature and drinking very well at the present time. The *cépages* here is the customary house mix of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay, with the wine having aged on the fine lees for six years prior to disgorgement. The wine is now fully mature and drinking beautifully, wafting from the glass in a complex mélange of apple, pear, fresh almonds, a lovely base of Bouzy soil tones, brioche, a touch of smokiness and a whisper of honeycomb in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and at its apogee, with elegant *mousse*, crisp framing acids and fine resolution and grip on the long finish. This still has plenty of life in it. 2015-2025. **91**.

Champagne Robert Barbichon et Fils (Gyé sur Seine)

Thomas Barbichon is an up and coming star in the Côte des Bars, and I was really, really impressed by the precision and complex minerality he routinely gets in his impeccably well-balanced wines. Just to remind readers, it is in the Côte des Bars that one finds the base of Kimmeridgian limestone that also defines the grand cru vineyards of Chablis and also forms the Monts Damnés in the village of Chavignol in Sancerre, so this is one of the finest sections of *terroir* one will find in all of Champagne. Thomas and his brother Maxime took over the family’s nine hectare estate from their father Robert in the early 2000s and the brothers have been farming their vineyards biodynamically since 2005. Monsieur Barbichon senior first began estate bottling wine in the early 1980s and Thomas and Maxime are now the second generation of the family to make wine from the domaine’s fine vineyards (though they are the fourth Barbichon generation to grow grapes from these parcels), with nearly the entirety of their production now devoted to the family’s own label. The house was first certified organic by Ecocert in 2010 and in 2012 they received the official certification for *biodynamique* farming, with the positive impact of this method of viticulture very much in evidence when one walks in their beautiful, rolling hillside vineyards. Thomas uses gravity for moving the wines in the cellar, rather than pumping, and has a lovely, old mechanical press that is making a comeback amongst many *vignerons* in Burgundy, who suspect that it may help to ward off unwanted, early oxidation

in their own wines. Out in the vineyards, pinot noir is the king of the Barbichon parcels, as fully seventy-seven percent of their vines are planted with this variety. The remainder of their production is made up of sixteen percent chardonnay (with a bit of pinot blanc blended in here) and seven percent pinot meunier, with the average age of vines in excess of thirty-five years. The wines tend to spend two years resting on their fine lees prior to disgorgement. Thomas Barbichon and his brother Maxime are not yet household names amongst Champagne lovers, but word is starting to get out about how fine their wines can be and this is going to be a very well-loved domaine in the near future, as the wines offer up great price-quality rapport!

Robert Barbichon et Fils Extra Brut NV (Gyé sur Seine) Disgorged April 2nd, 2015

The Barbichon non-vintage Extra Brut bottling is actually *non-dosé* and is comprised of one hundred percent chardonnay. The wine is from the base year of 2010 and had only been recently disgorged- less than three weeks prior to our visit- but was still showing very well. The bouquet is lovely, wafting from the glass in a blend of apple, lime, chalky minerality, citrus peel and a fine, smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully defined by its complex minerality, with a lovely core, elegant *mousse* and fine cut and grip on the long and beautifully focused finish. This is lovely juice. 2015-2025. **91+**.

Robert Barbichon et Fils Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Gyé sur Seine) Disgorged Dec. 2013

The current release of the Barbichon non-vintage Blanc de Blancs bottling is comprised of eighty-five percent chardonnay and fifteen percent pinot blanc and is from the base year of 2009. The wine was finished with a judicious *dosage* of six grams per liter and offers up a beautiful and very elegant bouquet of pear, tangerine, brioche, complex, limestone minerality and a lovely floral topnote redolent of lime blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and really chiseled, with a fine core, frothy *mousse* and superb mineral drive and grip on the very long and classy finish. This is high class Blanc de Blancs. 2015-2030. **92**.

Robert Barbichon et Fils “Réserve 4 Cépages” Brut Réserve NV (Gyé sur Seine) 8 gr./lt.

The Quatre Cépages bottling of non-vintage Brut from the Barbichon family is comprised of a blend of seventy percent pinot noir and ten percent each of chardonnay, pinot blanc and pinot meunier. This wine is ninety-five percent from the 2010 vintage and five percent from the preceding year, as Thomas Barbichon is just starting to have the possibility to build up a small cache of reserve wines to use down the road. The wine was disgorged in October of 2014 and I had the chance to taste it finished off with two different levels of *dosage*: eight grams per liter and five grams per liter. The eight grams version offers up a lovely, nicely reserved nose of green apple, lime, flinty minerality, a nice touch of smokiness and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite elegant in profile, with a fine core, refined *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the finish, but without quite the backend precision of the bottling with the lower *dosage*. This is very good and will no doubt be a crowd pleaser at this *dosage*, but I prefer the grip and mineral drive of the five grams per liter version. 2015-2030. **90+**.

Robert Barbichon et Fils “Réserve 4 Cépages” Brut Réserve NV (Gyé sur Seine) 5 grams/lt.

The Quatre Cépages bottling at five grams per liter is really a lovely wine, with the exact same nose (as it is exactly the same wine, other than level of *dosage*) as the above wine, but a racy and more precise palate impression. The bouquet is a blend of green apple, lime, flinty minerality, a nice touch of smokiness and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and quite precise, with excellent mid-palate depth, the same elegant

mousse, crisp acids and outstanding balance and grip on the very long and really well-balanced finish. This is a lovely level of *dosage* for this bottling! 2015-2030. **92**.

Robert Barbichon et Fils Blanc de Noirs Brut NV (Gyé sur Seine) Disgorged January 2015

Though the Blanc de Noirs from Thomas Barbichon is labeled as a Brut, the wine is actually *non-dosé* in its current release. This cuvée is comprised of one hundred percent pinot noir and hails from the base year of 2011. The bouquet is still very youthfully reserved, but shows lovely promise in its mélange of tart pear, lemon, complex minerality, plenty of smokiness and a touch of bread dough in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, frothy *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the pure and vibrant finish. This is fine juice in the making. 2015-2025+. **91+**.

Robert Barbichon et Fils Rosé de Saignée Brut NV (Gyé sur Seine)

The new release of the Rosé de Saignée bottling from the Barbichon family had also just been disgorged less than three weeks prior to our visit and was really not in the mood to be tasted. The color is a lovely cherry red and the nose shows notes of blood orange, cherries, pomegranate, minerals and a bit of warm bread. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and grumpy from its recent disgorgement, with fine *mousse*, but still agitated and I did not take a proper note on the wine as a result of catching it at an inopportune time. I am sure this will be lovely, but it would not be fair to try and estimate a score based on this particular showing.



Thomas Barbichon out in one of his meticulously-farmed and very healthy vineyards.

Aurélien Suenen (Cramant)

Aurélien Suenen is one of the up and coming stars in the world of grower Champagne, make no mistake about it. Monsieur Suenen gave up a promising career as a professional basketball player in France to return to the family domaine, after the premature passing away of his father a few years ago. In fact, he still looks as if he could start at point guard for the New York Knicks tomorrow, and when we asked, he did admit that he still practices nearly every day. But, his passion for basketball has been augmented by a very serious new task of fashioning stunning Champagne from his three hectares of vines in Cramant, Cuis, Oiry and Chouilly. He previously also farmed 1.7 hectares in the village of Montigny-sur-Vesle, which lies northwest of Reims near the village of Merfy (where his good friend, Alexandre Chartogne is based), but starting in 2014, he has given up most of those northern vines, as it was simply impractical to try and keep farming those parcels and spend enough time in in Côte des Blancs vineyards (as it is more than an hour drive each way to get from Cramant to Montigny with traffic, and there is always a bit of traffic between Épernay and Reims in my experience). Of those parcels in Montigny-sur-Vesle, he has only retained a small, twenty *ares* section of sixty-one year-old pinot meunier vines that are planted on *Franc de Pied* rootstocks in the sandy soils here, with the remainder of his vines in Montigny now being leased to other *vignerons*. He has begun farming his remaining three-plus hectares of vines in the Côte des Blancs organically, but as he commented, “I have no desire to put this on my labels, as I want to retain flexibility in the event of a crisis, but in general, I will always farm organically from this point forward.”

Aurélien Suenen was born in the 1985, the youngest of three children, and at age eighteen, he began to take more interest in the family domaine and worked part-time (when not on the basketball court) alongside of his father, Daniel Suenen, who in turn, had taken over the reins of the family estate when he was the age of twenty-five and had been instrumental in growing the sales in bottle of the domaine’s wines during his career. Sadly, his father was taken seriously ill in 2008 and Aurélien returned full-time to the family property in this vintage and assisted his ailing father in the vineyards and cellars. Daniel Suenen passed away in 2009 and Aurélien has been solely in charge of the estate since that time. I tasted his first wine a couple of years back, which was based on a blend of the 2009 and 2008 harvests and was dutifully impressed, and have been looking forward to meeting him since that time. Monsieur Suenen is absolutely passionate about quality, so that he has decided to sell off all of his wines from the difficult 2011 vintage in bulk, rather than commercialize them under his label. As he recounted, “if we had picked later in 2011, perhaps things would have gone differently, but the wines have simply not ended up good enough for me to sell under my name.” Aurélien recounts that “my father made very good wines in his days, but things have changed in Champagne and we have to do things a bit differently now,” so he has undertaken quite a few changes in both the vineyards and the cellars since taking over the direction of the family estate. Besides farming organically, since the 2012 vintage, yields have also been cut back by nearly half from what was typical in his father’s day, and Aurélien has an eye towards more and more single vineyard bottlings in the future. With this in mind, he has been adding small, older barrels and new *foudres* in the cellar in the last few years, so that he can vinify more of his parcels individually.

The Burgundy barrels he uses are six to eight years of age, as he does not want to mark the wines with the taste of the oak: “We need to remember that we are in Champagne- not Burgundy- and we do not want the wines to taste of the oak.” Previously, he had used primarily

enamel-lined tanks for the fermentations, but has moved on to using older casks and *foudres*, after a bit of experimentation with concrete eggs, which he was not overly happy with for the *vins clairs*, and over time, they are likely to be phased out. For the blended cuvées *chez* Suenen, fermentations were done in 2013 with a combination of fifty percent neutral cultured yeasts and fifty percent indigenous yeasts, with all the 2014s fermented using entirely indigenous yeasts, now that the populations have been built up in the cellars. Aurélien Suenen has already begun fashioning his single vineyard wines, starting in the 2013 vintage, but the results from this change will still have to age a while on their fine lees prior to being released into the market, as he expects to make available the first of these bottlings in 2017. All of the single parcel bottlings have been fermented solely with indigenous yeasts. Due to the size of his various parcels, he anticipates starting out by blending his production from his holdings in the villages of Cramant and Chouilly, and bottling the parcels in Cuis and Oiry on their own. In addition, he will have a small cuvée from his *Franc de Pied* old vine pinot meunier plot in Montigny. He is also very *laissez-faire* when it comes to malolactic fermentation for his *vins clairs*, with his approach to allow the wines to decide for themselves, with some going through malo and others not, depending upon the characteristics of each vintage. Again, this is very reminiscent of the philosophy of his good friend, Alexandre Chartogne. He ages his *vins clairs* for nine months in cask and *foudre* prior to the *assemblage*, but with absolutely no *battonage*, with the bottlings done in July following each harvest.

Monsieur Suenen is also working on using less sulfur to maintain the cleanliness of his casks and cellars, so that he can build up the indigenous yeast populations in his *cave*. With this in mind, he is using negative ion technologies to disinfect his used casks and *foudres* after the bottling in July, rather than cleaning them and then spraying SO₂ to keep them hygienic until the following harvest. All in all, Aurélien Suenen seems to be one of the most thoughtful young *vignerons* one will meet in Champagne these days and the superb quality of his wines is testimony to how precision in the vineyards and cellars and reflections about how to make the wines better each year can lead to truly stunning Champagne. As he notes, “the goal here eventually is to bottle everything as a single vineyard wine, from a single grape variety, so that we can really see the beauty of the underlying *terroir* in each wine.” Starting with his 2013s, he will be adding to the lineup his single vineyard bottlings of La Coclulette from the village of Oiry, La Montaigu from the warmest vineyard site in the village of Chouilly, Des Roberts from Cramant and his old vine, *Franc de Pied* bottling of pinot meunier from Montigny which will be called “La Grande Vigne.” In addition, there is the traditional non-vintage Brut Blanc de Blancs bottling from a blend of different vineyards (including some fruit from his single vineyards, as for example, some of the production from Les Roberts in Cramant was fermented in older Burgundy casks and some in *foudre*, with the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented in cask being reserved for the non-vintage blended wine and the *foudres* used exclusively for the single vineyard cuvée), as well as his blended Grand Cru bottling from additional parcels in Chouilly and Cramant and a top of the line cuvée called “MBDA” that is fifty percent pinot noir from Montigny and fifty percent chardonnay from his Côte des Blancs vineyards. Presumably, the “MBDA” will be phased out in the future, as he no longer farms his pinot noir vines in Montigny. All of the 2013s had been disgorged just the day before our visit, as they still have several years of aging *sur latte* to go, and consequently they had not yet seen any *dosage*. These are all very exciting wines and Aurélien Suenen is going to be a household name amongst Champagne lovers very, very soon.

Champagne Suenen “Cuvée Réserve” Brut NV (Disgorged March 2015)

The Cuvée Réserve bottling from Monsieur Suenen is made from the family vineyards in Montigny, so this wine from the base year of 2012 will be the last iteration of this bottling. Consequently, fully forty-five percent of the blend is comprised of reserve wines for this final release, as they would be of no use for future wines based on Côte des Blancs vineyard sources. The resulting wine is made up of a blend of forty-five percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier, with the final ten percent of the blend being chardonnay. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter and has turned out beautifully, with a bit extra complexity from the very high percentage of reserve wines in the blend. The bouquet is a fine and very elegant mix of white peach, lovely soil tones, *patissière*, a touch of smokiness and a potpourri of gentle meunier floral tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and refined, with a lovely core, frothy *mousse*, excellent balance and complexity and a long, bright and vibrant finish. Really lovely juice and a fine way to go out for this bottling! 2015-2025+. **91+**.

Champagne Suenen Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Disgorged March 2015)

The next release of the non-vintage Blanc de Blancs bottling from Aurélien Suenen is from the base year of 2012 (as the 2011 was skipped and sold off in bulk) and was finished off with a *dosage* of four grams per liter. The wine is lovely and very elegant in profile, offering up scents of apple, tart pear, chalky minerality, a hint of the brioche to come and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, complex and full-bodied, with lovely *mousse*, excellent focus and balance and a long, bright and refined finish. Fine juice in the making, but there may be a bit of a delay in this coming to market, as Monsieur Suenen is not going to rush it just because he decided to declassify the 2011 version. 2015-2030+. **92**.

Champagne Suenen “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Cramant-Chouilly Blend)

The Grand Cru blend from Aurélien Suenen will eventually be given a cuvée name, as it is forbidden to use the names of two grand crus on the label. 2013 will be the first vintage for this bottling, though it will not be labeled as a vintage-dated wine. This is still very young, but has enormous potential, as it wafts from the glass in a youthful and precise aromatic blend of pear, delicious apple, chalky minerality, smoke and a floral topnote redolent of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with bright acids, great length and grip, superb *mousse* and budding complexity on the impeccable finish. This will be a dynamite wine in a few years' time. 2020-2040+. **92-94**.

2012 Champagne Suenen “Les Roberts” Extra Brut Millésime (Cramant)

The 2012 Les Roberts is the first single vineyard bottling that will be produced from the estate. This wine had only been disgorged the day prior to our visit so that we could taste it, with the remainder of the bottles still having quite some time to remain on their fine lees. The *vins clairs* for the 2012 were raised in a fifty-fifty combination of *demi-muids* and concrete eggs, and this example had obviously not had any *dosage* yet. The wine is going to be excellent, as it offers up a fine bouquet of apple, pear, pastry cream, fresh almonds, and a stunning base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and very refined, with frothy *mousse*, outstanding focus and grip and a very long, very, very promising finish. Great juice in the making. 2020-2040+. **93-94**.

2013 Champagne Suenen “La Coclulette” Extra Brut Millésime (Oiry)

Aurélien Suenen's parcel of chardonnay vines in La Coclulette that are being used for the single vineyard bottling are fully ninety years of age. The *vins clairs* for this bottling in 2013 were raised in a combination of older six hundred liter casks and cement eggs and a total of eighteen hundred bottles will be produced in this inaugural vintage for this cuvée. The wine

jumps from the glass in a very stony and mineral-laced constellation of lemon, tart pear, gentle floral tones, almost a hint of mintiness and a lovely smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and beautifully light on its feet, with great intensity of flavor, pinpoint bubbles and a very long, very classy and zesty finish. This is going to be a terrific wine. 2021-2040+. **93-94.**



Aurélien Suenen out in his vines in the village of Cramant.

2013 Champagne Suenen “La Montaigu” Extra Brut Millésime (Chouilly)

The La Montaigu parcel is always the first that Monsieur Suenen harvests each year, as this is the warmest spot in Chouilly. The nose on the 2013 La Montaigu is more exotically fruity in tone than the La Cocluette, reflecting the riper fruit this *lieu à dit* produces, wafting from the glass in a superb blend of pear, fresh coconut, even a touch of banana, chalky minerality, spring flowers and perhaps just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and beautifully synthesizes chalky minerality and very pure fruit tones, with bright acids, refined *mousse* and great length and grip on the finish. This will be another stellar bottling in a few years’ time. 2021-2040+. **93-94+.**

2013 Champagne Suenen “Les Roberts” Extra Brut Millésime (Cramant)

The parcel of Les Roberts in Cramant has northeasterly exposition, so this is a decidedly cooler site than La Montaigu in Cramant, and the wine is more defined by its excellent minerality than the more gently exotic fruit tones of the above. The portion of the vineyard that is

earmarked for the single vineyard bottling is fermented in a two thousand liter *foudre* that Monsieur Suenen has just purchased from the fine Austrian *tonnelier* of Stockinger (whose large casks I see in many of the finest cellars in Germany), and the 2013 is the first vintage to pass through this large vat and consequently is showing just a whisper of oakiness as a result. The wine offers up a lovely nose of delicious apple, pear, vibrant minerality, spring flowers and just a touch of bread dough. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with great structure and cut, a rock solid core, elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This has great potential. 2020-2040+. **92-94+.**

2013 Champagne Suenen “La Grande Vigne” Pinot Meunier “Vieilles Vignes Extra Brut

The old vine, *Franç de Pied* bottling of meunier from Montigny is going to be a brilliant and supremely elegant wine in the fullness of time. The ethereal bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of white peach, apple, discreet smokiness, a gorgeous base of soil tones, brioche and lovely, floral elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and brilliantly complex and vibrant, with fine mid-palate depth, crisp acids, laser-like focus, elegant *mousse* and a very, very long, utterly seamless finish. A great, great and very elegant wine in the making. 2019-2040+. **93-95.**

Champagne Suenen “MBDA” Extra Brut NV

The MBDA bottling is comprised of a blend of fifty percent pinot noir from Montigny and fifty percent chardonnay from the three grand cru villages of Cramant, Oiry and Chouilly. The wine takes its name from the initials of surnames of the four generations of the Suenen family who have headed this estate in its history. The current release is base year 2010, with a bit of 2009 reserve wines blended in. The brilliant bouquet soars from the glass in a youthful mélange of apple, pear, brioche, a complex base of chalky soil tones, smoke and a touch of vanilla bean in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and utterly suave on the attack, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles, bright acids and superb grip on the long and nascently complex finish. This wine is still quite youthful, but it will be stellar once it has had a chance to blossom a bit with bottle age. 2018-2035+. **94.**

Mouzon-Leroux et Fils (Verzy)

Sébastien Mouzon is the ninth generation of his family to head this fine domaine in the grand cru village of Verzy on the Montagne de Reims, as the Mouzon family can trace back their presence here in the region to 1776 (the same year that Maison Louis Roederer was founded). The family farms ten hectares of vines, with eight of these situated in their home base of Verzy, and the other parcels in the nearby villages of Verzenay, Ludes and Villers-Marmery. In their vineyards in Verzy, roughly sixty percent are planted to pinot noir (on the western side of the village’s *vignobles*) and forty percent are planted with chardonnay on the eastern edge of the village where there is a strong vein of limestone. This situation is quite unique to Verzy, as it is one of the rare grand cru villages on the Montagne de Reims where chardonnay plays a very important role, as most of the top villages on the Montagne de Reims are planted primarily with pinot noir. The Mouzon family have been enlightened farmers since 1997, using “environmentally friendly” techniques since that time and expanding this commitment to fully farm *biodynamically* in 2008. They use horses to plow in their parcels with younger vines, to avoid compacting the soil too much when the vines have not yet developed their root systems to a significant depth. In the last few years, Sébastien has planted small parcels of some of the ancient grape varieties of Champagne, including Arbanne, Petit Meslier and Pinot Blanc is some of the family holdings, as well as pinot meunier, “for amusement” as he likes to say, and we can

look for bottlings featuring some of these grapes in the future from Mouzon-Leroux et Fils. Sébastien Mouzon has been doing excellent work for many years now and the high quality of the domaine's wines today has not gone unnoticed, as just this past spring, Sébastien was invited to join the small circle of *vignerons* in the Club Trésor association that produces the Special Club bottlings.

Sébastien Mouzon likes to work quite naturally in the cellars as well, so he prefers to use all indigenous yeasts for both his alcoholic and malolactic fermentations of his *vins clairs*. For the alcoholic fermentations, he picks a small selection of berries from all of his parcels of vines a week ahead of the start of harvest and crushes these together and gets them fermenting by the time the actual picking gets started. He then uses the fermenting juice from these very early picked bunches as his "starter" to get the remainder of his tanks started with their fermentations a week later. For his malolactic fermentations, as he does not want to inoculate the tanks with ML bacteria, he freezes a bit of wine from the previous year and thaws this out and uses this to get his malos started in the event that they are a bit sluggish. He ferments and ages in a combination of stainless steel tanks and old Burgundy *barriques*, and will age the wines up to six years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, depending on the cuvée. Typically, the Mouzon-Leroux non-vintage bottlings will be a combination of seventy to eighty percent of the base year, with the remainder made up of wines from the previous vintage or two. Sébastien Mouzon is making truly superb wines from the family domaine in Verzy and it is quite clear that the ninth generation of *vignerons* in the family would make the previous eight plenty proud to taste these wines.

Mouzon-Leroux et Fils "l'Atavique" Brut Réserve NV (Disgorged October 2014)

The new release of l'Atavique from Sébastien Mouzon is a classic family blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay. The wine is eighty percent base year 2011 and twenty percent reserve wines from 2010 and 2009; it was finished off with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. The lovely and youthful nose wafts from the glass in a classy blend of lemon, green apple, chalky minerality, bread dough, a bit of smokiness and a topnote of lime peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and rock solid at the core, with lovely focus and grip, elegant *mousse*, lovely backend minerality and a long, nascently complex and vivid finish. Lovely juice in the making. 2016-2030+. **91+**.

Mouzon-Leroux et Fils "l'Ineffable" Blanc de Noirs Brut NV (Disgorged July 2014)

The current release of this one hundred percent pinot noir-based Blanc de Noirs is comprised of seventy percent 2010 juice and thirty percent from 2009, with the wine having been finished off with a *dosage* of four grams per liter. Seventy percent of the *vins clairs* here were fermented in stainless steel and thirty percent in *barriques*. This is only the second release of this cuvée, as the first was a blend of 2009 and 2008, and this is going to be a terrific bottle of Blanc de Noirs. The outstanding bouquet offers up scents of white peach, apple, stony minerality, bread dough, citrus peel and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still quite youthfully structured, with excellent mid-palate depth, elegant *mousse*, snappy acids and great focus and cut on the long and laser-like finish. This is still a baby and needs at least three or four years in the cellar to blossom, but it will be absolutely outstanding when it is ready to drink. 2018-2040. **93**.

Mouzon-Leroux et Fils "l'Incadescent" Rosé Saignée Brut NV

The Mouzon-Leroux et Fils "l'Incadescent" Rosé Saignée is a wine that switches a bit from year to year, as Sébastien likes to select different parcels of pinot noir in Verzy for this

bottling, depending on how the vintage shapes up. As he notes, “it changes every year, as I just feel it- which parcels to use each year.” The wine is made by allowing the crushed pinot noir grapes to macerate on their skins for twenty hours prior to being racked off for fermentation. The current release is from the base year of 2011 and was finished off with a *dosage* of 4.5 grams per liter. The wine has a beautiful color in this vintage, offering up a lovely and quite vinous nose of blood orange, chalky minerality, a touch of cinnamon, a hint of bread dough and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and frothy, with a fine core, lovely soil signature and a long, racy and impeccably balanced finish. 2016-2030. **91.**

Mouzon-Leroux et Fils “l’Opiniâtre” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV

Sébastien Mouzon’s l’Opiniâtre Blanc de Blancs bottling is the rarest wine that he currently produces, as this will only made in top years and is made in tiny quantities of two hundred and fifty bottles. It is an experimental wine with no sulfur dioxide used during the *elevage*, and this first iteration was disgorged immediately prior to our tasting it. The lovely nose wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, lemon, brioche, a fine vein of minerality and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and shows off fine mid-palate depth, with frothy *mousse*, crisp acids and a long, focused and well-balanced finish. This seems likely to drink a bit earlier than the other cuvées, and while I would guess it will not age quite as long, due to its lack of SO₂, it still seems very well balanced and zesty today and I would expect that at least a decade’s worth of fine drinking is quite likely. A lovely wine. 2015-2025. **92.**



Sébastien Mouzon in his vineyards in Verzy.

Champagne Alexandre Filaine (Damery)

Champagne Alexandre Filaine is the side project of Fabrice Gass, who up until 2014, spent his days working in the cellars at Champagne Bollinger and tending his small parcels of vines in Damery on his evenings and weekends. It is a pity there are not larger quantities of Monsieur Gass's wines to go around, as these are some of the most beautiful and evocative wines to be found in the constellation of Grower Champagne. The Champagne house takes its name from Monsieur Gass's uncle, Alexandre Filaine, who ran the small house in Damery up until the late 1980s. Having no children interested in taking over the small property, Monsieur Filaine turned to his nephew to start to tend the vines and make the wines in the 1990s, though none were ever made commercially available until 1998, when Fabrice finally got a commercial license for the micro winery. Monsieur Gass now farms several small plots in Damery that total up to only a single hectare- enough to keep him plenty busy in the evenings and on weekends, but hardly enough to supply an increasingly thirsty world looking for his wines! He farms his parcels organically and ferments his wines in ancient small barrels (the oldest dating back to 1937, which he has bought over the years from Bollinger), using solely indigenous yeasts and with the *vins clairs* never going through malolactic fermentation. All of the wines here are hand-riddled. Monsieur Gass, until very recently, has produced solely two cuvées: Cuvée Spéciale and Cuvée Confidence. The two wines are essentially the same- produced from the same vineyard parcels and the same *cépages*, with the primary difference between the two wines being that the Cuvée Spéciale is aged under crown cap *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and the Cuvée Confidence is aged under cork for its entire lifetime in the cellar. Both bottlings are typically a blend of the current base year and a third from the previous year, with the Cuvée Spéciale aging three years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement and the Cuvée Confidence aging five years *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement, so there is always a two year gap in base years of the two wines in the market at the same time. The *cépages* of the two wines is routinely forty-five percent pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent pinot meunier.

These are beautiful wines that are very long on intensity, depth and transparency, with the lack of malolactic giving the wines routinely a great spine of acidity upon which to evolve in the cellar and one of the signature attributes of the wines of Monsieur Gass is their almost timeless ability to age, as the magnums we tasted from the early and mid-1990s during our visit were young, fresh and very snappy and clearly still had many decades of life ahead of them. Fabrice Gass is a great believer that Champagne is meant to be shared generously, so with this in mind, he bottles a very significant percentage of his production in magnum. He likes to call these "petites magnums", as they do tend to get drained pretty briskly when an appreciative crowd is in his courtyard tasting! The Alexandre Filaine label has always been primarily a side project for Monsieur Gass, with his producing the wines primarily for himself and his friends to share together, and it is only in the last few years that he has begun to export a small quantity of his superb Champagne outside of the immediate area. Production levels have never been more than four thousand bottles worth of wine in a given vintage (broken down between bottles and "petites magnums"), so the wines require some diligence to find in the market, but believe me, they are well worth the search, as these are some of the most distinctive and beautiful bottles of Champagne one can find in the world of grower Champagne. Damery lies at the start of the Marne Valley, alongside Cumières, and here, one sees the transition from the Montagne de Reims villages to the Marne Valley, with the Côte des Blancs villages across the river and the valley really not closing in until a bit further west along the river in the direction of Mardeuil. It

is a place with beautiful *terroir* and really probably deserves Grand Cru status (as does Cumières in my opinion), or at least, should be considered at the top of the list of premier cru villages, much like Clos St. Jacques and les Amoureuses are at the top of the list of premier cru vineyards in Burgundy.

Monsieur Gass has just begun to produce a third bottling in his small cellars in Damery: Cuvée Sensuum Vertigo, which will be a vintage-dated wine produced only in specific vintages where he feels the quality of the fruit merits its production. The *cépages* for the Sensuum Vertigo bottling is a bit different from the other two Filaine wines, being comprised of fifty-five percent pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and only fifteen percent pinot meunier. The first edition of this fine wine will be from the 2007 vintage and will be released later this year or early next year. At this time, Fabrice has no plans to produce this bottling again, as it was simply a one-time opportunity in 2007 that spurred him to add the Sensuum Vertigo to his lineup, and it is the very first vintage-dated bottling that he has produced here at Alexandre Filaine. In addition to producing some of the finest examples of Champagne in the village of Damery, Fabrice Gass is also a very seasoned hand when it comes to producing still red wine from a small portion of his grapes (or that of friends' vineyards) in the village, and indeed, his neighbors often say that "Fabrice makes the finest red wines in all of Champagne". We had a chance to taste a 2013 pinot meunier still red wine that he had produced to finish up our tasting, produced from left over grapes that were not picked in a neighbor's vineyard (due to the CIVC setting the required yields in 2013 lower than the crop out in the vines), and it was indeed the finest bottle of still red wine I have had the pleasure to taste from the Champagne region.

Alexandre Filaine "Cuvée Spéciale" Brut NV (Damery) Base Year 2012

This version of the Cuvée Spéciale is from the base year of 2012, with 2011 blended in as a reserve wine, and was disgorged just prior to our arrival, as it had not yet spent its requisite three years aging *sur latte* prior to its being prepared for the market. Consequently, this wine had no *dosage*, but Monsieur Gass will normally finish this off with between four and five grams per liter when it is time for its final disgorgement. The wine is going to be lovely, as it wafts from the glass in a vibrant blend of apple, pear, brioche, complex, chalky soil tones, orange zest and a touch of acacia blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with lovely focus and grip, crisp acids, frothy *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the focused and racy finish. This will be terrific wine. 2017-2035. **92.**

Alexandre Filaine "Cuvée Spéciale" Brut NV (Damery) Base Year 2011 (magnum)

The current iteration of Fabrice Gass's Cuvée Spéciale is from the base year of 2011, with the customary percentage of the previous year of 2010 blended in as reserve wine. This is really superb and shows just how talented is Monsieur Gass, as the 2011 vintage is quite weak in the region, but this wine is very strong indeed. The superb nose offers up a fine constellation of pear, apple, fresh-baked bread, a fine base of complex soil tones, dried flowers and a nice touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip, a relatively forward personality for this cuvée and lovely refinement on the long and complex finish. This is drinking beautifully, but like all of Fabrice Gass's bottlings, it will age very well indeed. 2015-2030+. **92.**

Alexandre Filaine "Cuvée Spéciale" Brut NV (Damery) Base Year 2007 (magnum)

The 2007 base year of Cuvée Spéciale is a young wine that is just starting to drink well, but my gut feeling is that another three or four years in the cellar would not hurt this wine one

bit, as I suspect that there is a bit more mid-palate *gras* hiding behind the structure here. The lovely nose is deep and complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of apple, tart pear, lovely minerality, lemon zest and brioche. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and still a touch lean behind its fine girdle of acidity, with a lovely core, blossoming complexity, elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the zesty finish. 2017-2035. **91+**.

Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Spéciale” Brut NV (Damery) Base Year 2006 (magnum)

Monsieur Gass’s Cuvée Spéciale from the base year of 2006 has now reached its peak of drinkability and is offering up superb aromatic and flavor complexity as it closes in on its ninth birthday. The wine is absolutely superb on the nose, offering up a complex mélange of pear, delicious apple, brioche, *crème anglaise*, limestone minerality and a pungent topnote of lemon zest and lemon blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very classy, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, bright, zesty acids and great length and grip on the wide open and very vibrant finish. This is really a gorgeous iteration of the Cuvée Spéciale and the wine is now at its zenith, though of course, with decades of life ahead of it in magnum! 2015-2035+. **93**.



Fabrice Gass, in his vineyards in Damery with Sarah Sutel, Wine Director of Mas in NYC.

Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Spéciale” Brut NV (Damery) Base Year 2004 (magnum)

The 2004 base year bottling of Cuvée Spéciale from Fabrice Gass is a beautiful wine in the making, but like so many of the top long distance runners from this year, it still needs a bit of bottle age to really come into its own. The very, very promising bouquet wafts from the glass in

a mix of pear, a touch of tangerine, warm biscuits, chalky minerality and a lovely, smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and still quite snappy in structure, with a fine core, frothy *mousse* and lovely grip and focus on the young, still fairly tensile, but electric finish. In magnum. I would not want to open another example of this excellent wine for another five years, as it is still quite youthful in structure and will be so much better if given sufficient time to fully blossom from behind its girdle of acidity. 2020-2050. **92+**.

Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Confidence” Brut NV (Damery) 2008 Base Year (magnum)

Fabrice Gass is amazingly generous, as we were ten folks visiting and he opened two magnums of each of these wines for sampling, so that everyone could have sufficient quantity to revisit the wines as they had a chance to blossom with air! This release of the Cuvée Confidence is from the base year of 2008, with 2007 blended in as the reserve wine and was finished off with a *dosage* of 4.5 grams per liter. Like all of the Cuvée Confidence bottlings, its *cépages* is forty-five percent pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent pinot meunier and the wine spent five years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement in the spring of 2014. The wine is still young and absolutely stunning in quality, soaring from the glass in a blaze of pear, white peach, chalky minerality, a touch of vanilla bean and an absolute garden full of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with a rock solid core, utterly refined *mousse*, a great spine of acidity and superb grip on the very pure, very long and very, very classy finish. This is still a puppy out of magnum and really should be aged for several more years, but in an emergency, it is eminently drinkable today! 2021-2050. **94**.

Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Confidence” Brut NV (Damery) 2004 Base Year (magnum)

The Cuvée Confidence from base year 2004 is really a lovely young wine and this is going to be terrific with some bottle age. The nose is still quite youthful in its mélange of lemon, pear, chalky minerality, white flowers, gentle smokiness and incipient notes of pastry cream. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tight today, with a rock solid core, excellent mineral drive, frothy *mousse* and a very long, racy and nascently complex finish. This will be a great wine in the fullness of time, but it is still very early days for this year of Cuvée Confidence (particularly out of magnum). 2022-2050+. **93+**.

Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Confidence” Brut NV (Damery) 1997 Base Year (magnum)

The 1997 base year version of the Cuvée Confidence is a stunning wine, soaring from the glass in a complex and blossoming blend of pear, tangerine, *patissière*, sweet almond, chalky soil tones, a touch of vanilla bean and buttery floral tones (buttercups?) in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still plenty racy, with a gorgeous core of fruit, frothy *mousse*, great focus and grip and a very long, very complex and very classy finish. This is really just entering into its plateau of peak drinkability and is a stunning bottle of bubbly with decades and decades of life still ahead of it. 2015-2040. **94+**.

Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Confidence” Brut NV (Damery) 1995 Base Year (magnum)

I really like the 1995 base year version of Monsieur Gass’s Cuvée Confidence, but this is quite different stylistically than the ultra-suave 1997, with slightly broader shoulders and a more “masculine” style, if this makes sense in the context of Champagne. The bouquet is complex and exudes personality in its mix of apple, pear, brioche, fine soil signature, plenty of smokiness and almond paste. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and snappy, with lovely backend mineral drive, a great core, very fine *mousse* and superb length and grip on the powerful and perfectly balanced finish. This is really a lovely wine, and if I had it in any other context than hard on the heels of the stunning 1997 version, I might have scored it even higher! 2015-2030+. **93**.

Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Confidence” Brut NV (Damery) 1994 Base Year (magnum)

The Base Year 1994 version of Cuvée Confidence is a slightly different *cépages* from the customary blend, as in this year the mix was fifty percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent each of chardonnay and pinot meunier. The wine is lovely and far more evolved aromatically than either the 1997 or 1995 versions, offering up a lovely, tertiary bouquet of apple, gentle citrus elements, lovely minerality, *patissière*, plenty of smokiness and lovely, botanical notes in the upper register that really recall the Maximin Grünhäuser Herrenberg bottlings with similar bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and very refined, with a very good core, loads of personality, pinpoint bubbles and a fairly long, very vibrant and complex finish. This is not quite as long as the 1997 or 1995, but it is a lovely wine that is at its apogee and drinking with great style. 2015-2025+. **92.**

2007 Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Sensuum Vertigo” Brut NV (Damery) magnum

I am not sure what spurred on Fabrice to produce a vintage-dated bottling in the 2007 vintage, but the Sensuum Vertigo is indeed a stellar bottle in the making and a very welcome addition to his lineup. The wine offers up a beautiful and youthful bouquet of pear, delicious apple, *crème patissière*, chalky minerality and spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, nascently complex and rock solid at the core, with great refinement and focus, elegant *mousse* and a great spine of acidity to carry it far into the future. The finish is very, very long, has fine grip and is impeccably balanced and this will prove to be a long distance runner of great breed and complexity in the years to come. This should be released later this year or early next. 2022-2050+. **94+.**

2013 Pinot Meunier Rouge- Fabrice Gass

The still wine made from pinot meunier is not commercially available, but if one is visiting Monsieur Gass and asks about his red wine, it is likely to be possible to taste the wine and it is really terrific. This was made from one of his good friend's vineyards, where the yield limits set in 2013 allowed for a percentage of the crop to stay out on the vines unpicked, so after Fabrice finished picking his own grapes and started his fermentations, he went back and picked these grapes and made this lovely red wine out of them for his own amusement. The wine is a beautifully elegant middleweight, with a bouquet of dark berries, smoke, cassis, a bit of black pepper and a very complex base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and elegant, with lovely complexity, a sappy core of fruit and lovely length and grip on the gently tannic finish. This is by a good margin the most refined red wine I have ever tasted from Champagne and I could drink it again on any occasion! 2015-2030. **91.**

Champagne Corbon (Avize)

Champagne Corbon is one of the great domaines in the fine grand cru village of Avize for long-aging, graceful Blanc de Blancs bottlings that unfold leisurely over many years in the cellar and offer up some truly exquisite drinking when they finally reach their plateaus of maturity. Agnès Corbon is currently the head of the family winery, but her father, Claude Corbon is still quite active in the affairs of the *maison*, as he strikes me as a *vigneron* who is never really going to retire. Agnès' first vintage at the helm here was the 2006, after she had worked for several years alongside of her father and her brother Jérôme at the estate, but also working several years outside of the region in the field of engineering. I have liked the Corbon wines well enough in the past, when tasting relatively new releases from the estate, but the light finally went on for me on this recent trip to the region, as over the course of my last week in Champagne, I had a chance to sample a wide array of mature vintages of the Corbon wines and I finally understood just how

good these wines are when they are fully mature! They start out life lean, tightly-knit and snappy, as these are non-malolactic wines, and they spend a long time aging on the lees in the cellars prior to disgorgement and eventual release onto the market. Agnès Corbon does not like to send a wine out into the market until it is starting to blossom- witness the fact that the domaine's 1996 Blanc de Blancs is still resting *sur latte* in the family's cellars fully nine years out from the vintage, and as far as I know, there are no immediate plans to disgorge it and offer it for sale still for several years to come, as it is still too young for the Corbon family's tastes! But, as the notes below will attest, once the Corbon wines are really ready to drink, they are really exquisite and very much reward the measure of patience that is required to allow them to blossom from behind their classic, non-malo structural chassis and start to drink with true generosity.

Champagne Corbon is one of the very few estates that I visited during my fortnight in Champagne that is not farming organically or *biodynamically* at the present time, but I have a feeling that it will not be too much longer before the family takes this next important step. Agnès Corbon is a very savvy and intellectually curious *vigneron* and it would seem to be part of her makeup to look at these farming methods in the near future, particularly since she is close friends with several of the most important organic farmers in the region. Madame Corbon was the force behind the village of Avize adopting the natural preventative measure known as “sexual confusion”, that prevents butterflies from mating in the vineyards and hence, stops damaging caterpillars from ravaging the vines and obviates the need to spray with insecticides to kill them. This is a pretty important role in the villages that have adopted this method, as every single *vigneron* has to sign on for the program of hanging these small plastic pods on trellises in their vineyards, or the program will not work, as the butterflies will cover very large distances to mate and if the protection is not used by every *vigneron* in a given village, there is going to be islands where mating can occur and the leaf damaging caterpillars can be born. Given her central role in getting this program implemented in the vineyards of Avize, it seems likely that she will eventually take the next step to fully organic farming in her vineyards, and in fact, she has already started some experimental plots that are being farmed this way.

The domaine can trace its roots back in the village of Avize to 1912, when Charles Corbon moved to the village and began working for one of the large Champagne houses in the region. In the early 1920s he was able to buy his first parcel of vines in the village and his is eventually able to farm enough hectares to make his living as a *vigneron* selling his grapes off to one of the *Grandes Marques*. His son Albert was not enthusiastic about this *métier* and chose another career path, becoming a coal merchant, though still keeping the family parcels of vines and selling off the production to augment his income. His son, Claude Corbon, eventually decided to return to the family farm full-time and sold off his grapes to one of the large houses in the region up through the early 1970s, when the economic crisis in the region made it difficult for him to find a buyer for his production at what he considered a “proper price”. Consequently, in 1971, he first began to make his own Champagne and sell that to clients directly, rather than simply selling the grapes from his parcels to one of the low bidders in the market at that time. It did not take him long to become very passionate about winemaking, and he quickly decided to forego filtration of his *vins clairs* and some of the other winemaking shortcuts that were popular in the region in this era, so that he could increase the depth and complexity in his finished wines. The first vintage-dated bottling from Champagne Corbon was produced by Claude Corbon in

1981, and Monsieur Corbon decided to make at least a small amount of each subsequent year as a vintage wine, so that he could have a souvenir of each growing season, and consequently this is one Champagne house where one can find some very surprising vintage-dated bottlings!

Agnès Corbon was working in the field of engineering in the city of Strasbourg (after having lived and worked in the United Kingdom for several years) when she realized that she wanted to return to the family domaine in Avize and join her father in making Champagne. She studied winemaking and viticulture in Alsace prior to returning to Avize, “learning loads about viticulture- that I still put in practice today, and quickly forgetting everything that I had been taught about winemaking at school, as it was essentially the same easy shortcuts that my father had turned his back on in the 1970s.” The family owns six hectares of vines, with two hectares in their home village of Avize, and the remaining four spread out amongst the communes of Vandières, Verneuil, Vincelles and Trélou-sur-Marne (all of these in the Marne Valley, rather than in the Côte des Blancs). However, a significant percentage of their grape production outside of Avize is still sold off to the *Grandes Marques*, and they concentrate most of their winemaking on their fruit from Avize and some of their older vine parcels in the other communes. The house currently makes ten thousand bottles per year under their family label, with the remainder of the fruit sold off to various houses. One of the hallmarks of the wines at Champagne Corbon is their extended aging *sur latte* prior to their disgorgement and release into the market, with their non-vintage bottlings typically spending five and a half or six years on their fine lees, and their vintage bottlings aging even longer than this, with their date of disgorgement ultimately decided upon by the structure of the wines themselves, with eight to ten years probably the average time each top year will spend aging prior to *dégorgement*.

Agnès Corbon and her father before her have always favored no malolactic fermentation for their *vins clairs*, with the wines fermented and aged in either stainless steel or older *barriques* prior to their *assemblage*. As I noted in the introduction to this long feature, the family has long taken advantage of the crazy yield regulations in Champagne and only used the first-pressed juice, or *Cuvée* for all of their own wines, selling off the second-pressing *Tailles*, which they firmly believe gives them superior quality juice to work with in the cellars. As houses such as Krug also only use the *Cuvée* for their own wines, it seems pretty clear that this is the superior course for growers in the region (until the crazy regulations are rationalized) to take and I wonder why more do not avail themselves of this opportunity. This being a proper Avize *maison*, chardonnay is king here, but there are a couple of *cuvées* were pinot noir and pinot meunier also play a significant role in the blends. The family has a long-running solera that they use for one of these bottlings, called Brut Autrefois, which these days is comprised of a blend of eighty-five percent chardonnay and fifteen percent pinot noir. Each year, fifty percent of the solera is bottled off and the solera refreshed with wine from the current year; Agnès Corbon notes that in the last few years, she has been topping off the solera each year solely with chardonnay, so that over time, this will become essentially a chardonnay *cuvée*. This is the one bottling in the Corbon cellars where the *vins clairs* go through full malolactic fermentation. Once it is bottled, the Brut Autrefois is aged for fully eight years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement, so that the current release was bottled in 2006.

Champagne Corbon makes a full range of *cuvées*, with the Absolument Brut (*Non-Dosé*) relatively new to their lineup, and augmenting their non-vintage Brut bottling, which Agnès has

just changed the name to “Anthracite Brut” (it was previously known as “Brut Prestige”), with both wines made from the same *vins clairs* blend of fifty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent pinot noir and pinot meunier. Both wines are made from fifty percent base year wine and fifty percent from wines of the preceding two vintages, with the sole difference between the two cuvées being that the Absolut Brut sees no *dosage* and the Anthracite Brut finished off with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. The flagship bottling of the house of Corbon is their vintage-dated Blanc de Blancs, which they have been producing every year since 1981. This bottling ages brilliantly and really only starts to show its true quality once it has reached the age of fifteen or twenty, which the *maison* helps get started, as the Corbon family will often keep it in their cellars *sur latte* for eight years or more, so that the wine is starting to stir a bit from behind its fine, no malo structural elements prior to its release. Only Avize chardonnay fruit is used for this bottling. One of the experiments that Agnès Corbon has undertaken in the last few years is to compare how wines will age *sur latte* under natural cork versus crown cap (which is what they use for almost all of their wines today), and we had the chance to make a comparison of the two versions from the 2009 vintage during our visit. Based on how the two versions of the 2009 were progressing, I hope we see more wines aged under cork here in the future. Champagne Corbon is one of the finest sources for long-lived and classy Blanc de Blancs and these wines are simply beautiful when they have fully blossomed.



Agnès Corbon in her tasting room at the family domaine in Avize.

Champagne Corbon Absolument Brut NV (Disgorged March 2015)

The current release of Absolument Brut from Agnès Corbon is from the base year of 2007, with fifty percent of the blend comprised of reserve wines from a combination of 2005 and 2006. The *cépages* is fifty percent chardonnay (half from Avize and half from Verneuil) and twenty-five percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier and the wine saw absolutely no *dosage* after its seven years on the fine lees. The bouquet is lovely, offering up a fine nose of lemon, pear, chalky minerality, white flowers and a bright topnote of lemon zest. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and nascently complex, with frothy *mousse*, fine focus and grip, nicely buffered acids and a long, elegant finish. This is a very classy middleweight. 2015-2022+. **90+**.

Champagne Corbon “Anthracite” Brut NV (Disgorged March 2015)

Anthracite is the new name for the non-vintage Brut cuvée at Champagne Corbon (no doubt taking its name from the previous generations of the family that were coal dealers in the region, and tended their vines as a side light. It is exactly the same wine as the Absolument Brut, but finished off with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. This too is base year 2007 and offers up an excellent nose of lemon, delicious apple, pear, chalky minerality, smoke and warm biscuits. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and very suave on the attack, with a lovely core, crisp acids, refined *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the focused finish. This is a classy middleweight. 2015-2025. **90**.

Champagne Corbon “Brut Autrefois” NV (Disgorged Spring 2014)

The Brut Autrefois from the Corbon family is made entirely from their solera, which was started by Claude Corbon many years ago. Each year, fifty percent of the solera is taken out and bottled, with the solera then filled up again with the new vintage. This bottling was done in 2006 and spent eight years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The wine is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a very complex blend of pear, almond, complex, chalky soil tones, brioche, a touch of tangerine, lemon oil, spring flowers and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully pure, with a lovely core, outstanding complexity, bright acids, lovely focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, vibrant and utterly refined finish. Gorgeous juice that offers up a lovely synthesis of the complexity of bottle age and the bounce and verve of a younger wine. 2015-2025+. **93**.

Champagne Corbon “Cuvée 598” Brut NV (Disgorged March 2015)

The Champagne Corbon “Cuvée 598” non-vintage Brut is another experimental wine produced only in this one iteration, which is from the base year of 2004, probably due to the very high yields of this vintage, which would have allowed a bit more very high quality fruit to be available beyond what was contracted out to *Grandes Marques* and what was needed for the classic cuvées in the family’s lineup. The wine is a blend of one-third each of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier and offers up a fine bouquet of apple, tangerine, a touch of *crème patissière*, chalky soil tones and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with crisp acids, frothy *mousse* and a long finish that closes with good grip and bounce. A very tasty wine. 2015-2025+. **91**.

2009 Champagne Corbon “Blanc de Blancs” Brut Millésime (aged under crown cap)

This 2009 Blanc de Blancs was all barrel-fermented, in a combination of six, four and three year-old casks and was disgorged in March of 2015. This is an experimental lot, with six barrels made in total and then split between the crown cap and natural cork bottles, with all of the *vins clairs* here having gone through malolactic fermentation for this particular wine. Both examples were finished with a *dosage* of 4 to 5 grams per liter at disgorgement. The example under crown cap is quite lovely, offering up scents of pear, delicious apples, pastry cream,

chalky soil tones and a fine topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and minerally in personality, with a fine core, frothy *mousse* and very good cut and grip on the still quite youthful finish. 2019-2035+. **92+**.

2009 Champagne Corbon “Blanc de Blancs” Brut Millésime (aged under cork)

The 2009 experimental lot of Blanc de Blancs aged under natural cork is even better than the crown cap version, delivering more depth and expressiveness on both the nose and palate. The utterly superb bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of the same fruit tones of pear and delicious apple, lovely, musky floral tones (redolent of acacia blossoms), gorgeous, chalky minerality, pastry cream and an exotic topnote of mint. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite a bit rounder on the attack than the crown cap version, with a great core, elegant *mousse*, superb focus and grip, snappy acids and outstanding complexity and backend energy on the very long and classy finish. The natural cork version is developing more volume on the attack and even better length and grip on the backend, and if it were up to me, I would consider starting to raise everything under natural cork in the future here for the vintage-dated wines. 2018-2040. **94**.

2008 Champagne Corbon “Blanc de Blancs” Chardonnay Grand Brut Millésime

The 2008 Corbon Grand Brut Millésime was disgorged in December of 2014 and finished off with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. Like all of the vintages of this particular bottling, only Avize fruit is used for this cuvée. The 2008 is a young and very vibrant wine on both the nose and palate, offering up a fine bouquet of lemon, pear, apple, chalky soil tones, incipient notes of *crème patissière* and a gentle topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still youthfully tensile, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles and excellent cut and grip on the still very primary finish. Given how long the Corbon wines age and the zesty nature of the 2008 vintage, this is going to be a long-distance runner *par excellence*, but it is going to need to be alone in the cellar for at least another seven or eight years to really start to blossom. It will be outstanding in the fullness of time. 2022-2060. **93**.

2007 Champagne Corbon “Blanc de Blancs” Chardonnay Grand Brut Millésime

Not surprisingly, the 2007 Corbon Grand Brut Millésime is a bit more forward than the 2008 version and is only a few years away from really starting to drink at its apogee. The lovely nose offers up a complex and classy constellation of delicious apple, tangerine, fresh-baked bread, a touch of almond, limestone minerality and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and still quite racy in personality, with a good core, fine focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, vibrant and nicely open-knit finish. This is approachable already, but in the tradition of long-lived wines at Corbon, I would be inclined to still give this a handful of years’ worth of bottle age to completely reach its apogee before starting to open it with abandon. 2019-2040. **92**.

2006 Champagne Corbon “Blanc de Blancs” Chardonnay Grand Brut Millésime

Like so many bottles from the 2006 vintage, the Corbon Blanc de Blancs is just beginning to drink well at age nine, but it has not quite reached its plateau of full maturity. The lovely nose wafts from the glass in a blend of tangerine, pear, almond, chalky soil tones, smoke, lemon peel and a touch of dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nicely balanced, with a good core, elegant *mousse*, fine focus and very good length and grip on the wide open and zesty finish. This is not quite as complex as either the youthful 2008 or the svelte 2007 versions, but it is a very pretty wine that is drinking well today and has plenty of life still ahead of it. 2019-2040. **90**.

2005 Champagne Corbon “Blanc de Blancs” Chardonnay Grand Brut Millésime

The 2005 Corbon Grand Brut Millésime is fully into its apogee at age ten and is drinking with lovely generosity and complexity. The first class nose offers up a lovely mélange of apple, pear, chalky minerality, a nice touch of salinity and a potpourri of white flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and wide open on the attack, with lovely mid-palate depth, frothy *mousse*, bright, Corbon acids, and excellent length and backend mineral drive on the complex and classy finish. This is really a lovely wine and a half step ahead of the pretty 2006 rendition. 2015-2035. **92.**

2003 Champagne Corbon “Blanc de Blancs” Chardonnay Grand Brut Millésime

I tasted a few very, very fine examples from the 2003 vintage during my fortnight in Champagne and the Corbon Grand Brut Millésime was certainly one of the strongest from this year that I sampled. The really lovely nose jumps from the glass in a ripe and refined blend of pear, orange, lemon blossoms, superb, chalky minerality, brioche and a touch of vanilla bean in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and complex, with lovely vinosity on the attack, a fine core, refined *mousse* and very good length and grip on the wide open and impressively light on its feet finish. This is perhaps not quite as long as the 2008 or 2005 versions, but it is an utterly complete wine that offers up plenty of vibrancy and elegance in the Corbon house style. Fine juice. 2015-2030+. **91+.**

1994 Champagne Corbon “Blanc de Blancs” Chardonnay Grand Brut Millésime (mag)

The 1994 Corbon Blanc de Blancs is still a puppy out of magnum today, but this is going to be a terrific bottle of wine in the fullness of time. The youthful nose jumps from the glass in a classic blend of apple, pear, brioche, chalky minerality, fresh almond and upper register smokiness. With air, the bouquet starts to show some lovely, musky floral tones as well. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and gently musky, with a lovely core, crisp acids, frothy *mousse* and excellent focus and grip on the long, still quite youthful finish. This is beautifully balanced and really still could use three or four years in the cellar to completely blossom. It should prove to be quite long-lived and offer great drinking at its plateau of maturity. 2018-2035+. **93.**

1991 Champagne Corbon “Blanc de Blancs” Chardonnay Grand Brut Millésime

I cannot recall tasting too many examples of vintage-dated bubbly from the 1991 vintage, but this bottle of '91 Corbon Grand Brut Millésime is absolutely stunning and at its apogee of peak drinkability today. The superb nose offers up plenty of secondary layers of complexity in its mix of gently backed apples and pears, brioche, *crème patissière*, orange blossoms, chalky soil tones and almond. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very suave on the attack, with a fine core, still very sound *mousse* and lovely focus and grip on the long and complex finish. Fine, fine juice at its zenith. 2015-2030+. **93.**

1989 Champagne Corbon “Blanc de Blancs” Chardonnay Grand Brut Millésime

The 1989 Corbon family's Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime is blossoming beautifully and is really starting to drink with great style and breed. The classy nose offers up lovely secondary layers of complexity in its mélange of pear, almond, orange zest, apple, chalky minerality and smoky overtones. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, focused and racy, with lovely complexity and mid-palate depth, bright acids, really vibrant *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the bouncy, but wide open finish. The acids here have peeled back nicely to play a supporting role at age twenty-six, so that the wine remains bright, but suave and easily accessible at this stage of its life in bottle. Fine, fine juice. 2015-2025. **92.**

1988 Champagne Corbon “Blanc de Blancs” Chardonnay Grand Brut Millésime (mag)

For current drinking, the 1988 vintage in Champagne is right up there at the top of my list and the Corbon Grand Brut Millésime out of magnum is hitting on all cylinders at age twenty-seven. The superb and completely *à point* nose jumps from the glass in a blend of pear, almond skin, baked apple, chalky soil tones, bread dough and a fine, smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and wide open on the attack, with lovely mid-palate reserves, frothy *mousse* and excellent focus and grip on the very long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. A quintessential example of the fine 1988 vintage. 2015-2030+. **92.**

Laherte Frères (Chavot)

Aurélien Laherte is the sixth generation of his family to run this eleven hectare estate in the village of Chavot, joining his father Thierry and uncle, Christian, in 2004. The Laherte family first founded their domaine in 1889, which Jean-Baptiste Laherte established with five hectares of vineyard land, all located in Chavot. The Laherte family were simply grape farmers for their first three generations and sold off their production to local cooperatives. It was Aurélien Laherte's grandfather, Michel, who first began to make his own wine, and with each successive generation, more and more of the family production was targeted for their own wines, and in the last three years, they have actually had to buy a few grapes from neighbors to meet their clients demand for wine. Their eleven hectares of vines are scattered across ten different villages, with fully five of them now farmed biodynamically since 2005, and with plans to ultimately convert everything over to *biodynamique* viticulture. Though it is not a grand cru, the village of Chavot, where half the Laherte vineyard parcels are found, is located between the *Vallée de la Marne* and the Côte de Blancs and offers a complex base of *terroir*, with a lovely blend of clay and limestone that gives the wines from this village a very unique and compelling character. Aurélien Laherte likes to vinify his *vins clairs* on a parcel by parcel basis, mostly in old Burgundy casks, to allow the inherent diversity of *terroir* found in Chavot to express itself. However, older *foudres* and stainless steel tanks are also used for certain fermentations, depending upon the vintage's character and the particular parcel. The typical breakdown in any given year will be eighty percent of the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented (this percentage includes *foudres*) and twenty percent in stainless steel. Casks here range from three to thirty-five years of age, with a notable exception. Aurélien Laherte is also quite agnostic about malolactic fermentation, with some lots going through full malo and others not, again depending upon vintage, parcel or grape variety. The family's vines range from thirty to over sixty years of age and it is typical here for younger vine juice to be fermented with a cultured yeast, but older vines being fermented with their indigenous yeasts.

The domaine is quite well-known for its parcel in the village of Chavot that has been planted several years ago with all seven allowed grape varieties in Champagne, and from this vineyard they produce their cuvée called “Le Sept”, which includes Petit Meslier, Arbanne, Pinot Blanc and Fromenteau, as well as the big three grapes of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier. This vineyard was planted in 2003 by Thierry Laherte, Aurélien Laherte's father, and the domaine takes the unique approach of co-fermenting all of the different grape varieties together for this bottling in older and newer Burgundy barrels to blend the different grapes as seamlessly as possible early on in their evolutions. This is the only Laherte wines that sees some new casks these days. It is produced from a solera that was started in 2005, with sixty percent of the blend made from the base year and forty percent taken from the solera as reserve wines each

year (with the solera then refreshed with forty percent of the new year's wine). The wine is finished these days as an Extra Brut and is truly a uniquely exotic and compelling bottle of Champagne. The Laherte family has also experimented with some plantings over the years on original, *Franc de Pieds* rootstocks, and they make a special cuvée from these special vines as well, called Les Vignes d'Autrefois". This is an Extra Brut bottling that is made entirely from *Franc de Pieds* pinot meunier vines that were planted between 1947 and 1953, with the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented, the wine not undergoing malo and then aged for six months in cask prior to bottling, with some *battonage*. Aurélien Laherte has begun to hold back fifteen thousand bottles per year in the cellars in Chavot, so as to be able to offer some older wines in the future to their clients, as he is keenly aware that one of the great advantages the *Grandes Marques* have over the smaller growers is their great stocks of older wines. This is an absolutely superb domaine that has been strong for many years, but seems likely to get even better as more of their vineyards are converted over to *biodynamique* farming methods and Aurélien Laherte has better and better fruit with which to work.

Laherte Frères "Extra Brut Tradition" NV (Disgorged October 2014)

The current release of the Laherte Frères non-vintage "Extra Brut Tradition" is from the base year of 2012, with some 2011 blended in as reserve wine and was finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter. Its *cépages* is sixty percent pinot meunier, thirty percent chardonnay and ten percent pinot noir. The wine offers up a very high-toned nose of tart pear, quince, stony minerality, a touch of menthol and bread dough. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and shows good mid-palate depth, with fine *mousse*, crisp acids and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is a very well done bottle of Extra Brut. 2015-2025. **90.**

Laherte Frères "Ultra-Tradition" Brut NV (Disgorged October 2014)

The non-vintage Brut from Laherte Frères is exactly the same wine as the Extra Brut, but is finished off with a *dosage* of 7.5 grams per liter. This too is a very pretty wine, and I like the little extra dimension on both the nose and palate that a bit more *dosage* seems to give to the wine today, as it delivers a lovely bouquet of apple, smoke, stony minerality, a touch of *patissière* and a lovely, meunier-driven discreet floral topnote of lilac. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and more generous on the attack than the Extra Brut version, with a good core, lovely backend mineral drive, bright acids and fine length and grip on the focused finish. Both iterations are very good, but I like the balance here a hair better. 2015-2025. **90+.**

Laherte Frères Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature NV (Disgorged April 2014)

The non-vintage Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature bottling from the Laherte family is excellent this year. This too is a blend of base year 2012 and reserve wines from 2011, which are aged for a year in barrel. The wine is superb on the nose, offering up an aromatic constellation of pear, apple, brioche, chalky soil tones, white flowers and a lovely topnote of lemon zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very refined on the attack, with a lovely core, elegant *mousse*, bright, well-integrated acids and lovely grip on the long and complex finish. This is an exquisitely balanced Brut Nature and eminently drinkable right out of the blocks. 2015-2030. **92.**

Laherte Frères "Les Vignes d'Autrefois" Extra Brut NV (Disgorged December 2014)

The current release of Les Vignes Autrefois is entirely from the base year of 2011 and was finished with a *dosage* of 3.5 grams per liter. As I noted above, this cuvée is produced entirely from old vine, *Franc de Pieds* pinot meunier planted just after the second world war; it does not undergo malolactic fermentation. The wine delivers a very pretty and classically refined

meunier nose of white peach, chalky minerality, a potpourri of meunier floral tones and a lovely topnote of *patissière*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, racy and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, very elegant *mousse*, excellent focus and superb backend mineral drive on the poised and very long finish. This is still a bit young and will need a few years in the cellar to really blossom, but it is a beautiful bottle in the making. 2017-2030+. **92.**

Laherte Frères “Le Sept” Extra Brut NV (Disgorged November 2014)

The new release of Le Sept is from the base year of 2012, with the solera of reserve wines comprised of a blend from 2005 through 2011. This new *vins clairs* for this cuvée does not always go through malolactic fermentation, but did so in 2012. For the 2012 *vins clairs*, there were sixteen casks produced, with seven older barrels and nine new oak, and then the wine is blended and seven casks’ worth of the 2012 *vins clairs* go back into the solera for future bottlings. The wine was finished off with a *dosage* of four grams per liter and offers up an absolutely beautiful bouquet of fresh coconut, pear, chalky soil, a touch of straw, white flowers and a vibrant topnote of lemon zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and frothy, with a lovely core of fruit, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the poised and very classy finish. A superb wine in the making. 2015-2030. **93.**

Laherte Frères “Les Empreintes” Extra Brut NV (Disgorged April 2013)

The Les Empreintes bottling from the Laherte family is comprised solely of fruit from two parcels in Chavot, with fifty percent of the blend old vine chardonnay from the *lieu à dit* of Les Chemins d’Épernay (one of the most purely limestone *terroirs* in the village) and fifty percent comprised of pinot noir from the *lieu à dit* of Les Rouges Maisons (which has more clay in the topsoil). Half of the chardonnay vines are the “Muscaté” clone that gives exotic spice and floral overtones to the wine. The current release is base year 2009 and did not undergo malo, with the *vins clairs* all barrel-fermented in older Burgundy barrels and spending seven months in cask prior to bottling. The superb nose jumps from the glass in a blend of white peach, pear, musky floral tones, lovely limestone elements, lemon zest and brioche. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and snappy, with elegant *mousse*, a fine core and excellent length and grip on the still very youthful and brisk finish. This needs some more bottle age to soften up a bit, and may well merit a higher rating when it has started to stir. 2018-2030+. **90+.**

Laherte Frères “Rosé Tradition” Brut NV (Disgorged December 2014)

The current release of Laherte Frères “Rosé Tradition” non-vintage Brut is base year 2012, with reserve wines blended in from the 2011 vintage. It is comprised of a blend of fifty percent chardonnay and fifty percent pinot meunier and was finished with a *dosage* of 7.5 grams per liter. The wine is a pretty, rose petal color and offers up a very stylish bouquet of strawberries, pomegranate, chalky soil tones, smoke and bread dough. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with frothy *mousse*, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the focused and wide open finish. A very pretty Brut Rosé. 2015-2025. **89.**

Laherte Frères “Les Beaudiers” Rosé Saignée Extra Brut (Base Year 2012)

The Les Beaudiers bottling from the Laherte family is made entirely from old vine pinot meunier, with the parcels planted in 1953, 1958 and 1965. The fresh-pressed juice spends twelve to sixteen hours macerating on the skins to give it the deep cherry color, and is then fermented entirely with indigenous yeasts and does not undergo malolactic fermentation. It is aged *sur latte* for a minimum of four years prior to disgorgement. The 2012 version was finished off with a *dosage* of 4.5 grams per liter and offers up a great nose of blood orange, rye toast, a touch of caraway seed, chalky soil tones, woodsmoke and a bit of pepper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a lovely core, frothy *mousse*, bright acids and

lovely focus and grip on the very long finish. There is a beautiful combination here of vinosity and lightness of step that is very rare in Rosé Saignée. Great juice. 2015-2040. **93**.

Laherte Frères “Les Beaudiers” Rosé Saignée Extra Brut (Base Year 2005)

Back in this era, the Les Beaudiers was not aged quite as long on its fine lees, so this spent two and a half years *sur latte* and was disgorged in late 2008. The *dosage* for this iteration was five grams per liter and the wine is aging beautifully. The bouquet is deep, complex and developing secondary layers of complexity in its mélange of peach, a touch of raspberry, chalky soil tones, a fine note of *patissière*, orange peel, wheat toast and a gentle touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and really defined today by its chalky soil tones, with a fine core, lovely focus, elegant *mousse* and superb length and grip on the perfectly balanced finish. This is beautifully complex today and at its apogee, but clearly has years and years of life in it. 2015-2030. **93+**.



Domaine Georges Laval (Cumières)

Vincent Laval is one of my favorite growers in all of Champagne. As I noted last year, the petit Georges Laval domaine is located right in the heart of the small village of Cumières, which, though only ranked as premier cru, really produces some of the finest pinot noir in all of Champagne. Vincent’s father, Georges, first began bottling on his own all the way back in the 1971 vintage and he was one of the first *vignerons* in the town to switch over to organic farming as he was inspired by a report by Jacques Cousteau in the early 1970s that traces of pesticides

were found in the ice of Antarctica. Georges Laval took the very courageous step in the wake of these reports to completely change his method of viticulture to harmonize it with nature and stop being part of the problem in Champagne (no matter what the CIVC might think of his son's continued organic methods and "the pollution that they cause"). I reported last year that Vincent continued on in this vein and converted over to *biodynamiques*, but that was incorrect, as Vincent continues to farm organically, rather than biodynamically having been certified by Ecocert for organic viticulture for many years now. He is one of the finest farmers in all of Champagne and walking through his immaculately maintained vineyards (alive with biodiversity) is a great pleasure- a pleasure which cannot always be shared in some of his neighbors' rather more chemically barren parcels in the village as one traipses through the *vignobles* of Cumières. Today, Vincent Laval is farming fully three hectares of vines in the village, and there are plans to slightly expand the amount of wine he bottles himself, as he is still selling off a bit of fruit to other domaines. As I noted last year, Vincent, took over the direction of the family *maison* in 1996 and has built beautifully on the well-earned reputation of his parents in those very early years of grower-bottled Champagne and today, Domaine Georges Laval is one of the most respected small estates in all of the region. Almost all of the bottlings here these days are *non-dosé*, as Vincent prefers to bottle the vast majority of his cuvées as Brut Nature. He disgorged a few older wines right off of their fine lees during our tasting and happily joked about these wines (which obviously had not had any *dosage* while resting *sur latte*) "this one is ten grams per liter *dosage*, but I do not really sense it in the wine..." Vincent Laval has a very real *joie de vivre* that is infectious as one walks around his parcels with him in Cumières or descends into his small cellars to taste, and visiting with Vincent would be a great pleasure even if he did not make some of the finest Champagne in the region. Happily, he also does that!

As I observed from my visit last year, Vincent Laval produces essentially three different cuvées of Champagne, a blended wine from his various parcels in Cumières, and two single vineyard wines, both of which are bottled as Brut Nature. The first of the two single vineyard wines is his "Les Chênes" bottling, which is a Blanc de Blancs from his parcel planted in one of the finest *lieux à dits* in Cumières, located up at the top of the slope, just under the Abbaye to Hautvillers. This is a particularly chalky *terroir* and perfectly suited to chardonnay. His second single vineyard bottling is called "Les Hautes Chèvres", which (up through the 2009 vintage) was produced solely from pinot noir vines planted in 1930, and this Blanc de Noirs bottling is also produced as a Brut Nature. These old pinot vines were planted at the top of a plateau of clay topsoil, over a fine base of chalky limestone, and this *terroir* is perfect for red grapes. As I mentioned last year, the Les Hautes Chèvres is in the process of changing over from these old pinot noir vines to another section of the vineyard planted to old pinot meunier vines, as the pinot noir simply had gotten too old to remain viable. The 2009 base year will be the last for these extremely old pinot noir vines, as they have now been replanted, and the cuvée will now become a Blanc de Noirs made solely from pinot meunier planted in the same vineyard beginning with its next iteration (base year 2012), with the pinot meunier vines having been planted between 1930 and 1959. The two single vineyard bottlings are only produced in top years (though not vintage-dated on the front labels, but rather on the back labels), and otherwise the production from these two *lieux à dits* go into the third cuvée, which is a blend of all the various parcels that the family owns in the village of Cumières, and which is also finished as a Brut Nature (though sometimes labeled as "Brut", despite typically not receiving any *dosage*.) The Cumières bottling, in years where the two single vineyard wines are bottled on their own, will typically end up being a blend

of fifty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier. Monsieur Laval also occasionally augments his lineup with a Brut Nature Rosé bottling and now has another single vineyard bottling in the works.

Vincent Laval barrel ferments all of his *vins clairs* in very old barrels- for both his Les Chênes and his Les Hautes Chèvres, as well as his blended Cumières and Rosé bottlings- with the still wines spending ten months in these ancient Burgundy barrels (and they really do look as old as the ones found in Domaine Raveneau's cellars in Chablis), prior to being bottled for their secondary fermentations. Not surprisingly, he uses only indigenous yeasts and does not fine or filter his *vins clairs*, as the extended aging in cask allows the wines to clarify naturally. The two single vineyard wines spend four years on their fine lees prior to disgorgement and release into the market, and with their *non-dosé* personalities, they are indeed quite young wines when they are released five years out from the vintage and continue to age very well and are even better, to my palate, after they have had another five years of further bottle age after they are released. The blended Cumières bottling of Brut Nature, which is typically comprised of a blend of fifty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier, also sees four years on the lees prior to disgorgement. Typically, the Cumières non-vintage cuvée will be made up of ninety percent of its base year, with ten percent reserve wines added in from the previous year. As I noted at the outset, Monsieur Laval is planning on a new single vineyard bottling that will commence with the excellent 2012 vintage, from the *lieu à dit* of Longue Violle in Cumières. My notes on the very young sample of this wine that we tasted in the cellars are quite incomplete, as I did not note its *cépages* or vine age, but I imagine that this will be a pinot noir-based bottling to augment the other two single vineyard cuvées (and stand in for the formerly pinot noir-based Les Hautes Chèvres which is now solely pinot meunier. It is still several years away from being released and I will have more information on it as we get closer to its release down the road.

Domaine Georges Laval “Cumières” Brut Nature Rosé NV (Base Year 2013)

The next release of non-vintage Brut Nature Rosé from Vincent Laval is eighty percent 2013 and twenty percent 2012 vintages. The wine is a blend of pinot noir and pinot meunier, but my notes do not mention specific percentages of each. The wine spends a short time macerating on the skins prior to the start of fermentation to give it its pale salmon color, rather than the addition of any still red wine. This new release, which Monsieur Laval opened up right before tasting and still has a bit of time on its lees ahead of it before it will be officially disgorged, offers up a youthfully complex nose of blood orange, wild strawberries, chalky minerality, rye bread and citrus zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite racy, with a fine core, refined *mousse* and very good length and grip on the snappy finish. This will be excellent. 2019-2030+. **91-92.**

Domaine Georges Laval “Cumières” Brut Nature NV (Base Year 2012)

The 2012 base year bottling of Cumières Brut Nature will be a bit unique, as in this vintage, rather than its customary fifty percent chardonnay, the *cépages* is one third each of the three principal grape varieties. This is going to be a lovely wine when it blossoms, as it delivers a nascently complex bouquet of pear, apple, orange peel, warm bread and a lovely base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a rock solid core, pinpoint bubbles, and a long, poised and zesty finish. This will not be released into the market

for another year, and will probably want a couple of years' worth of bottle age to blossom once it has arrived to fully blossom. It will be a terrific vintage for this bottling. 2018-2040. **92+**.

Domaine Georges Laval “Cumières” Brut Nature NV (Base Year 2006)

The Cumières Brut Nature bottling from the base year of 2006 is fully mature today and a great bottle of bubbly for current drinking. The deep, complex and very vibrant bouquet delivers scents of pear, tangerine, brioche, a hint of the nuttiness to come with further age, a lovely base of soil and a stylish floral topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and completely *à point*, with fine mid-palate depth, elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and fine focus and grip on the long and energetic finish. Fine, fine juice. 2015-2025+. **92.**



Vincent Laval in his element- in one of his beautifully healthy vineyards in Cumières.

Domaine Georges Laval “Cumières” Brut Nature NV (Base Year 2002)

The 2002 base year bottling of Cumières Brut Nature from Vincent Laval was aged twelve years on its fine lees and disgorged two days prior to our visit. This is a superb wine that shows the depth and structural muscle of the vintage to fine advantage, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, apple, fresh-baked bread, superb minerality, smoke and orange zest. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with lovely complexity, refined *mousse*, racy acids and outstanding length and grip on the focused and very intense finish. This is just starting to drink well, but will easily cruise along for another twenty years. 2015-2035+. **92.**

Domaine Georges Laval “Cumières” Brut Nature NV (Base Year 2000)

In the 2000 vintage there were no single vineyard bottlings produced and all the domaine’s production that was bottled went into the Cumières cuvée. This bottle spent fourteen years *sur latte* and was disgorged three days prior to our visit. It is fully mature and drinking very well today, delivering notes of tangerine, pear, brioche, a touch of almond, lovely soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and wide open on the attack, with a lovely core, good acids, pinpoint bubbles and lovely length and grip on the fully mature finish. This will not make old bones, but for drinking over the next five or six years, there is a lot of pleasure to be had here. 2015-2020+. **90.**

2005 Domaine Georges Laval “Les Chênes” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature

The 2005 Les Chênes from Monsieur Laval is a terrific wine in the making, and following on the heels of the fine mini-vertical of Cumières, it is easy to appreciate that there is more length in the single vineyard cuvées. The superb nose jumps from the glass in a blend of pear, tangerine, *crème patissière*, chalky minerality and orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and starting to blossom very nicely on the attack, with a fine core, lovely purity and focus, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and very classy finish. Great juice. 2015-2035. **94.**

2005 Domaine Georges Laval “Les Hautes Chèvres” Blanc de Noirs Brut Nature

The Les Hautes Chèvres from 2005 is a fine, fine bottle and one of the last to be produced from the old pinot noir vines in this *lieu à dit* that had been planted in 1930. The exceptional bouquet offers up scents of white peach, clementine, pastry, a very complex base of chalky soil tones, citrus zest and smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with refined *mousse*, lovely balance and grip, bright acids and a very long, classy and complex finish. This too is starting to really drink well at age ten and might outlast the lovely 2005 Les Chênes bottling. 2015-2035+. **94+.**

2006 Domaine Georges Laval “Le Meunier de But” Brut Nature NV (Disgorged 2009)

This was a special bottling of pinot meunier only that Monsieur Laval produced only in the 2006 vintage, and which I assume was the dry run for the changeover of the Les Hautes Chèvres bottling to these old vines from the pinot noir off previous incarnations. The wine was not chaptalized and came in at 11.6 percent alcohol naturally and is drinking beautifully today. The bouquet delivers a fine mélange of white peach, apple, *patissière*, delicate meunier floral tones, a touch of almond and really lovely minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and *tout en finesse*, with a great core of fruit, superb transparency, refined *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the focused and racy finish. A beautiful, beautiful bottle of pinot meunier-based bubbly. 2015-2035. **95.**

2012 Domaine Georges Laval “Les Hautes Chèvres” Blanc de Noirs Brut Nature

And the first vintage of Les Hautes Chèvres to be made from these same pinot meunier vines? The cuvée is progressing very nicely, offering up a complex and tangy nose of pink grapefruit, strawberries, complex, chalky minerality, bread dough and discreet meunier floral tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and still youthfully snappy, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, excellent focus and balance and a very long, primary finish. This wine is just starting to show a bit of the creaminess it will have on the attack with more time *sur latte*, and seems destined to be a stunning first iteration of Les Hautes Chèvres in pinot meunier. It still has at least a couple more years to spend on its fine lees, but it is going to be a beautiful wine in due course. 2022-2060. **94+.**

Individual Bottles Tasted in April, May and June

Sparkling Wines

2009 Bride Valley Vintage Brut (England)

Bride Valley is the new sparkling wine project of Steven Spurrier and I had a chance to taste his 2009 Brut while judging with him at the Old Mutual Trophy Wine Show in Paarl in May of this year. This bottling is ninety-five percent chardonnay and five percent pinot noir. These are still very young vines, as this is only their third year, but the wine has turned out very nicely and promises much for the future. The wine spent fifteen months on its fine lees prior to disgorgement and was finished off with a *dosage* of nine grams per liter. The bouquet offers up a stylish blend of lemon, green apple, chalky soil tones and bread dough. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and nicely balanced, with a very good core, frothy *mousse* and good length and grip on the vibrant finish. More complexity will certainly emerge here in the future as the vines get more established, but this is a very tasty bottle for drinking over the next decade. 2015-2025+. **88.**

Non-Vintage Extra Brut and Brut Nature

Benoit Déhu “La Rue des Noyers” Extra Brut NV (Disgorged June 2014)

Benoit Déhu produces this bottling from a 1.7 hectare parcel of vines that he now farms *biodynamically*, having sequestered them off from the larger family vineyard patrimony. The wine is produced from one hundred percent pinot meunier, with the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented and the wine finished with a *dosage* of one gram per liter. There are only two hundred cases of this wine produced and I was fortunate to cross paths with a bottle at Au Bon Manger in Reims during my spring trip. The wine has loads of personality (and is quite similar in some respects to the wines of Vincent Charlot), as it wafts from the glass in a blend of pear, a touch of passion fruit, stony minerality, brioche, vanillin oak and a topnote of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, brisk acids and very good length and grip on the extroverted finish. My only quibble with this wine is the *mousse* here is quite coarse in style and nowhere near as elegant as the bubbles in Monsieur Charlot’s wines, which keeps the score down a touch for my palate. However, if refined *mousse* is not a prerequisite in your bubbly universe, add at least three points to my score, as there is an awful lot to like in this wine. 2015-2025. **89.**

Champagne Grongnet “Carpe Diem” Extra Brut NV (Étoges) Disgorged February 2015

Étoges is located in the extreme southern end of the Côte des Blancs, just west of Vertus, and Cécile Grongnet exploits eighteen hectares of vines in this quiet village. The vineyards are planted to sixty percent chardonnay and twenty percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier. I came across her wines at the Special Club tasting in Reims during my visit, as she was highly recommended by Sébastien Mouzon, and loved everything that I tasted. Her Carpe Diem bottling is a blend of seventy percent chardonnay and fifteen percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier and does not undergo malo. This is from the base year of 2008 and spent fully five and a half years aging on its fine lees! It was finished off with a *dosage* of four grams per liter and offers up a superb nose of white peach, menthol, a complex base of soil tones, smoke, bread dough and an exotic, gentle topnote of botanicals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and exquisitely balanced, with fine core, very elegant *mousse*, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the focused and refined finish. The long aging *sur latte* here has really given this wine depth and dimension. A beautiful bottle of Extra Brut. 2015-2030. **92+.**

Champagne Huré Frères “Mémoire” Extra Brut NV (Ludes) Disgorged August 2014

The new release of Mémoire from Huré Frères is comprised of a blend of ten percent chardonnay and forty-five percent each of pinot meunier and pinot noir. The wine is produced from a base year of 2010, with the inclusion of a significant percentage of reserve wines from solera that was started with the 1982 vintage and spent two years on its fine lees, prior to disgorgement. The wine includes a *dosage* of two grams per liter and offers up a superb nose of apple, peach, a touch of nuttiness, lovely minerality, smoke and sourdough bread. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still on the youthful side, with frothy *mousse*, a lovely core, excellent minerality and a long, focused and snappy finish that closes with a nice touch of blood orange. For lovers of Extra Brut, this wine is already quite tasty, but for many, another year or two of bottle age will allow the pretty brisk structural elements to relax a bit and the wine to really blossom on the palate. It is a very well-made bottle. 2016-2030+. **90+**.

Jacquesson “Cuvée Number 738” Extra Brut NV (Dizy) Disgorged September 2014

Jacquesson’s “Cuvée Number 738” Extra Brut is base year 2010, with one-third of the blend comprised of reserve wines. The *cépages* on this iteration is sixty-one percent chardonnay, eighteen percent pinot noir and twenty-one percent pinot meunier, and was finished with a *dosage* of 2.5 grams per liter. The wine offers up an excellent bouquet of green apple, tart orange, bread dough, chalky minerality and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very well-balanced, with elegant *mousse*, a fine core, definitive minerality and a very long, nascently complex and classy finish. There is not an ounce of austerity in this wine today, and though it is still a puppy and will be even better with a few more years of bottle age, it is imminently drinkable today. A fine example. 2015-2030+. **91+**.

Alexandre Le Brun “Fascination” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Extra Brut (Chouilly)

I like the nose quite well on Alexandre Le Brun’s cuvée “Fascination” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut, but it is not quite as satisfying on the palate. The fine bouquet offers up scents of tart pear, apple, bread dough, chalky minerality and a touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and far less complex than the nose promises, with a moderate core, sound *mousse* and decent, middle of the road length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is okay, but no better, but perhaps this is just reflective of a base year of the difficult 2011 vintage? 2015-2025. **85**.

David Léclapart “l’Artiste” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Premier Cru NV (Trépail)

David Léclapart is one of the most respected young *vignerons* in Champagne, and to the best of my knowledge, this was the first wine I have had a chance to taste from him. The bottle did not have a date of disgorgement on the back label, but the code “L.V08”, which I assume means that this bottle hailed from the base year of 2008. The nose is complex and very vibrant in its blend of apple, pear, a touch of fresh almond, a fine base of soil, white flowers and brioche. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles and very good length and grip on the focused and well-balanced finish. This is a very good bottle of Blanc de Blancs, but even in Reims, it was very expensive and I could not quite correlate the price and the quality of the wine, as there seems to me to be plenty of other producers making wine at this same fine level and selling their bottles for a fraction of this wine. 2016-2030. **91+**.

Champagne Lelarge-Pugeot “les Meuniers de Clemence” Extra Brut NV (Vrigny)

The Champagne Lelarge-Pugeot “les Meuniers de Clemence” Extra Brut non-vintage bottling is from the base year of 2010 and was finished off with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. The wine is young and a touch coarse on the palate, with a pretty straightforward nose of apple, spring flowers, bread dough and stony minerality. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and

has a good core, with fairly large, unsophisticated bubbles, moderate, youthful complexity, but quite solid length and grip on the sturdy finish. This is okay, but no better. 2015-2023. **87.**

Pehu-Simonet “Transparence” Grand Cru Extra Brut NV (Verzenay) Disgorged- 9/13

David Pehu has been in charge of his family’s domaine in Verzenay since 1995, having studied oenology in Burgundy prior to taking over the reins of the estate. The family has 7.5 hectares of vines scattered amongst some of Champagne’s finest villages: Verzenay, Verzy, Mailly, Villers-Marmery, Mesnil-sur-Oger and Sillery. As Villers-Marmery is not ranked grand cru, the production from the Pehu family’s 1.5 hectares here are sold off to *Grandes Marques*, so that all of the domaine-bottled wines can be labeled as Grand Cru. The current release of his non-vintage Extra Brut is base year 2009 and comprised of a blend of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay, and contrary to most of the other Pehu-Simonet wines, the *vins clairs* for this bottling underwent malolactic fermentation. The wine offers up a fine nose of tangerine, apple, fresh-baked bread, a complex base of soil and a touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with fine complexity, a serious core of fruit, excellent soil signature and a long, refined and very classy finish. The *mousse* here is exemplary and the three and a half years on the lees has really allowed the wine to blossom nicely from behind its structural elements and offer up excellent drinking right out of the blocks. Serious juice. 2015-2025+. **91+.**



Clément Perseval Extra Brut “Premier Cru” NV (Chamery)

Clément Perseval took over for his father, Gérard, in 2010, at the family domaine in Chamery, which has been growing grass in their vineyards since the 1980s and has completely eschewed the use of herbicides since 2010, so here is another estate making progress in their farming. I have to assume that this bottling of Extra Brut was one of the first crafted after Clément took over, and while it is okay, it showed some signs of growing pains, as it was pretty short on the backend. The very youthful nose offers up scents of green apple, lime peel, a touch of menthol, chalky minerality and bread dough. On the palate the wine is fullish, youthful and bracing, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, and a bit severe on the short finish. Not bad, but there is room for improvement. 2015-2020. **84?**

Clément Perseval Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut “Premier Cru” NV (Chamery)

The current release of Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut from Clément Perseval is about the same level as the straight bottling of Extra Brut, though the wines are quite different in personality. The Blanc de Noirs offers up a rather grassy, almost sauvignon blanc-like bouquet of Granny Smith apples, grass, gooseberry, menthol and a nice signature of soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, simple and rather Cava-like in personality, with pinpoint bubbles, not a whole lot of complexity and pretty gentle acidity on the short finish. As both of these wines from Clément Perseval were bought at retail in the region and I do not have any idea of their provenance, perhaps they were not stored really well? 2015-2020. **84?**

Thomas Perseval “Tradition” Extra Brut NV (Chamery) Disgorged September 2014

I tasted three excellent wines from Thomas Perseval at one of the small growers salons during my visit in Champagne and look forward to visiting him on my next trip to the region. Monsieur Perseval farms two and a half hectares in Chamery, with all of his farming certified organic since 2012. He cultivates the three primary grapes of the region, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier, as well as small amounts of Pinot Blanc, Arbanne and Petit Meslier. These wines are his very first releases, and I was very impressed with everything about them, with the *vins clairs* fermented parcel by parcel in a combination of older *barriques* and enamel-lined tanks, with no cultured yeasts, moderate sulfur regimens and low or no *dosage*. His “Tradition” Brut Zero is comprised of a *cépages* of forty-five percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier and ten percent chardonnay, all base year 2012, with this lovely young wine offering up a precise nose of green apple, lime, bread dough, white flowers and a complex base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and snappy, with a fine core, refined *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the focused and well-balanced finish. This is still a puppy and really deserves a year or two in the cellar to unwind, but it will be an excellent wine once it blossoms fully. 2016-2030. **91.**

Thomas Perseval “Grande Cuvée” Extra Brut NV (Chamery) Disgorged April 2015

Thomas Perseval’s “Grande Cuvée” bottling is comprised of a blend of one-third each of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier, with all of the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented in older casks with indigenous yeasts. This is a full malo wine, which then spends eleven months of extended aging in barrel prior to bottling, which is done without fining or filtration. This is entirely base year 2012 and was finished off with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. The wine is still very young, but offers up outstanding potential in its nascently complex nose of white peach, apple, warm bread, impressive chalky minerality, a bit of *patissière* and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, crisp and full-bodied, with a great core of fruit, refined *mousse*, lovely focus and balance and a long, pure and zesty finish. All this fine young bottle of

Champagne needs is more bottle age to blossom. A very, very impressive inaugural effort from Monsieur Perseval! 2019-2035+. **93.**

Non-Vintage Blanc de Blancs Brut

Pierre Callot “Grande Réserve” Blanc de Blancs 1er Cru Brut NV (Avize)

The current release of Pierre Callot’s “Grande Réserve” Blanc de Blancs was disgorged in July of 2014, after spending twenty-eight months *sur latte*, so that this is primarily base year 2011. The wine is really lovely on the nose, wafting from the glass in a very classy blend of pear, tangerine, a touch of almond paste, chalky soil tones, brioche and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully complex, with a fine core, lovely minerality, brisk acids and slightly coarse bubbles. The finish is fairly long and still quite tightly-knit, as this promising wine could use another year or two in the cellar to fully blossom on the backend. There is a lot of personality here, but I would love to see the *mousse* a bit more refined and the finish a bit longer, as these keeps the wine’s score down just a touch. 2016-2026+. **88+.**

Claude Cazals Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (served from magnum)

I was quite delighted to see this wine being served by the glass from magnum at the fine Bistrot Le 7 in Épernay, which was the finest non-Krug-organized meal I had during my entire trip to Champagne. This is a lovely wine, but it is still a bit young from magnum for current drinking, as it offers up a stylishly youthful nose of pear, orange, chalky minerality, citrus peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and snappy, with fine mid-palate depth, frothy *mousse* and fine length and grip on the decidedly still brisk finish. Good juice in need of more bottle age- at least in magnum. 2017-2035. **89+.**

Gaston Chiquet “Blanc de Blancs d’Aÿ” Grand Cru Brut NV (Dizy) Disgorged Oct. 2014

Aÿ is pinot noir territory and a Blanc de Blancs bottling from chardonnay vines in this village is clearly a rarity, and in fact, there is only one other chardonnay-based bottling produced exclusively from fruit from Aÿ. As this wine is aged around two years on its fine lees, this is base year 2011, so perhaps this is a bit more difficult of a year to work with in the region. The nose offers up an enticing blend of pear, peach, some buttery tones, a lovely base of Aÿ soil, smoke and brioche. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very tightly-knit, with a fine core, fairly large, coarse bubbles, crisp acids and very good length and grip on the still very primary finish. Today, this seems a bit four-square in style, but perhaps it is just still too young and more refinement will emerge with a bit more bottle age. If this happens, my score will seem conservative. 2016-2025+. **87+.**

Dalys Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Cramant)

This grower was completely new to me, but I had the opportunity to taste a bottle during one of my days in the region in April. The estate farms all of its vineyard organically, but the wine is a bit lacking in complexity and is in the good, but not great camp of quality. The nose is straightforward, but not bad, as it offers up scents of apple, orange zest, chalky minerality and brioche. On the palate the wine is deep and full-bodied, albeit, a bit four-square, with frothy *mousse* and good length and grip on the simple, but tasty finish. Not a bad drink, but not in the top division of grower bubbly. 2015-2025. **87.**

Pierre Gimmonet et Fils “Cuvée Cuis” Premier Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Cuis)

The current release of the Cuvée Cuis from Pierre Gimmonet et Fils is base year 2010, with reserve wines blended in from 2009, 2007 and 2002. It is fermented entirely in stainless steel and spend thirty months aging on its fine lees prior to disgorgement in July of 2014. The wine offers up a lovely bouquet of apple, nutskin, chalky soil tones, brioche and a smoky

topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and still a touch youthfully coarse in texture, with a good core, fairly large bubbles and good length and grip on the still fairly primary finish. This is not overly complex, but part of this may be the relative youth of the wine and another six to twelve months of bottle age may allow more complexity to emerge. It is a good, solid wine, but not in the league with most of the Gimmonet wines I tasted for this report. 2016-2025. **87+**.

Godmé Père et Fils Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Verzenay) Disgorged Dec. 2014

Hughes Godmé is really on a hot streak right now and all of the Godmé Père et Fils bottlings are exceptional in their current releases. The non-vintage Blanc de Blancs includes sixty percent barrel-fermented *vins clairs* and is a blend of thirty-five percent 2010, twenty-five percent each of 2008 and 2007 and fifteen percent 2006, so there is a nice range of reserve wines in this bottling this year. The wine was finished off with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter and offers up a lovely, youthful bouquet of apple, chalky soil tones, warm biscuits and a touch of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with brisk acids, excellent focus and grip, pinpoint bubbles and a long, primary finish. This is going to be a lovely bottle, but it is still quite young and needs a couple of years in the cellar to relax a bit structurally. 2017-2035. **92**.

Paul Goerg Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Vertus)

The current release of Paul Goerg's non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is a good solid bottle, offering up scents of apple, pastry cream, fresh-baked bread, chalk and a touch of vanilla in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and well-balanced, with a good core, refined *mousse* and quite good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is a good example of its genre, with its three years aging on its fine lees prior to disgorgement allowing the structure to nicely mellow and the wine to come into very good balance. 2015-203. **89**.

Champagne Grongnet Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Étoges) Disgorged February 2015

The Grongnet non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is a fine example. Two-thirds of the *vins clairs* for this bottling are barrel-fermented, with the other third in stainless steel. This is from the base year of 2011 and was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The wine wafts from the glass in a very refined and pure nose of apple, pear, pastry cream, chalky soil tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with frothy *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and classy finish. Given that this is from the weak year of 2011, this is all the more impressive! Fine juice. 2015-2025+. **91+**.

Jean Milan "Spécial" Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut NV (Oger) Disgorged June 2013

Champagne Jean Milan is now run by the sister and brother team of Caroline and Jean-Charles Milan, with their non-vintage Blanc de Blancs bottling spending three years aging *sur latte*. The current release is a blend of 2009 and 2008 vintage fruit, with all of the *vins clairs* going through full malo. The wine is quite typical of Oger, with a more muscular style and superb depth and nascent complexity in evidence on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a fine blend of pear, brioche, a nice touch of chalky soil tones, a bit of hazelnut and incipient notes of *crème patissière* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with an excellent core, pinpoint bubbles, good acids and fine length and grip on the long and gently leesy finish. This is a bottling of Blanc de Blancs that does not really emphasize its fruit component, as the longer time on the lees has given a nice sheen of yeast autolysis notes to the wine, but it is deep, complex and broad-shouldered in the style of Oger and really a very good bottle of non-vintage Brut. 2015-2025. **91**.

Jean Milan “Grande Réserve 1864” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut NV (Oger)

The Jean Milan Grande Réserve bottling is aged under cork, rather than crown cap, with the current release a blend of the 2005 and 2004 vintages. The *vins clairs* for this bottling are all barrel-fermented in older casks. It was disgorged in August of 2014 and was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter, after spending eight years aging on its fine lees. The wine offers up an excellent bouquet of pear, apple, lemon peel, chalky minerality, fresh-baked bread, just a touch of oak and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite youthfully structured, with a rock solid core, brisk acids, slightly coarse *mousse* and very good length and grip on the broad-shouldered and youthful finish. This is one hundred percent Oger fruit, and that translates into a wine of depth and muscle when young, so give this some bottle age to fully blossom, as it should prove to be very tasty when ready to drink. 2018-2035. **91+.**

Pierre Péters “Cuvée de Réserve” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The current release of Pierre Péters “Cuvée de Réserve” Blanc de Blancs non-vintage Brut was disgorged in February of 2015 and includes forty percent reserve wines, from the domaine’s solera, which was started in 1988. This is primarily base year 2012 and the wine was finished with a *dosage* of just over six grams per liter. The bouquet is deep and fairly youthful, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, delicious apple, pastry cream, chalky soil tones, spring flowers and fresh almond. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite powerful in style in the classic Mesnil profile, with a rock solid core, brisk acids, slightly coarse *mousse*, fine focus and nascent complexity on the long, crisp and well-balanced finish. This is still a puppy, and while it is quite approachable today, it really needs at least a few years in the cellar to blossom more fully. It will be a very good bottle in the fullness of time, but never the most elegant of bubbliés. 2018-2035+. **91.**

Jacques Selosse “Initial” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Avize) Disgorged July 2012

This release of Initial from Anselme Selosse is absolutely beautiful and drinking with great style and complexity today. The superb bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of apple, pear, buttered biscuits, chalky soil tones, a discreet framing of buttery oak and a delicate topnote of fresh nutmeg. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a great core of fruit, superb soil signature, frothy *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly balanced and very, very classy finish. A gorgeous bottle of *à point* Blanc de Blancs with years and years of life still ahead of it. 2015-2030+. **94.**

Jacques Selosse “Version Originale” Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Avize)

The Version Originale bottling from Anselme Selosse hails entirely from fruit in the grand cru villages of Avize, Cramant and Oger, with the wine spending fully seven years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement in October of 2010, making this particular bottle base year 2002. The wine is finished off with a very minimal *dosage* of 1.3 grams per liter. The wine is deeper and more powerful in personality than the Initial, but I am not sure if it is actually superior, or just different stylistically. The outstanding bouquet delivers a constellation of pear, lemon, chalky minerality, brioche, spring flowers, a touch of oak influence and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with a rock solid core, very refined *mousse*, laser-like focus and great grip on the very long, intensely-flavored finish. This is another absolutely gorgeous bottle of bubbly. 2015-2030+. **94+.**



Tennis Club Avize “Côte des Blancs” Brut NV (Disgorged July 2014)

The Tennis Club Avize owns a small parcel of vines and has a bit of bubbly made to serve at the club to members and guests over at the fine cooperative in Mesnil. This is really quite a nice wine, albeit still quite young, as it offers up scents of lemon, pear, chalky soil tones, bread dough and a nice touch of spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and well-balanced, with elegant *mousse*, zesty acids and pretty good length and grip on the vibrant finish. Not bad at all and really went well with the tennis tournament I was watching at the club on a sunny Sunday morning. 2015-2022. **87.**

Non-Vintage Blanc de Noirs Brut

Cédric Bouchard “Inflorescence” Blanc de Noirs Brut NV (Celles-sur-Ource)

As Monsieur Bouchard has recently switched his labeling concept to bottle everything under his Roses de Jeanne label, this is the bottling that will be known as Côte de Béchalain “la Parcelle” (for the vineyard from which it is produced) beginning with the 2014 disgorgement. However, this bottle was disgorged in April of 2013, so it is still under the Inflorescence label. The wine is produced entirely from pinot noir and is simply outstanding, wafting from the glass in a complex and classy blend of apple, peach, a complex base of chalky soil tones, orange blossoms, brioche and just a hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very minerally in personality, with a lovely core, gently frothy *mousse*, fine cut and grip and a long, very elegant and complex finish. A beautiful bottle of bubbly. 2015-2030+. **94.**

Egly-Ouriet “les Crayères” Blanc de Noirs Brut NV (Ambonnay) Disgorged July 2014

Egly-Ouriet’s non-vintage Blanc de Noirs spent five years aging *sur latte* and is from the base year of 2008, with forty percent of the blend coming from the previous year. It is made entirely from pinot noir from the superb *lieu à dit* of les Crayères in Ambonnay, which is also the source of one of Benoit Marguet’s finest bottlings. The *vins clairs* here are barrel-fermented and the wine is finished with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. The wine offers up a superb nose of peach, bread dough, incipient walnut, stunningly complex minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite powerful in personality, with a rock solid core, lovely focus, frothy *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the still youthful and nascently complex finish. There is a firm spine of acidity here that argues for further bottle age for this excellent wine, but it is certainly accessible today and hardly a crime to be drinking it now—despite it obviously having decades ahead of it. Fine, fine juice. 2015-2035. **92+**.

D. Henriët-Bazin Blanc de Noirs Grand Cru Brut NV (Villers-Marmery)

The current release of Blanc de Noirs from Henriët-Bazin is comprised entirely of pinot noir and spent three years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. It was finished with thirty percent reserve wine from the *maison*’s solera. The bouquet shows nice elements of maturity in its mélange of apple, tangerine, brioche, plenty of smokiness, white flowers and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, elegant *mousse*, zesty acids and good length and grip on the finish. This is not the most elegant of wines today on the backend, but perhaps more refinement will emerge with further bottle age? It is certainly long on personality. 2015-2025+. **90+**.

Moussé Fils “Noire Réserve” Blanc de Noirs Brut NV (Cuisles) Disgorged March 2014

The current release of Moussé Fils “Noire Réserve” is a lovely and elegant wine that shows its pinot meunier influence to fine effect. This is fifty-five percent base year 2009 and forty-five percent reserve wines and is still on the young side for primetime drinking. The lovely nose offers up an elegant mélange of white peach, pastry, chalky soil tones, gentle meunier floral nuances and an exotic touch of fresh nutmeg in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite brisk, with a fine core, very good balance, pinpoint bubbles and good, solid length and grip on the focused finish. I would love this wine to be just a touch longer on the finish, but this is a small issue. The wine should really blossom with a few more years of bottle age. 2016-2030+. **89+**.

Serveaux Fils “Carte Noire” Brut NV (Passy-sur-Marne)

The Serveaux Fils “Carte Noire” is not marked on the label as a Blanc de Noirs, but with a *cépages* of fifty percent each pinot noir and pinot meunier, it seems it should be listed here. The Serveaux family puts all of their *vins clairs* through full malo and uses twenty-five percent reserve wines in this blend. The current release of Carte Noire is base year 2011 and offers up a very pretty nose of apple, discreet floral tones, *patissière*, lovely minerality and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and nicely light on its feet, with frothy *mousse*, bright acids and very good length and grip on the finish. This is not the most complex bottle of bubbly, but it is poised, vibrant and very tasty and a very fine effort for the difficult year of 2011. 2015-2025. **90**.

Non-Vintage Brut**L. Aubry Fils “Premier Cru” Brut NV (Jouy-les-Reims) Disgorged July 2014**

The current release of non-vintage Brut from L. Aubry Fils is base year 2010, with forty-five percent of the blend comprised of reserve wines. The Aubry family has been working on a

solera for their reserve wines since the 1998 vintage, with a bit more than half of the reserve wines in this blend hailing from this solera (and the remainder presumably 2009 juice). The *cépages* of the bottling is forty-five percent Pinot Meunier, twenty-five percent each of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir and five percent of classic, old school grapes like Arbanne and Petit Meslier, with all the wines fermented in stainless steel and going through full malo. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up scents of apple, bread fruit, lovely soil tones, fresh-baked bread, a hint of menthol and a discreet topnote of lime zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite complex, with a fine core, lovely mineral drive, slightly large bubbles, but fine length and grip on the crisp finish. The fruit tones here play more of a supporting role than in many other non-vintage Brut bottlings, as the minerality and bread flavors are quite dominant, but this wine is very nicely balanced and works very well at the table, with its quite low *dosage* for a Brut wine. Good juice. 2015-2025+. **90.**

Le Brun Servenay “Brut Selection” Grand Cru NV (Avize)

The Brut Selection from Le Brun Servenay is comprised entirely of chardonnay from the three grand cru villages of Cramant, Avize and Oger, though it is not labeled as a Blanc de Blancs. The wine is aged for three years on the fine lees, with the malos blocked for the *vins clairs* and the wine finished off with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The current release is base year 2011, with reserve wines back to 2008 included and the bottling was disgorged in December of 2014. Today, this is still a very young wine, but with plenty of promise for down the road. The youthful bouquet is a blend of apple, tart pear, chalky minerality, a touch of smokiness and bread dough. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely mineral, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, plenty of acidity and a long, focused and still quite primary finish. There is a touch of youthful greenness here on the backend that needs to be waited out, but a year from now, this wine should be singing and be an outstanding drink. 2016-2033+. **90+.**

Joseph Desruets “Premier Cru” Brut NV (Hautvillers)

The current release of the Joseph Desruets non-vintage Brut is a pretty modest effort, offering up a simple and quite appley nose of apple, gentle minerality, a touch of grapefruit and some toasted bread. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, simple and shows a bit of candied fruit at the core, with elegant *mousse* and solid length on the simple finish. This would be okay for airplane bubbly in the back of the plane, but that is about as far as I would go for a glass of this juice. 2015-2020+. **85.**

Champagne Duc de Romet “Brut Prestige” NV (Vandières) Disgorged February 2015

Champagne is blessed with several very high quality cooperatives, and this bottling hails from the co-op in Vandières, with the final blending done by Jean-Baptiste Geoffroy. All of the fruit comes from the village of Vandières, which is just west of Cumières on the Marne River. The current release is a blend of seventy-five percent pinot meunier and twenty-five percent pinot noir and offers up a lovely nose of white peach, apple, musky meunier floral tones, a bit of brioche and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and a bit simple, with a good core, rather coarse *mousse*, a good core of fruit and a long, minerally and youthfully snappy finish that closes with a touch of youthful bitterness and wants for a bit of bottle age to blossom more completely. This is not bad and priced fairly, but I would love to see a bit more refinement on the palate and more length. 2016-2025. **87.**

Egly-Ouriet “Brut Tradition” Grand Cru Brut NV (Ambonnay) Disgorged July 2014

The current release of Egly-Ouriet’s “Brut Tradition” is base year 2009 and spent four years aging on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. Fifty percent of its blend is reserve wines, with thirty percent from 2008 and twenty percent from 2007. All the fruit hails from the vineyards in

the three grand cru villages of Ambonnay, Bouzy and Verzenay. The *cépages* is seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay and the wine was finished with a low *dosage* of four grams per liter. The bouquet is deep and nascently complex, offering up scents of apple, almond, beautifully complex soil tones, a touch of pastry and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, broad-shouldered and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and grip, brisk acids and superb length and grip on the still very primary finish. The only thing here that keeps its score down a bit is the coarseness of the *mousse*, as this wine has everything else one could ever ask for in a young Champagne. But, given how superb all the other elements are here, should not the bubbles also be impeccable? For those who do not really care about how refined the *mousse* is in their bubbly, add three points! 2017-2030. **89.**

Champagne Geoffroy “Brut Expression” Premier Cru NV (Aÿ) Disgorged Jan. 2014

The current release of Brut Expression from Jean-Baptiste Geoffroy is from the base year of 2010, with thirty-five percent of the cuvée *vin reserve* from 2009. The *vins clairs* do not undergo malo and its *cépages* is forty-three percent pinot meunier, thirty-two percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent chardonnay. The wine spent two and a half years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The bouquet is a bright and classy blend of apple, *patissière*, a discreet touch of tangerine, lovely soil nuances and gentle nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite young and racy, with a lovely core, pinpoint bubbles, fine focus and very good length and grip on the still quite primary finish. This could use a year or two to settle in, but will be a lovely wine once it really blossoms from behind its girdle of acidity. 2017-2030+. **90+.**

Henri Goutorbe “Brut Tradition” NV (Aÿ)

I have had a few wines from Henri Goutorbe over the years and quite liked what I have tasted. This bottle was tasted at a restaurant in Aÿ in April, so I do not have any pertinent background information regarding *cépages* or date of disgorgement. The current release of the house’s Brut Tradition is still on the young side, but well-made, as it offers up a bouquet of apple, orange, fresh-baked bread, chalky soil tones and a touch of high end smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and a bit of youthful, bracing acidity perking up the really quite long and promising finish. This is good solid juice in the making, but it really could use a year or two in the cellar to soften up a bit. 2016-2026. **88+.**

Henri Goutorbe “Cuvée Prestige” Premier Cru Brut NV (Aÿ) Disgorged April 2014

The Goutorbe family owns fully twenty-five hectares of vines, with only six hectares in their home village of Aÿ, and other parcels held in the fine premier cru villages of Mareuil-sur-Aÿ, Hautvillers, Mutigny and Bisseuil. The family’s Cuvée Prestige obviously uses fruit from some of these premier cru vineyards as well, and hence the Premier Cru notation on the label. The wine is comprised of a blend of seventy percent pinot noir, twenty-five percent chardonnay and five percent pinot meunier and is aged *sur latte* for three years, making this release base year 2010. My only complaint with this wine, and this is not usually an issue that particularly bothers me, is that the *dosage* is perhaps overly generous and adds a strange, sweet-sour component on the youthful backend of this bottle. The nose is lovely, as it offers up scents of apple, white peach, a touch of brioche, a superb base of soil tones and a very gentle, floral topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core, slightly coarse *mousse* and good length and grip on the still young and snappy finish. If this has been more recently disgorged, I might have put down the backend sweetness to simply having not recovered fully from the *dégorgement*, but more than a year out from this, it seems quite clear that whatever the

dosage was this year for the Cuvée Prestige, it was too much. There are really some lovely materials here and it is still a good wine, but not harmonious today on the backend. 2017-2030. **88.**

Alfred Gratien Brut NV (Épernay)

I am very happy to see Alfred Gratien now in New York with a new importer, as I have liked these wines very much in the past and found the range of samples that the importer sent me this June absolutely superb across the board. The house ages its *vins clairs* in old oak barrels for six months prior to making their *assemblages* and each bottling spends a minimum of thirty-six months aging on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. None of their *vins clairs* go through malolactic. The current release of their non-vintage Brut offers up an precise and complex nose of apple, white peach, a touch of *patissière*, a lovely base of chalky soil tones, brioche and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep,. Full-bodied, crisp and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the focused and classy finish. An excellent non-vintage Brut. 2015-2025+. **91+.**

Champagne Grongnet “Cuvée Tradition” Brut NV (Étoges) Disgorged February 2015

Cécile Grongnet’s non-vintage Cuvée Tradition has to be one of the best values out there in the world of Champagne right now, as this really lovely wine is from the base year of 2008! The *cépages* here is sixty percent chardonnay and twenty percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier, with the chardonnay barrel-fermented and none of the *vins clairs* going through malolactic fermentation. The wine offers up a superb aromatic constellation of apple, peach, a complex base of soil, a touch of *patissière*, spring flowers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and again, impeccably balanced, with very refined *mousse*, a lovely core, superb focus and grip, bright acids and a long, poised and complex finish. This is really an absolutely terrific bottle of Brut NV! 2015-2030+. **92.**

Marc Hébrart “Cuvée de Réserve” Premier Cru NV (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ) Disgorged July 2014

Jean-Paul Hébrart’s Cuvée de Réserve bottling of non-vintage Brut is quite a pinot noir-based wine, with eighty-one percent of the *cépages* comprised of this grape and nineteen percent made up of chardonnay (all of which hails from Mareuil). The nose is lovely, wafting from the glass in a bright and vibrant mélange of apple, gentle tangerine, a touch of almond paste, a lovely and complex base of soil tones, brioche and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and complex, with slightly coarse *mousse*, a lovely core, fine focus and grip and a long, zesty and well-balanced finish. This is a very tasty bottle of non-vintage Brut, with superb aromatic complexity and good depth on the palate, but the bubbles are not as refined as in Monsieur Hébrart’s Brut Sélection bottling and keep the score down just a touch. 2015-2025+. **89.**

Marc Hébrart “Brut Sélection” Premier Cru NV (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ) Disgorged May 2014

The current release of Jean-Paul Hébrart’s non-vintage “Brut Sélection” bottling is comprised of a blend of sixty-five percent pinot noir and thirty-five percent chardonnay and offers up a youthful and very classy nose of white peach, apple, spring flowers, chalky soil tones, a touch of *patissière* and a bit of fresh almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and elegant in style, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, crisp acids and lovely length and grip on the bright and youthful finish. This is a high-toned and very classy bottle of non-vintage Brut that is quite accessible today, but will be even better with a bit of bottle age. 2015-2030. **91.**

Charles Heidsieck Brut NV (Reims) Disgorged 2012

This particular bottling of Charles Heidsieck non-vintage Brut was drunk at the very pleasant Reims restaurant of Brasserie le Boulingrin. The wine hails from the base year of 2008 and is drinking very well indeed at the present time, but clearly has a couple of decades of potential longevity in it as well. The excellent nose offers up a developing blend of apple, pear, fresh-baked bread, a complex base of soil tones, a touch of hazelnut and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and rock solid at the core, with elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a very long, complex and classy finish. This wine showed just a touch of vanilla bean in the bouquet with extended aeration, but to my knowledge, all of the *vins clairs* here are fermented in stainless steel! Lovely juice. 2015-2035. **92+**.

Jean Lallement et Fils “Cuvée Réserve” Brut NV (Verzenay) Disgorged July 2014

The current release of Jean Lallement et Fils “Cuvée Réserve” non-vintage Brut is comprised of his classic blend of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay, with this bottling made from vineyards all in excess of thirty years of age. The *vins clairs* went through malolactic fermentation and the wine is aged fully five years on the fine lees prior to disgorgement. The bouquet is deep and young, wafting from the glass in a blend of tart apple, a bit of grapefruit, lovely soil tones, bread dough, gentle smokiness and a touch of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very primary, with a rock solid core, slightly coarse *mousse*, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the still very youthful finish. This is stylistically a bit blunt in its youth, with the muscle of Montagne de Reims pinot noir quite in evidence, but with a bit of bottle age, this could be a really special bottle and I would not be surprised to see it blossom and merit a higher score. 2018-2030. **90+**.

Lanson “Extra Age” Brut NV (Reims) Disgorged November 2012

This particular bottle of Lanson “Extra Age” is drinking marvelously today, as it offers up a deep and wide open nose of apple, fresh-baked bread, a touch of tangerine, lovely soil tones, dried flowers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, lovely focus and balance, elegant *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the *à point* finish. This still has plenty of life ahead of it, but the wine has reached its apogee of peak drinkability and is really hitting on all cylinders. 2015-2030. **92+**.

Pierre Lebeouf “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Aÿ) Half Bottle

The non-vintage Pierre Lebeouf “Grand Cru” Brut is a good, solid bottle of bubbly, but not quite in the first division. I crossed paths with this wine at the fine Rotisserie Henry IV in the village center of Aÿ. The wine offers up a pretty, pinot noir dominated nose of white peach, apple, bread dough, smoke and chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, with crisp acids, fine *mousse* and very good length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This will be better with another year in bottle and is not a bad bottle by any means. 2016-2023. **88**.

Rémy Massin et Fils “Brut Tradition” NV (Ville-sur-Arce)

The current release of Rémy Massin et Fils non-vintage “Brut Tradition” is comprised of a blend of eighty-five percent pinot noir, ten percent chardonnay and five percent pinot meunier. Fifty percent of the cuvée is from the base year of 2012 and twenty-five percent each of 2010 and 2009. It was finished with a *dosage* of nine grams per liter and offers up a youthfully promising nose of apple, white peach, bread dough, stony minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and still youthfully brisk, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the well-balanced and primary finish. This needs a few years to blossom, but will be very good indeed once it relaxes a bit structurally. 2017-2030+. **90**.

Rémy Massin et Fils “Cuvée Louis-Aristide” NV (Ville-sur-Arce)

The Cuvée Louis Aristide from Rémy Massin et Fils is named in honor of the founder of the family domaine, Louis-Aristide Massin and is comprised entirely of pinot noir, which is produced from a solera that the estate began twelve years ago. The wine offers up lovely complexity on both the nose and palate, but seemed just a touch short at the Special Club tasting, but I would welcome an opportunity to retaste it, as this was hardly under ideal conditions with the festive crowd pressing in on all sides! The bouquet is a blend of apple, bread fruit, stony minerality, biscuits and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, elegant *mousse*, and, as mentioned above, not the greatest length on the well-balanced finish. However, other than the relatively short finish, there is nothing here not to like! It could use a couple of years in the cellar to more fully blossom on the palate. 2017-2030. **89.**

Pehu Simonet “Face Nord” Grand Cru Brut NV (Verzenay) Disgorged January 2014

The Pehu Simonet “Face Nord” non-vintage Brut is comprised of a blend of seventy percent pinot noir (from the villages of Verzenay and Verzy) and thirty percent chardonnay (all from Verzenay). The *vins clairs* for this bottling are fermented and raised in stainless steel and does not undergo malolactic fermentation. The bouquet is deep, youthful and zesty, as it jumps from the glass in a blend of pear, white peach, citrus zest, a touch of *patissière*, an excellent base of complex minerality and a discreet topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a lovely core, frothy *mousse* and fine focus and grip on the long and vibrant finish. Lovely juice that should age very well indeed, but is already quite tasty. 2015-2030. **91.**

René Roger “Brut Tradition” NV (Aÿ)

This wine was being poured by the glass at the very good Rotisserie Henry IV in Aÿ. The wine is okay, but not up to the quality of the food here, which can be very, very tasty. The wine offers up a fairly discreet nose of apple, warm bread, a touch of minerality and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and really a bit lacking in complexity, with a respectable core, elegant *mousse* and good acids, but a touch of greenness defining the not particularly long finish. This is okay, but no better (and I wish I had ordered the Henri Goutorbe instead). 2015-2025. **84.**

Camille Savès “Carte d’Or Grand Cru Brut NV (Bouzy) Disgorged March 2014

The new release of the Camille Savès “Carte d’Or is comprised of a blend of seventy-five percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent chardonnay, with all of the fruit hailing from the family vineyards in Bouzy. The current bottling is from the base year of 2009, with the balance of the blend reserve juice from 2008. As is the house style here, the *vins clairs* did not go through malo and the wine was aged fully four years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The bouquet is a blend of apple, pear, a touch of fresh almond, warm bread, a fine base of chalky soil tones and a dollop of honeycomb in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, bright acids and good length and grip on the finish. This is a very good bottle, but it does not seem quite as precisely focused as previous incarnations- perhaps this is just the stage I caught it in? 2015-2030. **90+?**

Serveaux Fils “Carte d’Or” Brut NV (Passy-sur-Marne)

The Serveaux Fils “Carte d’Or” bottling is comprised of a blend of sixty percent chardonnay, thirty percent pinot meunier and ten percent pinot noir, and the current release is base year 2011. The wine is drinking very well out of the blocks, offering up a bouquet of apple, lemon, a bit of warm bread, gentle smokiness and a nice base of minerality. On the palate the

wine is deep, complex and full-bodied, with a good core, lovely balance, frothy *mousse*, a wide open personality and good length and grip on the bouncy finish. This has a bit more complexity than the Carte Noire bottling from the family, but shares the same easy-going style. 2015-2025. **90+**.

Taittinger “Folies de la Marquetterie” Brut NV (Reims) 2014 Release

I do not have exact information about when this was released, but it had been in my friend’s cellar since last year. This is Taittinger’s single vineyard bottling from their vines in Pierry that surround their *grand maison* in that village, with the *cépages* fifty-five percent pinot noir and forty-five percent chardonnay. The wine is aged fully five years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement, so this is most likely base year 2008. This is a cuvée from Taittinger that I have routinely enjoyed, but this particular iteration was not singing and seemed a bit muddled from *battonage* and more leesy than precise on the nose and palate. It is also still very young, so perhaps I just caught it in a particularly leesy and awkward phase? The complex nose offers up scents of peach, citrus peel, brioche, sweet almond and plenty of smokiness to go along with all that leesiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy, with a very good core, elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the finish. The *dosage* this year also seems more generous than usual. This iteration of Folies de la Marquetterie clearly still needs some bottle age, and as my friend bought a case, I hope to have the chance to revisit this wine in a few years’ time and see how it is developing. I will report on this year’s release in the next issue and it will be interesting to compare it to this bottling. 2018-2030. **85-89+?**

Varnier-Fannièrre “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Avize) Disgorged June 2014

The non-vintage Brut from Varnier-Fannièrre is aged for two and a half years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, making this wine primarily from the base year of 2011, with thirty percent of 2010 and 2009 blended in as reserve wines. Though the label does not mention it, I assume this is a Blanc de Blancs, as Monsieur Varnier only has vines in the villages of Avize, Cramant and Oiry. The wine is still fairly young on the nose, but deep and promising, as it offers up scents of pear, delicious apple, chalky minerality, a touch of fresh almond and a topnote of brioche. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, nascently complex and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, slightly large bubbles, brisk acids and fine length and grip on the youthful finish. This needs a bit of bottle age to blossom, but should be a good bottle once it has come into its own, though it is not the most elegant of renditions of non-vintage Brut. 2017-2030+. **88+**.

Vilmart et Cie “Grand Cellier” Brut NV (Rilly la Montagne) Disgorged May 2014

The current release of Grand Cellier from Vilmart et Cie is comprised of a blend of seventy percent chardonnay and thirty percent pinot noir and is from the base year of 2010, with wines from 2009 and 2008 blended in as reserves. The *vins clairs* here do not go through malo and the wine spends ten months aging in barrel prior to bottling for extended aging on its lees, which was two and a half years prior to this disgorgement. The wine offers up a superb and very refined nose of apple, white peach, a fine base of soil, gentle smokiness, pastry and a touch of fresh almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is far less polite than the nose suggests today, with its full-bodied format still a bit youthfully brusque with bracing acids and a bit of non-integrated oak elements, but with a good core and impressive length and grip. The *mousse* here is very elegant and this wine could seemingly come together seamlessly on the palate with some bottle age, in which case the enormous promise of the nose will be realized on the palate. On the other hand, it has a way to go right now and it is no certainty that the palate will eventually catch up with the superb bouquet. Faith is required, as well as bottle age. This wine has a 93 point nose- let’s hope the palate can play catch up with bottle age! 2018-2030. **89-93?**



Non-Vintage Brut and Extra Brut Rosé

Gaston Chiquet Premier Cru Brut Rosé NV (Dizy) Disgorged October 2013

The current release of the Gaston Chiquet non-vintage Brut Rosé is base year 2009 and is comprised of a blend of forty percent pinot meunier, and thirty percent each of pinot noir and chardonnay. Fully eighteen percent of the cuvée is still red wine (both pinot noir and meunier I assume) and the wine was aged an impressive three-plus years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The lovely salmon-colored wine offers up a quite vinous nose of peach, tangerine, plenty of smoky overtones, rye bread, a fine base of soil tones and just a touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite soil-driven in personality, with a very good core, frothy *mousse*, crisp acids and good length and grip on the focused and fairly complex finish. There is not a ton of fruit in evidence here on the palate, but the wine is well-balanced and is very good at the table. 2015-2023+. **89.**

Egly-Ouriet “Grand Cru” Brut Rosé NV (Ambonnay) Disgorged July 2014

The new release of Egly-Ouriet’s non-vintage Brut Rosé spent four years aging *sur latte*, with sixty percent of the blend base year 2009 and the remainder a blend of 2008 and 2007 juice. The *cépages* is sixty-five percent pinot noir and thirty-five percent chardonnay. The complex bouquet on this fairly pale salmon rosé is excellent, offering up a fine constellation of strawberries, tangerine, chalky soil tones, bread dough, orange peel, gentle smokiness and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and fairly tightly-knit, with a fine core, low *dosage*, elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the focused and

classy finish. This is tasty today, but it really deserves two or three years in the cellar to really blossom and start to drink with some secondary layers of generosity. Classy juice. 2017-2030. **91+**.

Champagne Geoffroy “Rosé de Saignée” Premier Cru Brut NV (Aÿ) Disgorged 9/14

The current release of the Champagne Geoffroy “Rosé de Saignée” non-vintage Brut is a typically dark, cherry red color and is comprised of one hundred percent pinot noir, with all of the fruit hailing from vineyards in the village of Cumières. The wine does not undergo malo and was aged for two and a half years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The wine exudes tons of personality on the nose, as it offers up scents of cherries, blood orange, rye toast, a good base of soil tones, a touch of cinnamon and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a rock solid core, brisk acids, slightly coarse *mousse* and good length and grip on the youthful and vibrant finish. For those who prize elegant texture in their Champagne, this wine will not deliver the goods, but for those who are looking for loads of personality and a vinous style of Brut Rosé, there is plenty here to like. I would like to see the bubbles more refined, but this is good juice. 2015-2025+. **90**.

Paul Goerg Brut Rosé NV (Vertus)

Paul Goerg’s non-vintage Brut Rosé is comprised of a blend of eighty-five percent chardonnay and fifteen percent pinot noir and is aged *sur latte* for three years prior to disgorgement. The current release is a pale salmon color and offers up a stylish nose of melon, tangerine, a bit of smokiness, chalky and orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and nicely balanced, with good mid-palate depth, pinpoint bubbles, bright acids and good length and grip on the lively finish. This is not particularly complex, but it hits all the right notes within its more limited range. 2015-2020. **88**.

Alfred Gratien Brut Rosé NV (Épernay)

The current release of Alfred Gratien’s non-vintage Brut Rosé is a lovely wine that shows a lovely salmon color and offers up a fine nose of melon, strawberries, warm bread, a hint of cinnamon, chalky soil tones and a touch of orange blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and zesty, with a fine core of fruit, lovely soil signature, elegant *mousse* and fine length and grip on the vibrant and complex finish. Lovely juice that has a very modest level of *dosage* and really works well at the table. 2015-2025. **90**.

Alfred Gratien “Cuvée Paradis” Brut Rosé NV (Épernay)

The Alfred Gratien “Cuvée Paradis” Rosé is a beautiful young wine, but it still could do with a bit of bottle age to really blossom from behind its considerable girdle of acidity. Like all of the Alfred Gratien wines, this is a non-malo Champagne and is built to age long and gracefully. The color is a gentle salmon and the nose offers up a young, complex and very promising constellation of tangerine, rye toast, lovely soil tones, a bit of cinnamon and clove, citrus peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and zesty, with a superb core, great elegance and focus, refined *mousse* and a long, vibrant and youthful finish. This is certainly approachable today, but it will be drinking even better three or four years down the road and should age beautifully. 2015-2030+. **93+**.

Champagne Grongnet “Cuvée Rosé” Brut NV (Étoges)

The Champagne Grongnet non-vintage Brut Rosé is comprised of a blend of forty-five percent each of chardonnay and pinot meunier and ten percent pinot noir, with the pinot noir added as a still wine. As this was the end of the Special Club tasting, I was a bit rushed and did not have a chance to ask what was the base year here, but I did note that the wine does not undergo malo and was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. This is really another very

pretty wine from Cécile Grongnet, as it offers up a very elegant nose of strawberries, tangerine, chalky soil, fresh-baked bread and a nice dollop of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a very long, very refined and complex finish. Fine, fine juice. 2015-2025. **91.**

Jean Milan “Glamour” Grand Cru Brut Rosé NV (Oger) Disgorged June 2013

The current release of Caroline Milan’s non-vintage Brut Rosé is comprised of a blend of ninety percent chardonnay from Oger and ten percent pinot noir from the village of Bouzy. It was aged twenty-four months on its fine lees, with all of the *vins clairs* going through malo. The wine is a beautiful salmon color and offers up a fine bouquet of melon, orange, chalky soil tones, a touch of cinnamon, wheat toast and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and snappy, with a good core, pinpoint bubbles, fine focus and a long, youthful and still fairly primary finish. This needs just a bit more bottle age to blossom from behind its structural elements, but should be a very tasty bottle once it has fully come into its own. 2016-2026+. **89+.**

Moussé Fils “Rosé Tradition” Brut NV (Cuisles) Disgorged May 2014

The Moussé Fils “Rosé Tradition” is an interesting blend of eighty-two percent pinot meunier and only eighteen percent pinot noir. The wine is comprised of sixty-two percent base year 2011 and thirty-eight percent reserve wines, with the wine taking its lovely cherry red color from nine percent still wine that is fermented in casks. The wine offers up a superb and quite spicy bouquet of cherries, strawberries, a touch of fresh nutmeg, *patissière*, chalky soil tones and a lovely topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, frothy *mousse* and a long, youthfully complex and well-balanced finish. I do not know exactly what the *dosage* is here, but it is just a touch generous, though very nicely buffered by crisp acids today. This is a crowd pleaser of a non-vintage Brut Rosé and a very well-made wine (particularly when based on the difficult 2011 vintage). 2015-2025. **90.**

Clément Perseval Extra Brut Rosé “Premier Cru” NV (Chamery)

This was my favorite of the three bottlings I tasted from Clément Perseval, as this wine has better length and grip on the backend than the previous two wines from the domaine, though it too seems to lack a bit of complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a pretty, if straightforward blend of cherry, tangerine, chalky soil tones, orange peel and bread dough. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and not overly complex, but with a good core, fine *mousse*, good focus and grip and reasonable length on the vibrant finish. Not bad. 2015-2022. **86.**

Thomas Perseval “1er Cru” Rosé Extra Brut NV (Chamery) Disgorged September 2013

Thomas Perseval’s Extra Brut Rosé is an excellent wine that is made from a blend of fifty percent pinot noir, twenty percent pinot meunier and thirty percent chardonnay, with half of the *vins clairs* fermented in older Burgundy barrels and half in enamel tank. The base year here is 2012, and though the wine is still on the young side, it is already quite tasty and should be even better with a bit of bottle age. This wine received no *dosage*. The superb nose jumps from the glass in a blend of strawberries, tangerine, chalky soil tones, a delicate note of *patissière* and a nice hint of rose petals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and racy, with superb intensity of flavor, very refined *mousse*, lovely focus and grip and a long, suave and very well-balanced finish. This is high class and very elegant in style, and for a first release from Monsieur Perseval, most impressive! 2015-2025. **91.**

Serveaux Fils “Rosé Saignée” Brut NV (Passy-sur-Marne)

The current release of the Serveaux Fils “Rosé Saignée” bottling is a fifty-fifty blend of pinot noir and pinot meunier. The wines receive eight days of skin contact to give this Rosé its nice cherry color, with the *vins clairs* going completely through malo as well. The wine is quite

vinous in style, wafting from the glass in a mélange of blood orange, cherries, chalky soil tones, a touch of cloves and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and juicy on the attack, with a good core, fine *mousse* and a reasonably long, but pretty easy-going finish. I would love to see a bit more cut and grip on the backend here. This will want drinking over the short-term, but it is quite tasty at the table. 2015-2020. **88.**

Varnier-Fannière “Grand Cru” Brut Rosé NV (Avize) Disgorged September 2013

The Varnier-Fannière “Grand Cru” non-vintage Brut Rosé is comprised primarily of chardonnay from the grand cru villages of Avize, Cramant and Oiry, with a bit of Aÿ pinot noir still wine added for color. The wine is fairly pale salmon in color and offers up a lovely, quite discreet bouquet of strawberries, clementine, chalky soil tones, brioche, a touch of almond and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and classy, with a fine core, lovely limestone mineral drive, frothy *mousse* and excellent nascent complexity on the long and vibrant finish. This is already a lovely drink, but another year or two of bottle age will really allow the wine to blossom fully. Fine juice. 2015-2030+. **91+.**



Vintage Dated Blanc de Blancs

2013 Guillaume Sargent Blanc de Blancs “Les Prés Dieu” Extra Brut NV (Vrigny)

The Les Prés Dieu bottling from Guillaume Sargent hails from two different parcels of chardonnay vines, Les Prés in the village of Vrigny and Les Vignes Dieu in the neighboring town of Coulommès. The *vins clairs* are all barrel-fermented in four to six year-old casks, with

full malo and bottled without fining or filtration after fifteen to sixteen months on the lees, with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. Guillaume first started bottling on his own in 2011. The 2013 Les Prés Dieu is a lovely wine, offering up a very pure bouquet of apple, lemon, a nice base of soil, bread dough, lime blossoms and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, lovely cut and grip and a long, elegant and youthful finish. This needs at least a few years to blossom, but will be lovely. 2017-2027+. **90+**.

2012 Guillaume Sergent Blanc de Blancs “Les Prés Dieu” Extra Brut NV (Vrigny)

The 2012 vintage of Les Prés Dieu from Guillaume Sergent is every bit as young as the 2013 version and perhaps even a bit more structured, due to the differences in the two vintages. The bouquet offers up a youthful blend of tart pear, lemon, bread dough, lovely minerality, citrus peel and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, snappy and nascently complex, with a rock solid core, refined *mousse*, brisk acids and very good focus and grip on the long and snappy finish. This will need a bit more bottle age than the 2013 rendition, but should prove to be even a touch superior in overall quality, once it has had a chance to blossom. A lovely wine in the making. 2018-2030. **91+**.

2009 José Dhondt “Mes Vieilles Vignes” Blanc de Blancs Brut Grand Cru (Oger)

José Dhondt’s old vines celebrated their seventieth birthday in the 2009 vintage and the wine has spent five years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement in December of 2014. The 2009 offers up a lovely nose of ripe pears, delicious apples, chalky soil tones, brioche, fruit blossoms and a dollop of fresh almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite open out of the blocks for this often quite tightly-knit *cuvée*, with a lovely core, refined *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the pure and complex finish. This is one vintage of Mes Vieilles Vignes that will drink with great personality out of the blocks, and though the 2009 may not age quite as long as vintages such as 2002 and 2004, it is going to provide plenty of pleasure during its peak of drinkability. 2015-2025+. **93**.

2009 Pierre Gimmonnet et Fils “Cuvée Gastronome” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Cuis)

The Cuvée Gastronome from Didier Gimmonnet is bottled at a lower pressure to allow it greater flexibility at the table. The 2009 version offer sup a really stylish nose of pear, apple, pastry cream, chalky soil tones and a touch of almond skin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, lovely soil signature and fine length and grip on the intensely flavored finish. This is not the most elegant of Blanc de Blancs, but it is quite complex and does indeed work well throughout the entire meal. 2015-2025+. **90**.

2009 Jean Milan “Terres de Noël” Blanc de Blancs Vieilles Vignes Grand Cru Brut (Oger)

The 2009 “Terres de Noël” from Jean Milan is a young wine that offers up excellent youthful complexity on the nose, but at this early stage, the palate cannot quite keep pace with the excellence of the nose (but may catch up with bottle age). The wine was disgorged in July of 2013. The superb bouquet offers up scents of pear, apple, fresh almond, chalky soil tones, *crème patissière* and a nice touch of acacia blossom in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and snappy, with a very good core and lovely soil signature, crisp acids and very good length and grip on the finish. However, the *mousse* is a touch coarse at this early stage and the wine shows some youthful reticence on the finish that clamps down the backend amplitude today and leaves the wine just a touch youthfully bitter as well. If this wine’s palate can catch up with the nose with some bottle age, it will be outstanding, so just give it some time in the cellar and see what happens. 2019-2030. **88-92**.

2008 Pierre Gimonnet et Fils “Cuvée Oenophile” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut (Cuis)

The 2008 Pierre Gimonnet et Fils “Cuvée Oenophile” is actually *non-dosé*, though this is labeled as an Extra Brut. The fruit for this bottling hails from a blend of different vineyards in the villages of Cramant, Cuis, Chouilly and Oger, and is actually the same wine as the house’s “Fleurton” cuvée, but without any *dosage*. It was disgorged in July of 2014. The wine is aged fully six years *sur latte* and offers up a lovely nose of delicious apple, pear, limestone minerality, just a hint of almond paste and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and absolutely rock solid at the core, with lovely complexity, slightly coarse *mousse*, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the still fairly youthful finish. I really love this wine’s aromatic and flavor complexity and it has superb depth, but the coarseness of the bubbles keeps its score down just a bit. 2015-2030+. **90.**

2006 Pierre Gimonnet et Fils “Grands Terroirs de Chardonnay” Special Club Brut (Cuis)

The 2006 Special Club bottling from Pierre Gimonnet et Fils was disgorged in October of 2014 and is made from the house’s older vines in the villages of Cramant, Cuis and Chouilly. It spent more than seven years aging on its fine lees and offers up a lovely nose of pear, almond, apple, *crème patissière*, brioche chalky soil tones and a whisper of fresh nutmeg in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite youthfully snappy, with a fine core, nascent complexity, slightly large bubbles and very good length and grip on the still quite youthful and unevolved finish. This still needs at least a couple of years in the cellar to more fully blossom from behind its structural snappiness, and will need to resolve its slightly green backend to really place in the top division. There is impressive depth and cut here, and time may really allow this wine to shine. 2018-2030+. **88-92?**

2006 José Michel et Fils Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Moussy)

The 2006 José Michel et Fils Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime really shows lovely structural tension on the backend, which is quite lovely and fairly rare for the rather laid back 2006 vintage. However, the *dosage* here is a pretty generous eight grams per liter and this does show a bit on the finish, which may make the wine a bit too *dosé* for some Champagne lovers. The bouquet is quite fine, wafting from the glass in a classic mix of pear, apple, almond, chalky soil tones, spring flowers and pastry cream. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite pure on the attack, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and just a touch of backend, uncovered sweetness from the *dosage* on the long and complex finish. A very well-made wine that I would really love to see finished off with five or six grams per liter of *dosage*. 2015-2025. **90+.**

2004 José Dhondt Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Oger) served from magnum

The 2004 José Dhondt Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime is still quite youthful in magnum, but shows good promise and is starting to offer up some generosity on the palate at the present time. The nose is a fine blend of lemon, green apple, limestone minerality, bread dough and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and just starting to stir behind its structural elements, with a solid core, elegant *mousse* and good cut and grip on the long and vibrant finish. Good juice that will be even more generous on the palate with a bit more bottle age. 2015-2030+. **91.**

2002 Claude Cazals Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The 2002 Claude Cazals Blanc de Blancs is made from a blend of seventy percent fruit from Mesnil and thirty percent from Oger and was finished off with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The wine offers up a lovely and maturing nose of peach, brioche, a touch of honeyed

almonds, chalky soil, orange peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still more youthfully structured than the developing nose suggests, with a good core, pinpoint bubbles and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This really could use another couple of years' worth of bottle age to allow the palate's structural elements to relax a bit more and catch up with the lovely aromatic development. A very tasty bottle. 2017-2035+. **92.**

Vintage Dated Brut and Extra Brut

2013 Aurélien Lurquin "Meunier Non-Dosé" Brut Nature NV (Romery)

I tasted this wine at one of the grower salons during my stay in Champagne in April and was quite impressed. Monsieur Lurquin has 1.8 hectares of vines in the village of Romery, which lies up above Cumières and Hautvillers on the Montagne de Reims. He has just begun farming his parcels biodynamically in this year, with the *vins clairs* fermented in barrels and the malos blocked. The 2013 "Meunier Non-Dosé" is really quite good, albeit still quite young, as it wafts from the glass in a blend of tart apple, lemon, very good minerality, bread dough and a lovely topnote of pinot meunier's signature floral tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced for a young Brut Nature, with fine focus and grip, frothy *mousse* and very good length and grip on the snappy finish. Plenty of personality here. 2015-2025. **90+.**

2009 Champagne Huré Frères "Inattendue" Blanc de Blanc Extra Brut (Ludes)

The 2009 Inattendue from Huré Frères was disgorged in December 2014, after having spent four years on its fine lees. The 2009 vintage's *vins clairs* underwent full malolactic, but the plans are for this to stop starting with the 2012 *vins clairs*. The wine has three grams per liter of *dosage*. The 2009 is still young, but offers up good depth on the nose in its mélange of apple, tart orange, lemon, stony minerality, bread dough and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with frothy *mousse*, brisk acids and fine length and grip on the well-balanced, but still very youthful finish. This needs a bit of time to soften up on the backend, but will be quite good once it blossoms. I do have to say that I do not entirely understand the idea of not letting the *vins clairs* go through malo for this bottling in the future, given how young and snappy the 2009 is today, but we will have to wait and see how the 2012 shows when it is released down the road. 2019-2030+. **89+.**

2009 Rémy Massin et Fils "Special Club" Brut Millésime (Ville-sur-Arce)

The 2009 Special Club bottling from Rémy Massin et Fils is an outstanding example of the vintage. The wine's *cépages* is sixty percent chardonnay and forty percent pinot noir, with the *vins clairs* going through full malo and the wine disgorged in September of 2013, after spending three and a half years on its fine lees. It was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter and delivers a stellar bouquet of apple, white peach, hints of the *patissière* to come, warm biscuits, and excellent signature of soil and a touch of spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and focused, with lovely mid-palate depth, elegant *mousse*, gorgeous balance and exemplary grip on the very long, complex and classy finish. This is a terrific bottle of bubbly! 2015-2035. **93+.**

2009 Moussé Fils Blanc de Noirs Brut Millésime (Disgorged January 2014)

The 2009 Moussé Fils Blanc de Noirs Brut Millésime is a lovely wine that is wide open and drinking with great charm at age six. The superb nose wafts from the glass in a blend of white peach, apple, fresh-baked bread, a lovely base of minerally soil tones, a bit of smokiness and a lovely, discreet topnote of meunier-like floral tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-

bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, judicious *dosage* and excellent length and grip on the refined and vibrant finish. This offers up all of the generosity of the 2009 vintage, coupled with excellent precision. Fine juice. 2015-2025+. **92.**

2008 Champagne Geoffroy “Empreinte” 1er Cru Brut Millésime (Aÿ) Disgorged Nov. 2014

The 2008 Empreinte from Jean-Baptiste Geoffroy is a lovely wine that carries its oak quite well. While the house is now based in Aÿ, the Geoffroy family has several generation-long ties to the village of Cumières, which is where eleven of their fourteen hectares of vines are located. Their 2008 Empreinte bottling is produced primarily from fruit from Cumières, with a bit of Hautvillers parcels added in, and the *cépages* is seventy percent pinot noir and fifteen percent each of pinot meunier and chardonnay. Eighty percent of the *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented and the wines do not go through malolactic fermentation. The wine offers up a lovely and gently oaky bouquet of apple, warm bread, a lovely base of chalky soil tones, almond cream and a bit of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely balanced, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and lovely focus and grip on the finish. My only tiny quibble with this wine is it is not quite as long on the backend as some of the top bottlings I have tasted from 2008, but the wine is really quite classy and is drinking very well today. 2015-2025.

91.

2008 Champagne Grongnet “Special Club” Brut Millésime (Étoges) Disgorged Feb. 2015

The 2008 Champagne Grongnet “Special Club” bottling is comprised of a blend of fifty-seven percent pinot noir and forty-three percent chardonnay, with the latter fermented all in older *foudres*. The *vins clairs* did not undergo malo and the wine was finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter, after having aged *sur latte* for six years. The bouquet is deep, pure and nicely reserved still, as it offers up scents of apple, a touch of white peach, bread dough, complex soil nuances, smoke and a discreet topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with fine structure, excellent mid-palate intensity, pinpoint bubbles and a long, crisp and complex finish. This is a lovely bottle in the making, but it really deserves a few more years in the cellar to allow it to blossom more completely from behind its lovely structural attributes. 2018-2035. **92+.**

2008 Champagne Hébrart “Rive Gauche-Rive Droite” Grand Cru Extra Brut Millésime

Jean-Paul Hébrart’s 2008 “Rive Gauche-Rive Droite” bottling was disgorged in April of 2014, after having spent five years on the fine lees. Monsieur Hébrart only began producing this cuvée in the 2004 vintage, where he barrel ferments the *vins clairs* in older casks, rather than fermenting them in stainless steel or ceramic tanks (as he does for his other bottlings). This bottling is comprised of a fifty-fifty split of pinot noir and chardonnay, sourced from old vines in Monsieur Hébrart’s parcels in the villages of Aÿ, Oiry and Chouilly. The 2008 offers up a lovely nose of apple, white peach, fresh-baked bread, a fine base of chalky soil tones, gentle smokiness and a discreet touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a lovely core, impressive complexity, frothy *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the focused and very classy finish. The backend here shows just a touch more barrel influence than the nose suggests, but it is still very well-integrated. Good juice. 2015-2025+. **92.**

2008 Camille Savès “Cuvée Anaïs Jolicoeur” Brut Millésime (Bouzy) Disgorged Dec. 2014

The 2008 Cuvée Anaïs Jolicoeur from Camille Savès is comprised of a blend of ninety percent pinot noir and ten percent chardonnay, with all of the fruit hailing from the family’s vineyards in the town of Bouzy. The wine aged *sur latte* for fully five years prior to disgorgement and was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. This is really a lovely

example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a blend of apple, tangerine, brioche, smokiness, lovely minerality and a touch of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and still youthful, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and fine mineral drive on the long, vibrant and classy finish. I would give this at least another year or two in the cellar to really blossom, as it should prove to age very gracefully and will be excellent when it fully comes into its own. 2016-2035. **93.**

2006 Le Brun Servenay “Exhilarante” Vieilles Vignes Brut (Avize)

The 2006 Exhilarante Vieilles Vignes from Le Brun Servenay is comprised of a blend of eighty percent chardonnay and ten percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier. The wine is aged on the fine lees for eight years. The *vins clairs* here did not go through malo, the *dosage* is kept low at four grams per liter and the wine was disgorged in October 2014. The wine shows quite a bit of its lees influence in its bouquet of apple, warm bread, a nice base of minerality and plenty of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with superb backend mineral drive, frothy *mousse*, impressively snappy acids and a long, leesy finish. The extended aging on the fine lees has taken away a bit of backend precision here, but the wine is long, complex and has plenty of personality in its leesy style. 2015-2030+. **87.**

2006 Roger Brun “Cuvée La Pelle” Grand Cru Brut Millésime (Aÿ)

The Cuvée La Pelle from Roger Brun is made entirely from first-pressed, *Cuvée* juice from pinot noir in the family’s parcels in Aÿ. The *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented and the wine was finished off with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. The 2006 offers up a lovely nose of lime peel, green apple, a touch of quinine, stony minerality, dried flowers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with brisk, youthful girdle of acidity, pinpoint bubbles and good length and grip on the still primary and fairly severe finish. This wine needs some time in the bottle to soften up a bit and shed a bit of cut, but if it blossoms completely from behind its rather stern structural elements, it could merit a higher rating. 2020-2030+? **89+.**

2006 Godmé Père et Fils Meunier “Les Romaines” Extra Brut (Verzenay)

The 2006 Les Romaines from Hugues Godmé was disgorged in March of 2013 and the *vins clairs* for this wine were entirely barrel fermented. The wine spends five years on its gross lees and the vineyard has been farmed *biodynamically* since 2006. The *dosage* for the 2006 was two grams per liter. This is a beautiful wine that shows how marvelous pinot meunier can be on its own, as it offers up a pure and complex nose of white peach, fresh almond, lovely, chalky soil complexity, brioche and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and impeccably balanced, with a rock solid core of fruit, bright acids, pinpoint bubbles and a very, very long, focused and zesty finish. At age nine, this outstanding wine is now fully into its plateau of peak drinkability, but has the balance to continue to cruise along for at least the next fifteen years or more. Fine, fine juice. 2015-2030+. **93+.**

2006 Godmé Père et Fils Pinot Noir “Les Champs St. Martin” Extra Brut (Verzenay)

The 2006 Godmé Père et Fils Les Champs St. Martin was also disgorged in March of 2013 and finished off with a *dosage* of two grams per liter of residual sweetness. The wine is drinking beautifully, as it jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of apple, gentle orange notes, warm bread, complex minerality, smoke, a touch of citrus zest and a discreet topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with a superb core, excellent focus and balance, still pretty brisk acids, very elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and energetic finish. Not surprisingly, as this is pinot noir, rather than pinot meunier, this is a touch behind the

Les Romaines in its evolutionary arc and is just starting to get to its apogee, but is equally refined and is drinking very well indeed. 2015-2035. **93+**.

2006 Godmé Père et Fils Chardonnay “Les Alouettes St. Bets” Extra Brut (Verzenay)

The 2006 Les Alouettes St. Bets was also disgorged in March of 2013 after five years on the lees, but was finished with just a touch more *dosage* at three grams per liter. The wine is aromatically stunning, as it offers up a superb and very vibrant bouquet of pear, apple, a touch of almond paste, very complex, chalky minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is a bit younger in its evolution than its compatriots, with a full-bodied and brisk format, fine mid-palate depth, excellent focus and grip, frothy *mousse* and a long, snappy and beautifully balanced finish. Aromatically, this is the most expressive of the three single vineyard, single *cépage* bottlings, but it is not quite as seamless on the palate as either the pinot meunier or pinot noir-based bottlings. That said, this too is an excellent bottle of bubbly. 2015-2030+. **92**.



2006 Alfred Gratien “Cuvée Paradis” Brut Millésime (Épernay)

The 2006 Alfred Gratien “Cuvée Paradis” is an exceptional bottle of Champagne, with this vintage being comprised of a blend of sixty-five percent chardonnay and thirty-five percent pinot meunier. The wine spent five years aging *sur latte* and was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. Like all of the Alfred Gratien wines, the *vins clairs* here were all barrel-fermented in older Chablis casks and did not undergo any malolactic. The bouquet is deep, pure and exceptional, as it wafts from the glass in a complex blend of apple, tangerine, a complex

base of soil tones, fresh-baked bread, dried flowers and a lovely note of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and laser-like in its focus, with a rock solid core, snappy acids, very refined *mousse* and a long, crisp and complex finish. This is a very, very classy bottle of bubbly that is just starting to drink well, but will age very long and gracefully. 2015-2040+. **94+**.

2006 Champagne Huré Frères “Instantanée” Extra Brut (Ludes)

The 2006 Instantanée from Huré Frères is comprised of a blend of thirty-five percent each of chardonnay and pinot noir, with thirty percent pinot meunier. It was finished with four grams per liter of *dosage* and spent five years on its fine lees, prior to disgorgement in October of 2014. The wine offers up a complex and leesy nose of apple, orange peel, plenty of smokiness, a nice touch of minerality, bread dough and other leesy tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, but lacks just a touch of brightness from its lees influence, but is long, crisp and well-balanced on the finish. This is not my favorite style of bubbly, as I find the leesy influence takes away a touch from its elegance. 2015-2025. **87**.

2006 Vilmart et Cie “Coeur de Cuvée” Premier Cru Brut Millésime (Rilly-la-Montagne)

Laurent Champs has been in charge of the family house of Vilmart et Cie since 1989 and he is one of the top farmers in the region to eschew chemical herbicides and fertilizers in his vineyards, which he had farmed organically now for many, many years. His 2006 Vilmart et Cie “Coeur de Cuvée” bottling is comprised of a blend of eighty percent chardonnay and twenty percent pinot noir and was disgorged in July of 2013. The wine is very discreetly new oaky on both the nose and palate, as it wafts from the glass in a fine blend of apple, pear, chalky soil tones, brioche, spring flowers and a deft framing of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still quite primary in profile (particularly for a 2006), with a fine core, snappy acids, frothy *mousse* and fine length and grip on the focused and still quite youthful finish. I would not hesitate to tuck this lovely wine away in the cellar for a few more years and allow it to fully blossom. 2017-2030+. **91**.

2005 Le Brun Servenay Vieilles Vignes Grand Cru (Avize)

The 2005 Le Brun Servenay Vieilles Vignes bottling is one hundred percent chardonnay, though the house does not label this as a blanc de blancs. The wine spent fully nine years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement in October of 2014 and was finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. The wine offers up a complex nose of pear, apple, gentle leesy tones, stony minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, complex, but again, a touch defined by its leesiness, but with a good core, elegant *mousse*, crisp, beautifully integrated acids and very good length and grip on the complex finish. If this was more precise and just a tad less leesy, it would be stunning, rather than just very good. 2015-2030+. **89**.

2005 Egly-Ouriet “Grand Cru” Brut Millésime (Ambonnay) Disgorged July 2014

The 2005 Egly-Ouriet Brut Millésime spent fully eight years resting on its fine lees prior to disgorgement, and is comprised of a blend of seventy-five percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent chardonnay. The *vins clairs* here are all barrel-fermented, with twenty-five percent of the casks new wood, and the wine was finished with a low *dosage* of two grams per liter. The bouquet is lovely, complex and very discreetly oaky, as it offers up scents of apple, toasted almond, a beautifully refined base of soil, smoky overtones, warm biscuits and a touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite tightly-knit at age ten, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, brisk acids and a long, youthful and slightly restrictive finish. The length here is excellent, but today, the wood clamps down things just a bit on the backend, but this may

well disappear with further bottle age. Right now, the wine is excellent on the nose, but cannot quite deliver that same promise on the palate and needs some bottle age to loosen up on the backend. If it does so completely, then it should merit a score at the top end of the range; if the wood remains in ascendency on the backend, the lower limit will be more likely its reality. 2019-2035+. **90-93+**.

2005 Henri Goutorbe “Special Club” Brut Millésime (Aÿ) Disgorged March 2014

The 2005 Henri Goutorbe “Special Club” bottling is a blend of seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay and spent eight years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement in the spring of 2014. The wine is a fine follow-up to the impressive 2004 version, as it offers up a youthfully complex nose of apple, white peach, a touch of *patissière*, a complex base of soil, a bit of brioche, dried flowers and gentle smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and properly broad-shouldered (as any wine with plenty of Aÿ pinot noir in the blend ought to be), with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, still quite brisk acids and fine length and grip on the finish, which closes with some lovely secondary layers of mature flavors. This is a touch more powerful in personality than the more seamless 2004 version, but it is very close in quality to its predecessor and may drink at its peak even a year or two sooner. 2015-2030. **92.**

2004 Franck Pascal “Harmonie” Blanc de Noirs Brut Millésime (Baslieux-sous-Châtillon)

Franck Pascal has run his family’s estate now for more than a decade and farms their four hectares of vines under *biodynamique* principals. The 2004 vintage of Harmonie is produced entirely from pinot meunier and was finished off with a judicious *dosage* of five grams per liter. It was disgorged in October of 2011, after having spent six and a half years aging *sur latte*. The wine offers up a high-toned nose of lemon, menthol, stony minerality, a bit of quinine and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and complex, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, youthful and zesty finish. This is a very tasty bottle of bubbly, but I would love to see just a bit more mid-palate amplitude by this point in its evolution. 2015-2025. **90.**

2002 Bollinger Grande Année Brut Millésime (Aÿ)

The 2002 Bollinger Grande Année is a lovely wine that is drinking very well today and shows plenty of structural integrity to keep on cruising at this fine level for another fifteen years or more. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mature blend of apple, peach, lovely soil tones, a touch of honeycomb, warm biscuits and a fair bit of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and lovely length and grip on the wide open and classy finish. 2015-2030+. **93+.**

2002 Champagne Huré Frères “Terre Natale” Brut (Ludes) Disgorged August 2014

The Terre Natale bottling from Champagne Huré Frères is there top of the line bottling, which they only produce in the finest vintages and which they age for an extended period on the lees prior to disgorgement and release into the market. The 2002 spent eleven years on its fine lees and is comprised of a blend of thirty percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier and forty percent chardonnay, all from some of the oldest vineyard parcels owned by the family. The 2002 was finished off quite dry, despite its Brut classification on the label, as the *dosage* is only three grams per liter. The wine is excellent, offering up a deep, complex and nicely mature aromatic constellation of apple, a touch of orange, wheat toast, complex soil tones, a whisper of fresh almond, gentle floral tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still impressively snappy in structure, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, fine focus and complexity

and a long, quite minerally backend. Lovely juice that is now at its apogee, but has the vibrant acidity to carry it easily another fifteen to twenty years. This is the kind of Champagne I can drink anytime, anyplace! 2015-2030+. **92+**.

2000 Alfred Gratien Brut Millésime (Épernay)

The 2000 vintage from Alfred Gratien is the current release of their vintage-dated bottling and it is truly an exceptional bottle of bubbly. The *cépages* for the 2000 vintage is sixty-four percent chardonnay, fifteen percent pinot noir and eleven percent pinot meunier and was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. Like all of the house's wines, the *vins clairs* here were barrel-fermented and did not undergo malo. At age fifteen, the wine is just reaching its apogee of peak drinkability, with a very vibrant personality and plenty of potential for further longevity. The superb nose jumps from the glass in a blend of apple, a touch of tangerine, fresh-baked bread, a fine base of soil, a touch of fresh nutmeg and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and still youthfully vibrant, with a lovely core, refined *mousse*, bright acids and a very long, complex and classy finish. As this is a non-malo bottling, the wine has a great spine of acidity to carry it still many, many years into the future, but it is drinking already with great style and breed. Impressive juice. 2015-2030+. **93**.

1998 Ployez-Jacquemart "Liesse d'Harbonville" Brut Millésime

The 1998 Liesse d'Harbonville from Ployez-Jacquemart has blossomed beautifully since the last time I tasted it and is now showing great class on both the nose and palate. The pure and utterly refined bouquet delivers a mélange of apple, pear, a touch of *patissière*, a complex base of minerally soil tones, gentle smokiness, a touch of orange zest and a nice touch of fresh almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very complex, with a rock solid core, impeccable focus and balance, refined *mousse*, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the pure and racy finish. Great juice that still has decades of life ahead of it, but which has really begun to drink brilliantly at age seventeen. 2015-2035. **94**.

Vintage Dated Brut Rosé

2006 Pol Roger Brut Rosé

It had been nearly a year since I last tasted the 2006 Pol Roger Brut Rosé, and the wine has continued to blossom beautifully over the course of that time. As readers may recall from last June, the *cépages* of this vintage is comprised of a blend of sixty-five percent pinot noir and thirty-five percent chardonnay, with the customary fifteen percent of the pinot noir made up of still wine. Today the wine is absolutely singing, wafting from the glass in a complex and vibrant constellation of strawberries, blood orange, caraway seed, beautiful limestone minerality, orange zest, rye toast and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off absolutely superb mid-palate depth, with very elegant *mousse*, bright acids and a very long, focused and perfectly balanced, complex finish. This wine has opened up beautifully with further bottle age, but has not lost any of its spine of acidity or backend mineral drive and is still quite youthful and clearly has a couple of decades of outstanding drinking ahead of it. A great bottle of Rosé. 2015-2035+. **94**.